

## **Lesson 11: Researching the Problem**

### **Goals/Purpose**

The purpose of this section is to introduce young people to the concepts and methods of research so they can conduct research that can be used to narrow their focus or learn about a problem, and then create a successful strategy for winning the issue.

### **Objectives**

- Describe the concept of research
- Develop research skills among group members
- Conduct research and analyze its results
- Use research to select a problem and strategy

**Total Time:** 3 –18 hours over 4-6 weeks, including data collection and analysis outside meeting times

### **Agenda/Activities**

- Introductions/Icebreaker
- Informal Research
- Formal Research: A Survey
- Data Collection
- Data Analysis
- Closing

### **Facilitator Preparation**

- Discuss safety guidelines for collecting data with your program staff
- Collect sample surveys
- Bring sample questions for your group's survey
- Get approval for data collection (especially if using a school site)
- Arrange for data analysis
- Create game to review data with group (optional)

### **Materials Needed**

- Sample Surveys
- Disposable cameras (for data collection and observations)
- Survey prizes and/or thank-you's (optional)
- Clipboards and sharpened pencils
- Sign for your data collection central meeting place
- Reminder note and/or parent guardian permission for data collection
- Art supplies for graphs to review findings

### **Tools**

- Sample survey

## The Basics

Research is another word for collecting information in an organized, systematic way. Researching the problem is one of the most critical steps in action planning. It shapes how you look at the problem, points you towards solutions and forms the basis for your strategy. Local research and local data are very important in getting local decision-makers to feel like the problem is their responsibility. Statewide or national data is not as compelling as local data will be for most groups.

There are many ways to conduct local research. Informal methods like observation, brief informal interviews with a few people, intuition and personal experiences are used to get an idea of what the problems are in a community. Formal methods such as focus groups, structured interviews and surveys are used to get more specific information from a large number of people about a situation. For example, you may know that the youth are concerned about the quality of their school experience, and some people say it's that the school campus needs to be cleaned up, and others say that it is teachers. You can find out how many people agree with each other using a survey.

Surveys are used to get the opinions of a large number of people by interviewing a sample of them. A sample means a selection of people from a larger population. Everyone answers the same questions and their exact responses are recorded. The best surveys are easy to understand and short enough to encourage participants to complete the survey in one sitting.

It is unlikely that the youth in your group will have much experience planning and conducting surveys – so it will be up to you to show them how much fun it can be. The youth can be involved in any or all aspects of the research – planning the survey, collecting data, data analysis and reporting the findings. Not all of the youth may be as involved with each of the steps. Rather it is an opportunity to build leadership and develop skills based on individual interests of the youth.

Carrying out research activities requires advance preparation and takes several weeks to complete. Generally 1-2 planning meetings are needed plus data collection outside the regular meeting. Analysis also takes a few weeks and should be planned at the same time the survey is designed. If youth will be involved in the analysis, keep in mind that although learning to set up and analyze data can develop skills, the actual data entry can be tedious. The survey findings may be clear or the adult may need to take more of a lead in synthesizing the information so that it is digestible.

The sections on *Working with the Media* and *Meeting with your Target* will help you find ways to let others know what you found out so you can build support for your issue, and to let your target (the decision-maker) know about the problem and your solution.

**It is up to the adult leader to plan the logistics of the survey:**

- ✎ Get the survey approved (by your program staff and/or school officials).
- ✎ Review safety guidelines if youth will be completing the survey in the community.
- ✎ Arrange for the survey data to be processed and analyzed.



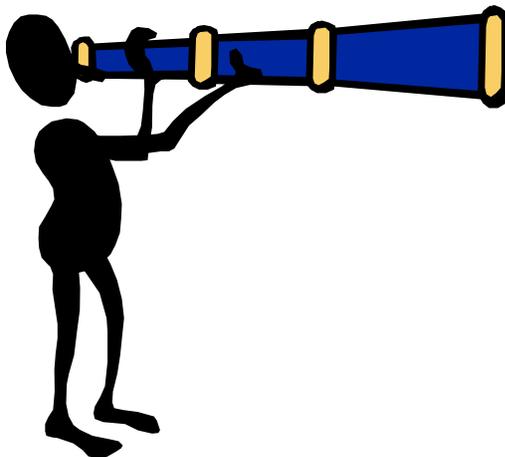
## **Informal Research**

**30 - 60 minutes to plan  
1-2 hours to conduct**

Materials: disposable cameras, copies of activity log

- a. Remind the group that when we talked about power, we said that one of the three things needed to build power is organized information -- which is what research is. This will help us learn more about the problem and come up with solutions.
- b. Review the two types of research: **formal** and **informal**. Informal methods present a general understanding of the problems in a community and formal methods provide more specific information. We will start with informal research.
- c. Brainstorm different ways to get some informal information about the problem you want to change: brainstorm of personal experiences, observations, and log activities.

Here are a few ideas of activities other group have used:

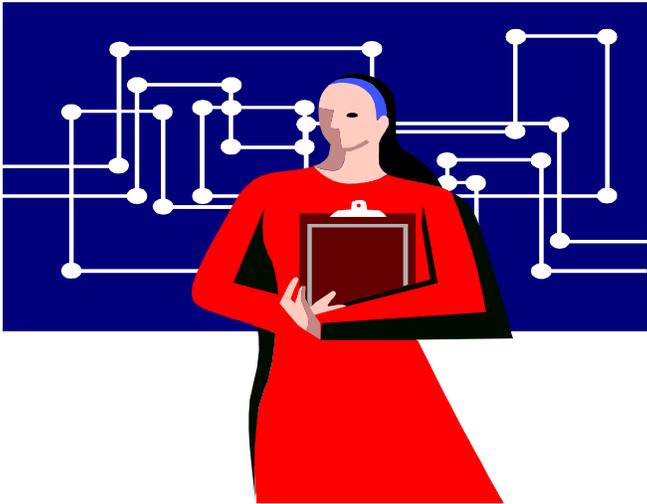


- **Observations:** Look for real-life examples of the problem. Take pictures of what you see -- keep these to back up any formal information that you collect.
- **Activity Log** (late buses, overcrowded buses, bathrooms, length of lines to get lunch): Create a log sheet for group members to collect small pieces of information over a short period of time (about 2 weeks) to learn more about the problem. (Note: Collecting this information on a large scale could be considered formal research.)

Here's a sample activity log:

Bathroom Log			
Observer's Name: _____			
Date	Location	Time	Check if the bathroom is clean or dirty, smells and has supplies
1.			<input type="checkbox"/> clean
			<input type="checkbox"/> smelly
			<input type="checkbox"/> dirty
			<input type="checkbox"/> has needed supplies (toilet paper, soap, towels)
2.			<input type="checkbox"/> clean
			<input type="checkbox"/> smelly
			<input type="checkbox"/> dirty
			<input type="checkbox"/> has needed supplies (toilet paper, soap, towels)
3.			<input type="checkbox"/> clean
			<input type="checkbox"/> smelly
			<input type="checkbox"/> dirty
			<input type="checkbox"/> has needed supplies (toilet paper, soap, towels)

d. Decide which activities you and the youth have enough time and people power to complete effectively.



## 2. Formal Research: A Survey

10 - 15 hours for all steps  
including data analysis

a. Explain that now that we have a better understanding of different aspects of the problem, we can use a survey to collect more specific information by asking more specific questions about the problem. This will allow us to get information from a large number of people about the situation. Surveys are especially powerful because they provide numbers that represent a large group of people – e.g. 74% of students surveyed at this school report that the campus needs to be cleaned up. This is really impressive when you're trying to get the interest and support of people in power.

b. Review the different steps involved in conducting a survey:

**Planning** Decide what questions to ask and how to ask them, how long the survey should take to complete, and how it looks. Also, when to do the survey, how will the results be analyzed and who wants to do what.

**Data Collection** Group members ask other people to complete the survey.

**Data Analysis** Add up the results. Hopefully you will have the support of computer program and some data experts.

**Reporting the Findings** Let others know what you found out. Maybe find a fun way to let other youth know what you found out and build support for the issue. Then decide how to let the target (the decision-maker) know about the problem and your solution. The sections on media and meeting with your target will guide you through this step.

## Step 1: Planning the Survey

Materials: Sample surveys and sample questions related to your problem

Explain that today we are going to plan the survey.

1. **Decide on the questions.** It is a good idea to have some sample questions prepared for the group to respond to. If you have a few more experienced youth, they can help come up with the questions to get the group started.
2. **Have some multiple-choice questions** that ask agree/disagree or yes/no.
3. **Include a few open-ended questions** that ask for people's ideas (e.g. what do you think is needed to make your school or community a better place?)
4. **Revise the questions** to make sure they are clear and easy to understand. This is best done on a separate time after you've had a chance to test the questions.
5. **Pick a time and place** to conduct the survey. Make sure it is a time when most of your group can help. Remember you may also need to get permission from the site, which can take time.

A school, community center, library, mall, are all possible places to conduct your survey – pick the best place to reach other youth. Keep in mind that door-to-door canvassing involves higher risk, so youth should only go door-to-door in small groups and should be accompanied by an adult.

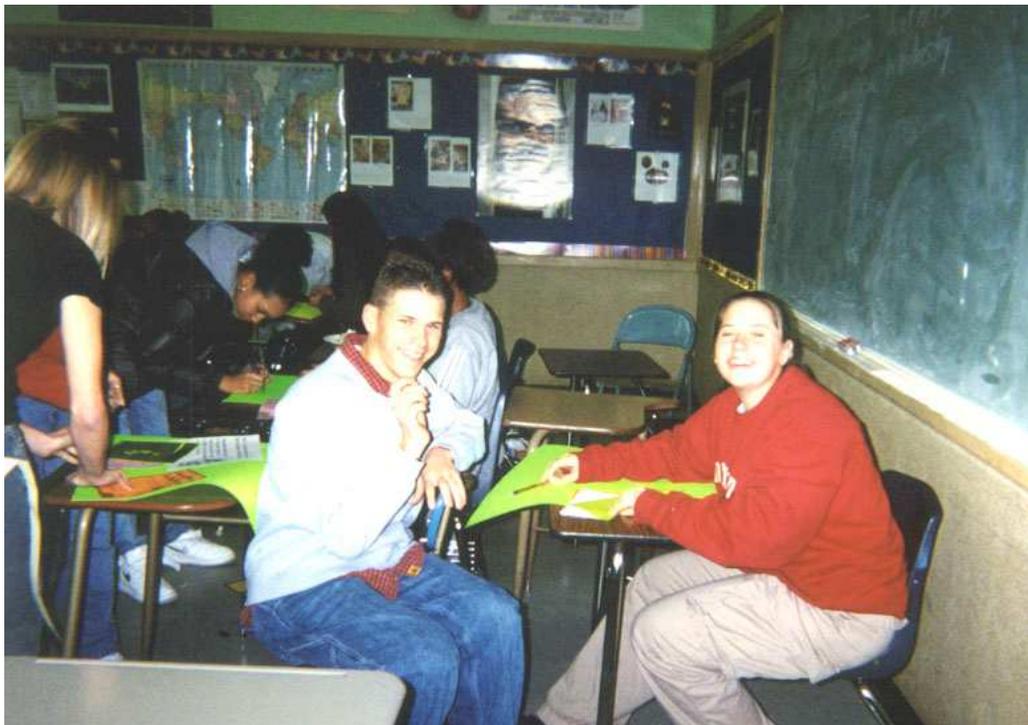
6. **Ask for a volunteer** to type up the questions and add a few graphics. (Identify someone you feel confident would be good at this. You will need to work closely with this person to make sure the survey is clear and easy to understand.)



### **Follow Up Activity: Test the Survey**

To test the actual survey questions you will use, this activity needs to be done separately from the initial survey planning.

- ✓ Explain that now we are going to practice asking people to complete the survey
- ✓ Ask: What kinds of things should you say when asking someone to complete the survey? (Ask the recorder to write answers on newsprint.)
- ✓ Review safety guidelines, especially if youth will be conducting the survey in the community. Remind youth of people's right to say no.
- ✓ Divide the group into pairs and distribute sample surveys to each. Ask each pair to review them together to see if it is confusing or if it takes too long to finish.
- ✓ Then each person takes a turn asking his or her partner to complete a survey. (Give people 3 minutes to practice).
- ✓ Come back together as a large group. Ask: What it was like? What did you say? Do you feel ready?
- ✓ Outside of the meeting, work with experts at your agency or in the community to make sure your survey questions are as clear and easy to understand as possible.
- ✓ Revise the survey as needed to incorporate feedback from the testing.



## Step 2: Data Collection

Data collection may take place at a school, community center, library, mall, etc. – depending on the best place to reach other youth. Remember that canvassing door-to-door could be risky, so youth should go door-to-door in small groups and be accompanied by an adult.

Collecting data works best when you have a group of 6-8 people so you can reach a good-sized sample in a reasonable amount of time. Youth may feel more comfortable working in pairs.

### Materials Needed:

- ✓ Copies of the survey (have a few extra)
- ✓ Clip boards and sharpened pencils.
- ✓ 1-2 disposable cameras to take pictures of group members conducting the survey
- ✓ Optional: A small thank-you for each person who completes the survey (e.g., a pencil with your group's name and phone number).
- ✓ Optional: If you decided to have prizes, you will need sign-in sheets to collect names for the drawing.



Since the youth will be participating outside of the regular meeting time, it helps to make reminder calls and/or give the youth a reminder note the day before.

The day of, post a sign at your central meeting place so youth know where to come to get supplies and if they need support.

As a group, make sure to review:

- Safety guidelines.
- How to introduce yourself and ask people to participate.  
Where to turn in the completed surveys and materials.

### **Step 3: Data Analysis**

Now someone (or a small group) needs to add up the results from the surveys.

Your time frame, the size and capacity of your group will determine how involved the youth will be in analyzing the data from the survey. It is likely that the adult leader will need to take a large leadership role with this aspect of the research. Ideally, there is the time and resources to train a few of the youth to input and analyze the data.

You could also get some technical assistance from a local organization or a department in your agency that specializes in research. The experts may do the analysis for you or work with your group to do it yourselves.

#### **Follow Up Activity: Reviewing the data together.**

Materials: game questions, small prizes, art supplies, colored paper

Once the data has been analyzed, you will need to go over the results as a group. Here are some ways to have fun and to make the information real:

- a. Create a game with questions and results from the survey. Give each team a copy of the survey with the results. Alternating teams, answer the questions. You might give the team that answers the most questions correctly a small prize.

Discussion questions (Ask someone to record the discussion points on newsprint):

- Were any of the results surprising?
  - Which findings do you think are most important?
  - Which problems do you think we could do something about?
  - What are possible solutions to some of the problems?
- b. Make graphs to illustrate different points from the survey. Ask each student to take one question and make a graph that shows the response to that question. (The facilitator should come with some samples to give the group some ideas.)

### **Follow Up Activity: Summarize the Findings**

- a. With a small group, summarize the key points of the survey – these are the points that had definite responses on the survey or seemed to emerge as themes. Make a poster to help group members identify the most important findings.
- b. Use the key findings to brainstorm and evaluate possible solutions to the problem. This will help your group pick an issue – that is the solution they want to focus on in their campaign. Complete steps to this process are outlined in the *Picking an Issue* section.

You will want to let others know what you found out to help build support for your issue (your solution for how to fix the problem). See the lessons on *Working with the Media* and *Meeting with Your Target* for the details of how to use the media to build your power and preparing to meet with your target.

# Tools – Lesson 11



# SPEAK YOUR MIND

And have a chance to win a prize!!!!

A group of students wants to improve your school. It's YOUR school too, so tell us what YOU think...  
Your answers are completely anonymous – so no one will know it's you.

About you...

Check one:     male                       female

CIRCLE YOUR AGE:    12    13    14    15    16    17    18    19

## ◆ Here are questions about the food at your school. ◆

	No 	Yes 	Sometimes 
1. Is there enough food for you to eat at lunch?			
2. When you get to the window, do they still have the food you want?			
3. Are there enough choices of food for you to pick from at lunch?			
4. Do you <b>not</b> eat lunch at least once a week because the line is too long?			
5. Would you be able to do better in school if you had a more filling lunch?			
6. Is there a free lunch program at your school?			-----
7. Can students prepay for their lunch?			-----

8. Circle how good you think the food is at your school.



1

2

3

4

5



9. How long do you usually wait on line to get your lunch?     5-10 minutes     11-15 minutes     more than 15 minutes

## ◆ The next questions ask about your school's campus. ◆

10. Most of the time, the temperature in my classrooms is just right.     No                       Yes

11. When it gets hot in my classrooms, it is hard to concentrate on my schoolwork.     No                       Yes

12. Are the bathrooms (**Check all**)

- usually clean                       dirty
- smelly                               have the supplies needed (toilet paper, soap, paper towels)
- too small

13. How does **not** having air conditioning affect your learning in class? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Is your locker (*check one*):  Working  Broken  I don't have a locker

◆ **The next questions ask about school. Circle the answer to best describe your opinion.** ◆

	1 not true	2 a little true	3 pretty much true	4 very much true
15. I like going to this school.	1	2	3	4
16. My teachers help me until I understand my school work.	1	2	3	4
17. This school is getting me ready me for after I graduate.	1	2	3	4
18. This school teaches me things I want to learn.	1	2	3	4
19. This school has the classes I want.	1	2	3	4
20. I think I am treated fairly and with respect at school.	1	2	3	4
21. My teachers expect me to do good work.	1	2	3	4
22. I can get extra help <u>after school</u> when I need it.	1	2	3	4
23. I think it would help me to have an after-school tutoring program on campus.	1	2	3	4

◆ **Next are questions about the buses.** ◆

	No 	Yes 	Sometimes 
24. I share a seat on the bus with 2 or more people.			
25. The bus driver treats me fairly and with respect.			
26. It is hard for my family to pay for the bus.			
27. I don't take the bus because it costs too much.			-----
28. When the activity bus drops me off I feel safe walking home.			
29. I don't use the activity bus because the bus stop is too far and I don't feel safe walking home.			-----

30. How many times in the last two weeks has the bus been late to bring you to or take you home from school?  
 0  1-3  4-5  6-8  8-10

◆ **The last questions ask about putting a high school in our community.** ◆

31. Do you think it's important for our community to have its own high school?  No  Yes  Not sure

32. Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

33. How would having a high school in your community make a difference in your life? (Check as many as you want)

- I could spend more time in my community  It wouldn't
- People would have more pride in our community  I could participate in after-school activities
- I could ride my bike to school  It could be used for activities like dances, sports, music...
- Not sure

**Thanks SO much!**