

# From Activities to Activism

## *What is Policy/Policy Change?*

Sometimes in the planning of an event or activity, it can be easy to lose sight of why you're doing it, what the larger goal is, what you are advocating for or against, or even if your activity presents an opportunity to advocate for or against something. Often an activity's larger goal is related in some way to policy change, or perhaps there are policies you need to know about or change in order to do your project in the first place!

### **What is policy?**

*A Definition: a course of action or a procedure.*

We all deal with lots of different policies, even if we don't call them that. A curfew your parents set, a school dress code, or a city ordinance about skateboarding are all examples of policies.

### **What is policy change?**

*A Definition: A major change in attitude or principle or point of view.*

Policy change can look like lots of different things. Creating or advocating for policy change isn't always about collecting signatures on a petition about a law, or calling your legislators, although those are great ways to exercise your democratic rights, too! Sometimes changing policy might be getting permission to paint a room in your school if that isn't usually done, or convincing your school board to include youth members, or to give those youth members voting rights.

### **Why are policies and policy change important?**

Policies affect *people*, affect how we behave, our safety, our health, or satisfaction with our community. Changing policies we don't agree with, or supporting policies we do agree with is **how we change our world!**

Sometimes it can be hard to see how legal mumbo jumbo or boring rules really affect our daily lives, but understanding how they relate to you, and helping others to understand that impact is the key to making a difference. Being involved with policies means **you are helping to shape what expectations you, your peers, your community & your world live with.**

Knowing about policies that are out there & how they support or prevent you from reaching your goals also keeps you connected with all those other people out there working for change! Connecting with a larger policy change movement prevents the "silo effect" where everyone works separately on similar goals.

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## Connecting Our Work to Policy & Policy Change

### Is this an activity that aims to change policy?

Ask participants to decide whether they would say YES, NO or I DON'T KNOW to that question for each of the following. Identify a corner of the room for each answer, and ask participants to move to the corner representing their answer. Ask participants to explain why they answered what they did.

1. Testifying in support of legislation to reduce advertising of candy in schools.
2. Holding a health fair in your school.
3. Surveying students about their substance use behaviors.
4. Asking students and teachers to sign a petition to the school board to offer more nutritious options for school lunches.
5. Doing an action in your school to educate people about the number of deaths each day caused by tobacco.
6. Writing a letter to the school principal asking him/her to change the dress code.
7. Presenting to the school board about the benefits of a school garden.
8. Writing a press release about your teen center programming.
9. Asking your boss to allow employees to listen to music at work.
10. Holding a fundraiser to build a skatepark.

### Scenarios for Small Groups:

Break into small groups & give each group a scenario. Ask each group to discuss the questions below and then come back to a large group to share out.

1. Problem: Teen obesity rates in your town are high.  
Current Activity: Your group has decided to hold a health fair to educate their peers about healthy lifestyle choices.
2. Problem: There is a high rate in your community of teen drug & alcohol use.  
Current Activity: Your group is arranging to have a former drug addict speak at your school.
3. Problem: Teen pregnancy rates in your school are higher than the state average.  
Current Activity: Your group is surveying their school to find out more information about students' behaviors in relationships (sexual health).
4. Problem: Statistics show that almost 1 in 5 teens smokes.  
Current activity: Your group is planning to do a demonstration in front of the local department store to educate people about the health risks of smoking.

### Questions to guide your discussion (use your imaginations!)

1. As it is described now, is this activity designed to address or change a policy? (Does it aim to create long-term change in a system?)
2. If not, brainstorm 3-5 things you could do to link this event/activity to policy, or other ways your group could address the problem from a policy angle. \*\*Consider whether your ideas are youth-friendly & would help bring policy alive—be creative!
3. What policies might you need to know about to get this done & who are the decision-makers who you will need to help you make this a reality?