The Ohio Center for Law-Related Education is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is to improve society by developing citizens empowered with an understanding of our democratic system.

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Introduction

Coordinated by the Ohio Center for Law-Related Education, Youth for Justice (YFJ) is a student-led program designed to encourage and empower youth to be actively engaged citizens who work together to make a positive difference in their community. The YFJ program model asks students to identify an injustice, intolerance or problem relevant to them and to their local community or school. Students then develop a plan of action and work together to remedy the injustice through coordinated effort to enhance awareness and/or make a positive impact in the community.

The program empowers students to create meaningful change through service-based learning. Students advocate for solutions they had a role in developing, while practicing valuable 21st century skills, such as research, civic literacy, communication, and collaboration.

Overview

While correlating with state social studies and language arts standards, Youth for Justice is a valuable example of project-based service learning. It challenges students to experience the intricacies of community service and develop an appreciation for the value of active citizenship. Students frequently comment, “This was a lot of work, but it was worth it!”

Students are required to work through the following four phases: Selecting a topic, researching solutions, implementation and presenting results.

Students should be allowed a great deal of freedom in order that their work reflects issues pertinent to themselves and their peers, as well as their community. However, advisors will oversee the students’ project and the implementation of solutions.

Presentation Quick Facts

- Students should practice their presentations with peers and/or teachers or advisors prior to presenting to decision makers or community leaders. Practice makes perfect!

- Students are encouraged to be creative and to incorporate technology in their presentations. Just remember to include essential information: why the topic is relevant to you (students) and the local community, from where you gathered information (research), obstacles encountered, and what you propose to help address the problem (implementation plan).
Program at a Glance

When guiding student teams, advisors are encouraged to consider:

1. The goal of the Youth for Justice Program is to encourage and empower youth to be actively engaged citizens who work together to make a positive difference in their community.

2. The YFJ program model asks youth to identify an injustice, intolerance or problem relevant to them and to their community. Students then develop a plan of action to remedy the injustice through a coordinated effort to enhance awareness and/or make a positive impact in the community.

3. Youth will:
   - Identify an injustice, intolerant behavior/attitude or community problem that affects them and/or their fellow citizens.
   - Research the problem – gather information via interviews, surveys, observations, first-hand experiences and examining what has been done
   - Analyze the information to come to a better understanding of the problem.
   - Develop a plan of action to address the injustice based on their research and analysis.
   - Implement the ‘best’ solution and work to enact change (optional)
     - Most teams implement 50 – 75% of their recommendations.

4. Identify and schedule opportunities for youth to present their work to peers, community leaders, and other interested parties with a vested interest in the issue(s). Presentations may be structured as school assemblies, town hall meetings, or presentations before an appropriate governing board. Students should be able to share and explain their process, as outlined in # 3, above.
SELECTING A TOPIC

Participants select an injustice, intolerance or problem relevant to their school or community. The goal is for students to determine: What issue is of most concern to you and your peers? Students describe how their chosen problem affects their school and/or community, its seriousness, and those individuals or groups that are most affected.

Advisors have the freedom to direct students as they deem appropriate. Teams are urged to involve community resource people throughout the project.

Selecting a topic typically includes:

A. Student “brainstorming” sessions to generate ideas and select a topic
B. Collection of research facts about the topic
C. Documentation of findings and problem statement

THE FOLLOWING ARE EXAMPLES OF METHODS TO GENERATE IDEAS AND COLLECT FACTS:

1. Look through a local newspaper with students to identify issues they are concerned about and that are relevant to their school and/or community;

2. Conduct fact-finding sessions with local experts modeling legislative committee hearings where stated problems, statistics, and solutions are presented to students. This method engages students and experts in questions, answers, and opinions about specific topics in an effort to better understand the complexity of the issues and to get a better handle on possible solutions to the problems presented;

3. Assign students homework requiring them to think about and write down what they feel is the biggest problem in their neighborhood. It may be effective to invite students’ parents to write down what they feel are the biggest problems, too. Both parents’ and students’ statements can then be tallied and the top vote-getter is the selected topic.
Before selecting topics, you may find it helpful to research and gather information on the issues of injustice, violence, at-risk behavior, intolerance and/or prevention programs. You may come across new perspectives on issues as well as unique ideas for intervention strategies. Many government agencies have toll-free telephone numbers and websites. They also may offer free publications and statistics.

Consider elected officials, agencies, and staff from all branches and levels of government who might have an interest in the issues your team identifies. Don’t forget staffers and aides who work either directly for elected officials or for legislative task forces or research offices. Here’s a partial list to get you started:

**Local**
- Board of Elections
- City Council Members
- City or County Clerk
- Mayor’s Office
- Youth Coordinating Board
- Corrections Department
- Police Departments
- Juvenile Justice Agencies
- City or County Attorney
- Public Defender’s Office

**State**
- Secretary of State
- Attorney General
- Governor’s Office
- Office of Lieutenant Governor
- Members of the Legislature and their staffs
- Legislative Research Office
- Public Health Agencies
- Office of Criminal Justice Services
- Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution & Conflict Management
- See www.state.oh.gov

**Federal**
- Members of Congress and their staffs (www.house.gov or www.senate.gov)
- **Key Congressional Committees:**
  - House Education and Labor
  - House Judiciary
  - Senate Judiciary
- Congressional Black Caucus
- Senate Children’s Caucus
- U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
- U.S. Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
  - Center for Disease Control
  - National Center for Health Statistics
- U.S. Department of the Interior
  - Bureau of Indian Affairs
- U.S. Department of Justice
  - Bureau of Justice Assistance
  - Federal Bureau of Investigation
  - Uniform Crime Reporting Program
  - National Criminal Justice Reference Service
  - Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- U.S. Department of the Treasury
  - Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms
- U.S. Department of Commerce
  - Bureau of the Census
It is very important that the students choose an issue or problem that is a concern to them and their peers, and their goal should be to make an improvement (in relations, policy, etc.) in their school or community.

The following are topics that past participants have selected:

**Conflicts in School**
- Violence Within Our Schools
- Anti-Social Behavior of Drop-outs
- Avoiding School Confrontational Violence
- Gang Fights
- Bullying

**Youth Violence**
- Theft and Violence
- Violence on the Increase
- Avoiding Violence

**Drugs and Alcohol**
- Alcohol and Crime
- Alcohol, Crime, and Drug Use
- Teen Smoking and Drinking

**Social Issues**
- Going Green
- Distracted Driving
- Clothing Drives
- Poverty
- Literacy

**Violence in the Media**
- Violence in the Media Increases Teenage Crime
- Violence in Video Games
- Influence of Television and Media Violence

**Gang and Gun Violence**
- Gangs and Guns
- In-School and Out-of-School Shootings
- Guns in School
- Accidental Shootings/Gun Safety

**Interpersonal Factors**
- Teenage Pregnancy Prevention
- Child Abuse and Neglect
- Peer Pressure
- Lack of Positive Role Models
- Discrimination
- Sexual Harassment
- Racism
- Respect
- Obesity
- Peer Motivation
- Self Esteem
- Healthy Eating
Almost every legislative body publishes some sort of directory that will help you identify committee chairs, committee staff, statutory officers, etc. There are publications that range from schedules of committee hearings to task force reports to newsletters published during the session. The most valuable resources can be drafts of bills themselves. Examples of federal sources include U.S. Government Printing Office, The Congressional Record, etc.

The Ohio Center for Law-Related Education can provide participating YFJ teams with office addresses and contact information of the state representatives and senators from their respective districts so that teams can make legislators aware of their efforts and try to involve legislators in the project.

Many other local and national agencies can assist you with specific information on issues related to the Youth for Justice goals and mission. You may also refer to the next section of this manual about community resource people.
Phase 2

INFORMATION GATHERING

**PROCESS**

Students gather information about their topic of concern and then make recommendations toward a proactive goal or solution. They are urged to answer the following question: **Considering this problem and its causes, what are our solutions going to achieve, alleviate, or eliminate?**

Students identify solutions or strategies to help address the chosen problem. These solutions can be based on existing programs or they can generate new ideas. For each solution, students must clearly state who would be responsible for taking action. That is, to whom will these solutions eventually be presented as recommendations – elected officials, students, school board, community leaders, or others?

**Solutions can be two-fold**

- Those that are directed towards other individuals and entities (local, state, federal policy makers)
- Those that can be implemented by youth locally

Student teams should present research findings and solutions to elected officials, agency personnel, and community leaders.

**IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY RESOURCE PEOPLE**

Once your topic has been determined, start thinking about gathering information from those in your community, e.g., surveying peers, community members, etc. Who are potential community experts to utilize when collecting facts on the identified problems and solutions?

Community people can provide a unique opportunity for young people to interact with adult leaders and experts. With some research and the suggestions in this manual, you can identify individuals who have the knowledge for which you are looking. If anyone within your school has access to resource people, ask them to personally extend the invitation.

**WHOM DO YOU CONTACT?**

When selecting community resource people, it is important to keep in mind issues of accessibility and balanced viewpoint. If possible, select resource people who have experience in working with young people or who have a compelling presentation style. In addition, it is important to inform resource people in advance of the goals and objectives of your students’ projects and the nature of your audience. The following pages list possible organizations and websites for various agencies that can assist in researching the team’s topic.*

*Please note that the Ohio Center for Law-Related Education does not endorse or support any of these organizations, but they are listed only as resources for research. Some websites may have changed since the printing of this manual.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANIZATIONS &amp; WEBSITES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Parenting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Al-Anon/Alateen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alliance for Children &amp; Families</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Bar Association</td>
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<td>American Civil Liberties Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Counseling Association</td>
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<td>American Humane Association</td>
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<td>American Humanics</td>
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<td>American Society for Deaf Children</td>
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<td>American Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Association of Jewish Family and Children’s Agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Center for the Child Care Workforce</td>
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<td>Child Find Of America, Inc</td>
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<td>Child Welfare Information Gateway</td>
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<td>Childhelp</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children of Alcoholics Foundation</td>
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<td>Children of the Night</td>
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<td>Children’s Hospice Internaional</td>
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<td>Cocaine Addiction Treatment</td>
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<td>Covenant House Nineline</td>
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<td>Crisis Prevention Institute</td>
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<td>DARE</td>
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<td>Families Anonymous</td>
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<td>Family Resource Center</td>
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<td>Feeding America</td>
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<td>Fellowship of Christian Athletes</td>
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<td>Focus on the Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>GED Hotline</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy Center Education Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make-A-Wish Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mothers Against Drunk Driving</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Adoption Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Alcohol and Substance Abuse Information Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Association for the Advancement of Colored People</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Black Child Development Institute</td>
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<td>ORGANIZATIONS &amp; WEBSITES</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Center for Missing &amp; Exploited Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Center for Research in Vocational Education</td>
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<td>National Child Safety Council</td>
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<td>National Child Support Enforcement Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence</td>
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<td>National Runaway Switchboard</td>
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<td>National Stepfamily Resource Center</td>
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<td>National Urban League</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents Without Partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Search Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service Corps of Retired Executives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse &amp; Mental Health Services Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teenline</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Nurturing Network</td>
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<td>ToughLove America</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Way</td>
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<td>Youth 4 Change</td>
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<tr>
<th>ADDITIONAL POSSIBLE CONTACTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol &amp; Drug Abuse Councils</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bar Association – State and County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board of Supervisors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<tr>
<td>City Attorney</td>
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<tr>
<td>City &amp; County Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>City Council Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Activists</td>
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<tr>
<td>County Board of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>County Department of Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>County Department of Parks &amp; Recreation</td>
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<tr>
<td>County District Attorney’s Office</td>
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<td>County Public Defender’s Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>County Juvenile Probation Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of Disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence Agencies and Shelters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media – Local/Public Newspaper, TV, Radio</td>
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<td>Mental Health Center</td>
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<td>News Station</td>
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<td>Police Department</td>
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<td>School Resource Officer</td>
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<td>State General Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Child Protective Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Department of Youth Services or Juvenile Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Universities, Colleges, Law Schools</td>
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**OVERVIEW**

The key to real impact for the project is the implementation phase. Teams are strongly encouraged to develop a plan for implementation, documenting the steps taken, deciding what they will do next, and at what time.

This phase helps students to put their words and ideas into action. After identifying the problem and coming up with solutions, teams are expected to state what they plan to do or have already done. The following are guides to help with this step.

1. Select one of the solutions for the team to take action.
2. Write out the basic steps you will take to implement this solution.
3. Describe how you will measure the success of the project. Be specific.

Repeat this process for each solution the team has come up with for their topic. Determine which solution(s) will work best and benefit the most people. Be prepared to explain why the team chose the solution(s).

**DEVELOP A PLAN**

After you have created solutions, you will create an implementation plan. The following pages provide a sample way to go about this process. Feel free to use this sample as needed and adapt it to fit your needs with your group.
Youth for Justice Plan

TASK CHART & TIMELINE

1. What activities and tasks must you complete to do this action? Include descriptions of meetings, research, acquiring materials, making arrangements, getting permissions, finding locations, etc.

2. Who is responsible for each of these activities and tasks? Be as specific as possible.

3. In what order and by what date should each of these tasks be completed? Who will be in charge of each task? Write the person’s name and due date.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>PERSON</th>
<th>DUE DATE</th>
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LIST OF SUPPORTERS

1. Who is likely to support your project? Look to government, business, non-profit and media organizations, and community members.

2. For each supporter answer the following questions:
   1. What can our project do for the supporter?
   2. What can the supporter do for our project?

3. What steps can you take to gain their support?
Youth for Justice Plan

**LIST OF OBSTACLES**

1. What are the major obstacles to successful action? Who is likely to oppose your efforts? Are there existing laws or policies that might make it difficult to enact your solution(s)?

2. How can you overcome these obstacles?

**EVALUATION OF PLAN**

How will you measure the success of the project? Be specific. Document success.

**BUDGET**

What resources (people, money, skills, materials) will be needed to successfully complete the project? Where and how will you obtain these resources? List supplies, materials, or financial assistance needed. Next to each item, identify ways to meet these needs.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Supplies/Materials</th>
<th>Ways to Meet These Needs</th>
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You may want to start by prioritizing your solutions. Which one(s) do you want to implement first? Your plan should tell you which solutions will take more or less work.

For some solutions, only one or two students may be needed to implement. In that case, you can implement more than one solution at a time. However, the whole team may be required for other solutions. For example, if the team wanted to implement a new peer mediation program, some members would be busy gaining support from the school board, while others would be gaining support from the school staff, and still others would need to raise money for training mediators. This solution would require everyone’s help.

Remember, time is limited. You may not be able to implement all or even most of your solutions. Do as much as you can. Perhaps your work will be continued by the next year’s Youth for Justice team.

Every solution requires implementation by the Youth for Justice team. Some of your solutions may be directed toward other groups (parents, teachers, principals, community leaders, etc.). Decide how you are going to get them to heed your suggestions. Remember this is your project. You have to convince these groups to join in on your ideas. Identify and follow through on ways to gain support. Working through the exercises for “LIST OF SUPPORTERS” will help you. Whether it is through presentations in front of groups or one-on-one meetings, you have to get the word out.
At this point, you have done a great deal of work. You have developed a plan, anticipated both supporters and obstacles, and have begun implementing your solutions. However, be sure to document each step of your plan as it is carried out. Documentation provides a number of benefits:

1. Keeps track of your work
2. Keeps you focused
3. Provides data for oral and written presentations

As you put your plan into action, don’t forget to document your work. Your team’s documentation can take many forms:

1. Written “diary” of steps with dates, activities and results.

   Example:

   Feb. 19 - Presented research and recommendations to PTH. We asked each parent to talk to their children about drug and alcohol abuse as soon as they got home that night. We passed around a “Pledge to Talk to Your Child” form. Twenty parents signed the pledge.

   Mar. 3 - Put up posters in all school halls. The posters warn kids about the dangers of substance abuse. Each one is different and includes the number for a national teen hot-line.

2. Take pictures or video of team implementing project, e.g., making presentations, group discussions, working a hotline, performing a skit.

3. Keep any materials produced by the team (flyers, posters, newsletters). You will want to use these in your presentation.

4. Save and share with OCLRE any news clippings about your Youth for Justice team activities.
Phase 4

PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS AND SOLUTIONS

OVERVIEW

Students should now prepare to discuss and present their research, solutions, and implementation plan. They should be able to explain the connection to the Ohio Youth for Justice goals, the importance of their problem among youth in their school or community, and who will be responsible for implementation of their solutions.

Youth for Justice is designed to encourage and empower youth to be actively engaged citizens who work together to make a positive difference in their community.

Important note: One of the primary program goals is to empower youth. Therefore, make every effort to let the students decide what they think should be done and by whom. Students should come up with their own ideas, no matter how naive adults may perceive them.

YFJ FINAL REPORT

At the completion of a Youth for Justice project, students should take time to reflect on their experience and summarize their work. These final reports can serve as a basis for a final grade, and are a great way to share students’ work with OCLRE.

Final Reports should contain:

- Advisor Summary
- Student Reflections
- Materials the team developed as part of its project, ex. photos, posters, artwork, surveys
- Any News clippings about your team project

If you would like to share your students’ work with OCLRE, please forward final reports to rsuskey@oclre.org.
PLEASE INCLUDE ALL INFORMATION LISTED BELOW IN YOUR TYPED ONE-PAGE REPORT.

SCHOOL/ORGANIZATION NAME:
GRADE LEVEL(S):
ADVISOR(S) NAME:
STUDENT NAMES:

1 **PROBLEM STATEMENT**
Describe, in specific terms, the problem you have selected. Based on your research, list at least three facts about this problem.

You should also answer the following questions:
- How does the problem affect your school/community?
- How serious is the problem?
- What individuals or groups are most affected by the problem?

2 **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**
What possible solutions to the problem did your team identify? Who would need to be involved to implement your recommendations? What person(s), organizations, or agencies could you contact for help or information? To whom are recommendations directed? Provide one or two statements about each recommendation.

3 **ACTION STEPS**
What steps have you taken to contribute to solving this problem and/or implementing your recommendations? Have they been (or do you believe they will be) successful? Why or why not? List and describe as many as possible.

4 **RESULTS**
What were the results of the team’s endeavors? How did this project solve the issue or problem on which the students concentrated? How is the school, neighborhood, community, etc better because of the students’ project?
Guidesheet for Final Report: Student Reflection

EACH TEAM MEMBER SHOULD SUBMIT A TYPED REFLECTION PAPER.

Do not let this form limit the creativity of how students choose to reflect on their project. If preferred, the reflection may be in a form other than writing – e.g. video, drawing, recorded interview of student, etc.

SCHOOL/ORGANIZATION NAME: ____________________________________________

STUDENT NAME: _________________________________________________________

1 TOPIC
   • What was the topic your group chose?
   • Why was the chosen topic important to you?

2 WORKING ON THE PROJECT
   • Describe the project you completed:
     • Specifically, what went well?
     • What did not go well?
     • What obstacles did you/your team encounter?

   • Did you learn anything new? Please describe.
   • How did your group work together in the project?
   • What did you learn about yourself from this experience?

3 RESULTS
   • How did your project solve the issue or problem you focused on?
   • Do you believe your team was successful in solving your topic? Why or why not?
Teams should present to legislators, judges, school board members, state agency personnel, community leaders, and other Ohio YFJ teams. Presentations should be as creative as possible and should include:

- Introduction of team members, school and city;
- Problem statement and research findings; and
- Solutions and planned action steps.

**LOCAL PRESENTATIONS**

Teams are urged to make appointments with local decision-makers or others to whom they want to make recommendations. For example, if students propose a new policy for the school or district, they can arrange to make their case before the local school board or administration.

Students can learn a great deal about how decisions are made and influenced through this process. Adults can be reminded of the important voice young people can provide.

In past years, teams have made presentations at school assemblies, before student groups, PTA and PTO committees, and local officials. Its local Bar Association honored one team with the Liberty Bell Award. Another team had legislation introduced on the House floor, and was the first youth group to win the Youngstown mayor’s Task Force for Crime Prevention Award.
If you have any questions about the program, please contact:

Ryan Suskey
rsuskey@oclre.org
614-485-3510

To view sample projects, or view additional resources for the Youth for Justice program, visit www.oclre.org/YFJ

OCLRE offers professional development and resources to help teachers interested in project-based citizenship. Visit OCLRE’s website at www.oclre.org/professional_dev to learn about upcoming professional development opportunities, or e-mail Ryan Suskey at rsuskey@oclre.org for more details.