

Contact Issue Experts

Experts can help you identify community needs and effective strategies and resources to address those needs, refine your project idea by providing feedback, and spread the word about your project.

Who to contact?

- Passionate, engaging people—people who want to get others involved!
 - Set up a Google Alert or do a Twitter search about your issue—who in your community is making news?
 - Attend a community workshop or lecture. Check out the community events calendar in your local newspaper for a listing of these events.
- Experts connected with these organizations working on your issue
 - Government agencies or departments
 - Colleges or universities
 - Organizations working on a local level in the community you identified

How to contact?

- Once you have identified someone to contact, do more research to learn about their work. Check out their website or Twitter feed, or read articles they have written.
- Send an introductory email asking for a short (5-10 minute) phone call, or ask direct questions in the email. Tell briefly about:
 - Your inspiration and project—why this issue is important to you and what you are doing about it?
 - Your “ask”—the advice or support you are seeking.
 - Your assets—how the expert will benefit from advising or working with you.
 - Your availability—days and times when you are free to talk.

Engage Community Partners

Community partners are organizations or agencies—for example, the local food bank, or parks department, or homeless shelter – helping you focus your project, providing a service site, serving as issue experts, connecting you with community needs and priorities. The most successful – and sustainable projects engage community partners.

Step:	Activity:	Done?
Prepare for your Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before you reach out to the partner, do some research. Get to know its mission, goals, policies, resources, etc. (Most will have this information on a website.) How could you and the potential partner support each other? • Community partners appreciate being included from the beginning of the planning process. A face-to-face planning meeting makes all the difference – and helps develop trust. • Prepare information to share about how your school functions, your school schedule, etc. Do not assume that your community partner will already be aware of this information. 	
Goals and Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about your goals and look to your partner as a resource. • Be clear about the partnership and the process and discuss opportunities for student leadership. 	
Logistics and Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring notes from your research (pages 31-33). • Be clear about follow-up to meetings. 	
Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify, and confirm staffing and supervision early on. Most organizations do not have staff dedicated to working with students; do not assume that the organization will provide staff (or volunteers) to fulfill a required adult/student ratio that your school may have. 	

How to Interview an Issue Expert or Community Partner

Tips for Success

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Do Your Homework: Whether you are reaching out to an issue expert, government official, or a potential community partner, it is important to research their history, mission, and goals. While researching, keep a list of how your goals connect with theirs and how you can support each other.

Understand Your Goals: As you are preparing for your interview, ask yourself these questions:

- Why are we reaching out to this individual/organization?
- What are their goals? How can we help them with their goals?
- What are our goals? How do we want this individual/organization to help us with our goals?

Practice: What questions might the individual/organization ask? Work with a partner and ask each other questions about your project. For example:

- Why does this issue matter to you?
- What steps do you plan to take to make a difference?
- How will you measure the success of the project?
- How do you see us working together?

Arrive on Time: Ten minutes early is best.

Dress Nicely: It shows that you take this project seriously and respect the person you are meeting.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Stay Focused: When you ask questions, keep your goals in mind. When you answer questions, try to make your answers are clear and detailed.

Be Respectful: Remember to be polite and positive, and give the person you are interviewing your full attention. If you have a phone, turn it off.

Be Confident: When you walk into the room, give the person you are interviewing a firm handshake and smile. Relax during the interview. Finally, be enthusiastic about your project! If your project is something you are excited about, the person you are meeting will be excited as well.

Listen: Remember, you are there to learn, and they may know a lot about the topic. You want to find out where your interests meet, and that requires listening and not just talking.

Take Notes: Bring a notebook and a pen so you can write down any important details like names of the people you met, or contact information.

Plan Ahead: Just before the interview ends, take the time to make sure you understand what

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Say Thank You: As soon as you get home, write a thank-you note and send it to the person you interviewed. You can also use email to say thank you.

Reflect on your experience: Take some time to write down what you talked about during the meeting, what you learned, and how it will change your project in the future.