

# IDENTIFY ISSUES AND ASSETS

## Session 5

**90 minutes**

### OBJECTIVE:

Youth will select a topic(s) for their research and action project.

### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Index cards.
- Sticker dots.
- Paper, pens, and clipboards.
- Butcher paper, tape, and markers for writing possible topics (include space for pros and cons of each topic).
- List of characteristics of a good research topic that could contribute to social change (see Topic Brainstorm below).
- Copy *Research Topic Budget Activity* (Master Copy 3.5a) and the *Research Topic Debate Preparation* (3.5b) before the session: one copy of each for each participant.

### I. OPENING: ATTENDANCE, SNACKS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AGENDA OVERVIEW (10 MINUTES)

Opening Circle Statement (Around the World): Name a political or social issue that you feel strongly about or are passionate about one way or another. (e.g., racial equality, gender equity, environmental conservation, death penalty, access to health care, military recruitment)

### II. WARM UP: QUESTION GAME (5 MINUTES)

The group must sit or stand in a circle. Have someone volunteer to start by asking a question (any question, just not personal or derogatory) to the person to their left or right. The person DOES NOT ANSWER, but asks another

Pick a Topic



question. Whoever is asked a question must then ask the person to their left or right another question. If someone repeats a question or hesitates with his or her question, that person is disqualified. The goal is to keep going with new questions. The questions don't need to make sense – they just need to be questions!

### III. TOPIC BRAINSTORM (25 MINUTES)

**Step 1:** List some characteristics of a good research topic:

- Specific and focused
- Affects people in your school and community
- Easy to understand and explain
- Important to other youth
- Could use more examination
- Has realistic or possible solutions

Ask if youth have anything to add to the list based on their experience. Write down any additions.

**Step 2:** Have youth brainstorm possible topics to research based on what they have identified as issues or concerns in their community (in previous sessions). List all topics mentioned on a piece of butcher paper. Remind everyone that this is a time to get all ideas out, not to make decisions or evaluate options.

**Step 3:** Brainstorm and record the pros and cons of each topic.

### *Facilitation Tip:*

*Be open to all issues that youth raise even issues that, on the surface, may seem relevant only to a small or specific group (a minority). For example: Some youth might think that homophobia only affects a small group. Challenge youth to think about the issue more deeply, and refer to the community webs.*

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#### IV. TOPIC NARROWING: MONEY GAME (15 MINUTES)

**Step 1:** Decide on the final topic or topics to pursue for the year. Each youth will pretend they are mayor of their community, and that, as mayor, they are deciding on the the top priorities for the year by allocating money to different areas. Youth will vote on their preference by assigning funds to the topics they think are the most important. Remind youth to think about the characteristics of a good research project.

**Step 2:** Hand out the *Research Topic Budget Activity*, and give youth a few minutes to fill in their answers.

**Step 3:** Have someone add up the totals for each category (with a calculator). Have someone else record the total amounts for each topic on butcher paper. The two topics or issues with the most support are the topics that youth will debate in the next activity.

**Optional:** You can also narrow down topics through a sticker-vote. Give each youth two or three sticker dots to put by the topic(s) in which they are most interested. Each person can choose how to distribute the dots (e.g., evenly between high-interest topics or concentrated around one topic for a weighted vote).

#### V. TOPIC DEBATE (30 MINUTES)

**Step 1:** Divide the group according to the number of issues (usually two or three) that have received the most interest. Have youth choose the group that represents the topic most relevant to them.

**Step 2:** Hand out copies of the *Research Topic Debate Preparation* worksheet to each group and have the groups prepare for the debate by answering the questions on the worksheet.

**Step 3:** Assign a moderator and have each group take two to three minutes to present the case for their topic. Give the other group one minute to respond with a counter argument.

**Step 4:** After the debate, review the topics as a group, and use your group decision-making process to narrow it down to your final topics.

#### VI. CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

Closing Circle Statement (Around the World): If you had a million dollars that you had to give away, what would you do? How would you decide to whom or what organization you would give it?

#### *Example from Practice:*

*In 2004, youth in the middle school YELL project divided into three research teams: Youth Hang Out Spots, X-expression (school climate and physical environment), and Bullying. Each group designed its own surveys, interviews, and focus group protocols, and made a short film highlighting its research findings and recommendations.*

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 Research Topic Budget
 

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**Instructions:** Pretend you are the mayor, and you have to decide how to spend your budget for the year based on the issues that you think are most important for your community. Basically you are voting for a research topic, but your vote is in the form of how much money you will give to each topic.

Using the form below, list the possible research topics from your brainstorm and decide how much money you want to give each one. (You don't have to give money to each one.)

**You have \$256 total.**

You can distribute your money any way you want, but it should reflect how important you think that issue is.

**Think about two factors as you are making your decisions:**

1. How interesting is this topic? How passionate are you about it?
2. How important is this to your school or community in general?

ISSUE OR TOPIC	\$ AMOUNT \$
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$256</b>

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**Research Topic Debate Preparation**

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**TOPIC:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. WHY SHOULD WE FOCUS ON THIS TOPIC OVER THE OTHER(S)? WHY IS THIS TOPIC IMPORTANT?  
WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF THIS TOPIC?**

**2. WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT RESEARCH ON THIS TOPIC MIGHT HELP TO CREATE CHANGE?  
HOW CAN OUR RESEARCH ON THIS TOPIC LEAD TO IMPROVEMENT OR POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS?**

**3. WHO DO YOU THINK WOULD SUPPORT YOU AT THE SCHOOL AND IN THE COMMUNITY?**

**CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD RESEARCH TOPIC:**

- Specific and focused
- Affects people in your school and community
- Easy to understand and explain what it is and why it matters
- Important to other youth
- Could use more examination and deeper understanding
- Has realistic or possible solutions