
Hot Issue Brainstorm

ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE...

Objectives: To get students thinking about community problems and considering youth-led solutions to those problems

Time: About an hour

Space: Any location that comfortably accommodates your group

Materials: Flipchart/chalkboard

Training Activity Instructions

1. Choosing a student to record ideas on the chalkboard/flipchart, brainstorm a list of hot issues and community needs. Start big, listing everything you can think of. Topics should range from very local (such as whether your school has adequate Internet access) to very broad (such as teen smoking or healthcare coverage). Aim for at least 20-30 issues (even more is fine).
2. As a group, pick your favorites. Which issues do your members most care about? Establish a favorites list of 5-10 topics. Don't bother prioritizing them.
3. Randomly pick a few issues from the favorites list. (How many you choose depends on how much time you have.) Try to choose at least one strictly local issue and one societal problem.
4. Brainstorm activities that a youth-led group like yours could undertake for each of their favorite issues. Your activities lists might look something like those on the next page:

Sample local problem: Neighborhood youth need artistic outlets

Possible youth-led solutions:

- Organize a community mural project.
- Organize a letter campaign to the school board requesting funds for art/music programs.
- Urge the school to keep art and music departments open after school for interested students.
- Write letters to local businesses asking them to donate money to buy musical instruments for the school band.

Sample societal problem: Teen drug abuse

Possible youth-led solutions:

- Distribute flyers at school urging youth to stay away from drugs
- Organize a school program in which teens give presentations about staying off drugs.
- Testify at a hearing of the city's Park and Recreation Department, urging it to create more after-school programs so students have less time to get involved in drugs.

5. Debrief the activity with the following broad discussion questions:

- What does your first list of hot issues tell you about the extent, or lack thereof, of community needs?
- How many of those issues could be solved (or at least improved) if citizens were willing to volunteer in their community?
- What do the lists of youth-led solutions tell you about youths' power to make a difference?

6. (Optional) If your group is planning to conduct some kind of community project, talk about how this exercise can help you start choosing it. Remind students this is only a first step; your group must learn more about the potential topic and solutions before finalizing its choice of a project.