

FINALIZING THE ACTION PLAN AND GETTING APPROVAL

AGENDA

- The Contents of a Complete Action Plan
- Submitting the Action Plan
- Presenting the Action Plan
- Approvals

The Contents of a Complete Action Plan

At this point in the planning process, students will organize the information that they have gathered from their research in section 3 to create a formal action plan.

An action plan is a formal explanation of the project. Thus, it should be written clearly and presented neatly. A complete action plan will contain the following information.

Introduction

This section of the plan states the need for the students' proposed project and articulates their motivation for engaging in it.

It would be helpful for students to review their notes from the brainstorming sessions and the research that they gathered. This section of the action plan should include all background information so that readers will have an overall picture of the project, including who is involved, what will happen during the project, when and where it will happen, and why and how it will happen. Below is an example:

Project Summary: Eight students from Ms. Grimes's seventh-grade science class have chosen to develop and act out a play about the ecosystem of a local park. The students will perform the play for students at the elementary school as part of their science curriculum. In order for students to create a play that explains the ecosystem in a meaningful way, they will visit and study the local park. They will also research the developmental level of the students who will watch the play.

Materials Needed

It is acceptable to include a simple, straightforward list of the materials needed, but encourage students to create a more detailed list of tasks to be performed and the materials needed for each task. In either case, next to each listed material should be an indication of whether it is already available or whether it must be procured. If the material must be procured, the action plan should explain where it can be found and how it will be obtained (e.g., money must be raised to buy it, will ask for donations, can borrow).

Example (partial list)

Human Resources

This section of the action plan will clearly state the people needed to complete the project, along with their availability, skills, and commitment.

Like the materials list, the human resources list can be organized by activity or task. This section of the action plan should explain which people will do which tasks in order to successfully complete each aspect of the project. This information can also be organized by outlining the areas of expertise required by the project and listing the people who are skilled in them.

Jobs and Responsibilities

Encourage students to outline the responsibilities each person has taken on by naming the role each person has agreed to fulfill (e.g., team leader, publicity manager, materials manager) and listing the duties of each job. Include each participant's name, title, and job description.

Examples:

Ms. Grimes, *Supervising Teacher*: Ms. Grimes will act as the liaison between the students and the administration at our school and at the elementary school. Ms. Grimes will sign transportation requests and chaperone (or find a suitable chaperone for) off-campus activities.

Helen Wilson, *Playwright and Editor*: Helen will research information about ecosystems, and prepare potential plot outlines and characters for a play about the ecosystem at Winnipeg Park. She will complete the first edit of the script.

Jim Graham, *Playwright and Editor*: Jim will research how stage directions are written, and write and title a play about the ecosystem at Winnipeg Park. He will complete the final edit of the script.

If students are working with an outside organization or agency, the introduction to this section of the action plan should clearly outline the nature of the collaboration and the role that the agency will be playing. Remind them to include the names of the agency personnel who will be working on the project and a description of the tasks to which they have committed.

Example:

The students in Ms. Grimes' class will collaborate with the city's Department of Parks and Recreation. The Department of Parks and Recreation staff will provide written materials and be available for interviews during the research phase of the project. They will guide students on a tour of Winnipeg Park and supply the necessary permission to conduct a field trip there.

Schedules and Contacts

This section of the plan should include transportation schedules (collected from train/bus stations and so on), work schedules, and a general list of resources and references. A list of all participants and their contact information (i.e., address, phone number, email address) should be included. If an outside organization is participating in the project, include its contact information and the names of the people there with whom students will be working.

Time Line

Goals have a measurable time line, and a service learning project is no exception. The time line provides a plan to follow and ensures that tasks are completed on schedule. This is especially important if the start of one task must be preceded by the completion of another.

Though it's acceptable for the time line to be somewhat preliminary, it should indicate as many concrete dates as possible. Students may wish to organize their time lines by listing the tasks that must be completed each week or each month from now until the end of the project. The time line should also include a detailed schedule of what will happen on the day of the project.

While it's likely that a project's schedule will change, it is important to create a strong working time line as both an indicator of what should be done by what date and a barometer by which to judge how much work is expected to be done in a certain amount of time.

Appendix

If students have referred to particular materials, or if the project was inspired by a particular newspaper article or story, encourage them to include photocopies in an appendix. This section of the plan should also contain photocopies of student contracts, transcripts from interviews, and a list of all the sources that students used to gather information.

Submitting the Action Plan

The action plan should serve as a proposal to those who must approve the project. As in the workplace, the proposal should be typed and should look professional. Though your principal and administrators should know that the proposal is coming from your students, you may wish to add a cover memo explaining the nature of service learning and your students' proposal.

Once the action plan is completed, ask students to share it by sending copies of it to others. In addition to obtaining any necessary administrative approvals, sharing an action plan often gets others involved in and excited about the project. It is also an excellent method of getting feedback.

Example:

MEMORANDUM

TO: Principal Dominguez

FROM: Ms. Grimes

DATE: December 12, 20XX

RE: Ecosystems Instruction for Casimiro Fontanez Elementary School

CC: Helen Wilson, Jim Graham, Chris Yates, John Armin, Kate Clark, Dr. Bashir

The students mentioned below have spent the past month researching and developing a service learning project. They would like to complete the project by the end of this marking period and they would like your approval to do so. The attached proposal has been prepared for your review. Please respond by Friday, December 17, 20XX.

Due Diligence

Once the action plan is written, you and your students must critically examine the project's strengths and weaknesses, and encourage others to do the same. Have students ask those who have received a copy of the action plan to consider its limitations and whether or not it can be accomplished on time. Model for your students what it's like to honestly address these issues, and encourage them to critically examine their plan. If necessary, work as a class to revisit or scale back the project by again considering the issues outlined in section 3. Your goal is to emerge from this stage with an action plan that is detailed, realistic, and achievable.

You may wish to ask questions such as the following:

- Do you think the proposed project can realistically be completed in the time allotted? Why or why not?
- What challenges do you see the group facing as they try to complete this project? Can you offer any suggestions for how the group can respond to these challenges?
- Do you have any general advice for the group?

A complete written proposal will usually provide the information necessary for the pertinent parties to make a judgment about the project. However, they may require further information or wish to speak directly with students to discuss the project in more detail. In this case, students may need to prepare a project presentation.

Presenting the Action Plan

Ensure that students understand that it is common for approval of a project to be contingent on both a written proposal and a face-to-face meeting. A project presentation is a positive event—it enables those proposing the project to immediately address questions and concerns, and provides a great opportunity to excite administrators about the project. A face-to-face meeting will make the students' personal enthusiasm for the project more apparent than even a well-written proposal.

Presentation Preparation

Since your students have completed a written action plan, they already have all the information needed to make an effective presentation. Preparing for a presentation is similar to preparing for a job interview—it is a matter of organizing one's thoughts and preparing for questions.

Revisit with students the questions they considered when first putting together their action plan: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Each student or group of students should be responsible for preparing part of the presentation. If your class is working as a whole on one project, you may wish to have students work in small groups to prepare their answers to these questions, with each group discussing and organizing the answers to one question. Students should create note cards with the points that they want to make in order to best answer their questions.

A great way to keep a presenter on topic is with the use of visuals, which can be very simple and still be effective. For example, a poster that lists the benefits of the service learning project will be useful for both the presenter and for the audience. Students may also choose to create a visual for each question. If students have access to a projector and a computer, allow them to use presentation software (e.g., PowerPoint). Demonstrating effective presentation skills will serve as a testimony to how seriously students are taking the project. Remind students that visuals can be useful, but the presentation is only as strong as the content they present.

Making the Presentation

Some students may feel nervous about speaking publicly or intimidated about answering questions posed by an adult or an authority figure. Calm their fears by reminding them of two points:

- If they have done the work needed to create a detailed action plan, they should be proud of what they have accomplished and fully prepared to answer questions about their project.
- It is acceptable to respond to a question by saying, “I don’t know the answer to that question, but I can find out and get back to you.” It is possible that a concern about the project is one that your students did not take into account. This is not a negative response—in fact, action plans are submitted for approval specifically so that others can examine them for potential problems and ensure that issues are dealt with before they become actual problems.

Remind students that, just as they would for a job interview, they should consider their oral presentation at the meeting to be a reflection of how they feel about the project. There is no need to dress up, but students should dress neatly. Clear, appropriate language that is audible to everyone is important.

Approvals

With both the written action plan and in-person presentation, your students should have provided all of the information requested by those whose approval is needed to move forward. Remind students to establish a date by which they expect to hear a response to their proposal and to follow up with a visit or phone call. Students should also indicate that they would like to receive a response in writing—as in the workplace, it’s important to establish good records. A written approval may be needed as a reference during the course of the project. Once students have received a written approval, remind them to make a photocopy and file it.