Taking Action to Improve Your Environment

A Technology-Enhanced Environmental Health Project for Youth

Facilitator’s guide
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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OVERVIEW

❖ What is purpose of the project in this guide?

*ConnectEd* encourages youth to become more civically and socially engaged and to work together to improve their communities. This project is designed to help youth develop their skills for civic engagement and covers issues related to environmental health. Its secondary purpose is to give youth opportunities to expand their knowledge and use of technology.

❖ Who should use this guide?

This guide is for youth leaders, teachers, and facilitators who work with youth under the *ConnectEd* Program. In general, it is for people who are able to meet regularly with a class or group and have time and support to implement an in-depth project. The guide is presented in such a way that neither facilitators nor youth will need to use a computer. However, for those facilitators who do wish to use technology, the guide provides alternative activities in each module that do. These alternative activities require facilitators (or assistants working with them) to have basic computer skills such as familiarity with PowerPoint and the Internet. They will also need to introduce these technologies to the youth they work with.

❖ What do the modules cover?

The four modules build upon each other. Module 1 provides background and calls upon participants’ experience and prior knowledge. Participants investigate a problem in Module 2 and find solutions to the driving questions “What are the health risks in our local environment? What can we do to prevent them?” In Modules 3 and 4, participants work together and present their findings. In each module, you will find the objectives, time required to complete them, preparation required by the teacher or facilitator, and a detailed list of necessary steps.

The title of each module is as follows:

Module 1: Background

Module 2: Investigating the problem

Module 3: Planning action

Module 4: Sharing findings

❖ What are the objectives?

Upon completion of the activities in this project, participants will have:

1. Named and described characteristics that make up their environment
2. Identified aspects of the environment that can be hazardous to their health
3. Identified sources of pollution in their community and recorded how they are affecting their community’s environment
4. Decided on actions the group can take to improve the environmental health of their community and decrease health risks
5. Created environmental health materials and shared them with their school or community

❖ What is the approach of the modules?

The activities within the modules are designed to be highly interactive, as student participants are seen as partners in each other’s learning. Students’ viewpoints and feedback are encouraged throughout. This approach generally works best when youth are put in small groups. Remind group members that working on this project can affect the quality of their own lives and those in their community.

❖ How is technology used?

One goal of this project is to provide an opportunity for students to learn to use technology in new ways. By incorporating technology into their civic engagement projects, participants practice using tools that may become a part of their future studies and work.

Each activity provides steps that initially do not include technology use. Following these steps are alternative instructions on how to integrate technologies if your program has access to certain software, the Internet, mobile phones, and cameras, and you are comfortable using them. If you do not know how to use a particular technology, consider asking if any participants in the group do know and would want to take the lead.

The following symbols appear throughout the manual to indicate the use of different technologies:

- Cameras
- Computers
- Mobile phones

Teachers should briefly demonstrate the use of software first, then model its use with an example of an activity in a module. Give participants practice with the technology by having them complete the authentic tasks in the guide.

Three simple applications may be used in this project:

Presentation Software

Microsoft PowerPoint (hereafter referred to as PowerPoint) is often included on PCs (personal computers). If not, a good alternative is Open Office’s Impress, available free-of-charge at [http://www.openoffice.org](http://www.openoffice.org).

**Advantage of this option:** Presentation Software is part of a package that comes with most PCs. Youth will encounter it in the workplace and in their studies.

Photo Slideshow Makers


**Advantage of this option:** This program is easy to use and has step-by-step instructions for adding audio, music, and text.

Online Slideshows

If you have Internet access and wish to share this project via the Internet, consider websites such as Slideshare (available at [http://www.slideshare.net/](http://www.slideshare.net/)), where you
can upload and share PowerPoint presentations. You may also search for sites (in your spoken language) that allow users to create online presentations.

**Advantage of this option:** Easy to share.

You may also need the following software:

**Graphics Software**

Microsoft Paint (hereafter referred to as MSPaint) comes with Windows. Also consider downloading Gimp for free at [www.gimp.org](http://www.gimp.org).

**Word Processing Software**

Microsoft WordPad (hereafter referred to as WordPad) comes with Windows. Often, either Microsoft Works or Microsoft Word (hereafter referred to as Works and Word) also come with your PC. You can also download word processing software from Open Office at [http://www.openoffice.org](http://www.openoffice.org).

A note about working with beginning computer users:

It is likely that some youth will be familiar with some of the software listed above or will be comfortable enough with computers to learn how to use these programs easily. Make sure youth with strong computing skills mentor those who have less experienced. If you have beginning learners, giving them exposure to new programs first is helpful. Then invite them use the computer for a short time (for example, type a few words) to instill confidence and motivate them to learn more when they can.

Do not underestimate the speed with which some youth can learn a new computer program. This is especially true when they perceive the activity as fun or purposeful. For example, someone with artistic talent may learn a graphic program quickly in order to add images to a presentation.

Of course, not every group will have access to computer technology. If yours doesn’t, consider alternatives. For example, if the group can access a camera, they can share, discuss, and write about the photos they take. Later in this guide, there are suggestions for using cell phones as part of the project. And there is always the option of paper and pens if need be!

**How can you use the different features of this project?**

- **Objectives:** Help you focus on the key learning points of the activity.
- **Preparation and Materials Sections:** Help make sure you have the background information and teaching materials needed to facilitate each activity.
- **Steps:** In each module, there are instructions on how to complete each activity. Please note that there are steps provided which do not require technology but are followed by a technology alternative.

**How long will this project take to complete?**

In total, the project may take as many as 15 hours. More time will be needed for preparation before each module on the part of the teacher or facilitator. On average, the first three modules can be completed within seven hours of class time and so may be accomplished in one week. Module 4 will take a lot longer. This part of the project may benefit from being broken up over a number of days. For example, if students are using new technology for this part of the project, it may take time them to become sufficiently comfortable with the software. They will also need time to organize their
content and develop a presentation. The time required here varies greatly between individual students. Some groups have learned to use PowerPoint and put a presentation together in a couple of hours, while other youth (and teachers) will need much more time learning how to use the software and perfecting the details of their project. If you are able to present the projects to the larger community, keep in mind that organizing this process and preparing students to show their presentations will require additional time.

❖ **Key points to remember**

- Encourage participation. Do your best to avoid an atmosphere where youth think there is a ‘wrong’ and a ‘right’ answer. Accept most comments during a discussion, then gently guide the group away from beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors that might lead to a health risk.
- Make sure that you leave extra time to account for potential technology glitches when using technology alternatives.
- New computer-users will need time to practice learning any new technology related to the lesson. One solution is to pair experienced users with those who are less computer literate.
## MODULES AT-A-GLANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Classroom Time</th>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Other Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Participants discuss what environment is and what it means to them. Images of local environment are shown. Participants identify natural resources they wish to protect and why.</td>
<td>Large group discussion.</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>Projector (if available)</td>
<td>Photos/imagettes of local environment. Blackboard and chalk or large sheets of paper and markers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>As a warm-up activity, students learn about the risks of pollution and toxic chemicals. Small groups go out to the community with a camera to identify potential health risks.</td>
<td>Large group activity followed by small group activity outside the classroom. Small groups report back to the large group.</td>
<td>3-4 hours</td>
<td>Projector</td>
<td>Matches, a candle, and a glass. Paper and pencils. A projection screen or light-colored wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The group votes on which environmental health risk in the community is most important to work on for the rest of the project.</td>
<td>Large group vote.</td>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>Projector</td>
<td>Blackboard/chalk. Large sheets of paper and markers (as an alternative to technology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The group creates a product that can be shared with the larger community.</td>
<td>Product development is designed to be a large group activity with small teams working on various aspects of the project. However, there may be individual tasks depending on the project.</td>
<td>9-10 hours</td>
<td>Projector</td>
<td>Newsprint, markers etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MODULE 1: BACKGROUND
Examining what is meant by the word “environment”

❖ Objectives
Upon completion of this activity, participants will have named and described characteristics that make up their environment.

❖ Time Required
1 hour

❖ Preparation
Draw pictures or take photos of your local environment and bring copies to show your group. Include images of the air, land, water etc.

If you have access to the technology and software, prepare a presentation of the images inserted in PowerPoint or even Word. Make at least one slide that has a photo or a drawing of the local environment. This slide or slides should show elements such as air, earth, water, etc. If you are not able to show a presentation to the classroom, print out and bring the image or images.

If you have a projector, set it up and make sure it is in focus.

Generate a list of questions such as, “Can you name things in the photo if destroyed would create a problem?” and “What problem would it create,” to get the class thinking about the concept of environment.

❖ Materials
1. List of introductory questions
2. Computers, PowerPoint or Word
3. Projector and screen or light-colored wall
   OR
   If there is no access to computers or there are technological problems, use a blackboard and chalk or bring large white poster paper and markers.

❖ Steps
1. Introduce the project to the group, tell them its goals and the kinds of activities they can expect to do. Emphasize the project’s relevance for the general community, and the importance of knowing about environmental safety. For example, you can introduce the project by saying: “Our next activity is a project to discover the health risks in our local environment and what can we do to prevent them. Using technology, you will work together to create a presentation that will help you share your findings with our community.”

2. Write the word “environment” on the board or large white paper and ask if anyone knows what it means. If they are familiar with the word, ask what comes to mind when they hear it.
If necessary, tell them that “environment” can mean natural resources, and it can also refer to the surroundings or conditions in which people live. Show them at least one photo of your local environment. If possible, show more photos of the local area, preferably with as many natural resources in the pictures as possible. Ask participants to say what resource in their environment they would like to protect the most. Write these on the board or large paper, and ask the group to explain how the community depends on each. Discuss the problems that might occur if these resources were destroyed or contaminated. Make sure the group considers resources that involve each of the three environmental elements—water (such as rivers), land (such as farms), and the air we breathe. To conclude, ask the group, “If there was a movie about the loss of these resources, what might the title be and how would the story end?”

If you are using software to show photos (instead of holding them up) and this is the first time most participants have seen it used, explain the software and its general purpose.

As an alternative activity, if the program has a digital camera, have the youth start this lesson on a previous day by having them take photos of the things in the environment they depend on to live and want to protect and preserve. Put these photos into a PowerPoint presentation and ask the group to explain the importance of each or have them take turns typing an answer under each photo.

3. Tell the group what to expect for the next part of the project. Tell the group that they will be investigating and taking pictures of the environmental health risks they might find in the community.
MODULE 2: INVESTIGATING THE PROBLEM
Discovering health risks in your environment

❖ Objectives
Upon completion of this activity, participants will have identified health risks in their local environment.

❖ Time Required
3-4 hours

❖ Preparation
Tour the area you will have participants investigate so that you are familiar with it. Notice any dangerous areas or no trespassing signs and warn the youth accordingly. Depending on your situation and the age of students, you may need to arrange for volunteers to accompany groups of students and get permission from school officials and/or parents.

❖ Materials
1. Matches, a candle, and a glass.
2. Paper and pencils
3. Computers, projector (if possible), screen or light-colored wall.
4. PowerPoint
5. Cameras
6. Mobile phones, if available

❖ Steps
1. Hold and light a candle. Ask the group if they see a lot of smoke. Then ask a volunteer to hold a glass over the candle so that the flame from the candle is touching the inside of the glass. Ask the group to observe the presence of smoke and soot that forms. Then ask:
   - What is happening here? What is the black?
   - Why do you think it happens? How is the black formed?
   - What else will produce soot, aside from a candle? Are there other kinds of pollution in the community that can cause this kind problem? (Explain the term pollution if it is new to the group.)
   - How is pollution harmful to us? Do you know what illnesses air pollution can cause? (Mention cancer and asthma if participants don’t)
   - What can be done about it?
2. Remind the large group that the first task of this project is for them to answer the following question: “What are the health risks in our environment?” Explain that problems may not be obvious so they will need to look carefully. Ask the group if they know examples of health problems other than air pollution. Prompt if necessary: Are there things in food that can
make us sick? What happens if you leave certain foods without refrigeration? (Explain bacteria.) How are colds spread to other people? (Explain germs.) Do you know of any chemicals that are harmful to land or people if we touch or swallow them? (Explain toxic chemicals such as pesticides, etc.)

3. Create small groups and ask them to talk about any places nearby where they might find environmental problems. Have them think carefully about situations where health risks and pollution might not be easily observed.

4. For this step, the students will go into the community to observe and record. Explain that they will be looking for things happening in the environment that might cause health problems. Divide participants into small groups (three per group). Give each group a pencil and paper and ask participants to find and draw three problem areas in the neighborhood. Group members should take turns drawing and taking any necessary notes.

   If possible, give each group a camera and instruct them to take photos of three problem areas instead of drawing them. If there is one camera, have groups take turns going out to investigate. Each participant should take a turn using the camera to photograph one potentially dangerous area. In addition to taking photographs, each group should have the other two youth describe the problem and its location on a sheet of paper.

   If you have access to a video camera, have each small group record a video.

   If there is at least one mobile phone per small group, have a member of that group text (and if the phone has the capability, have them send a photo) the facilitator to report the problem and its location.

5. In the next step, the groups will prepare their findings to share with the class.

   If there is access to computers with presentation software, this is a good opportunity for the groups to begin using it. Show the group how to insert images and video into a PowerPoint to make a multimedia presentation.

6. Share findings with the class:

   When the class comes together next, have each of the small groups come up one at a time to show their drawings, photos, or videos to the rest of the class. If possible, use the projector to display student photos or presentations. Then ask the class the following questions:

   • Where did the problem occur?
   • What is the cause of this environmental problem?
   • What is the danger to human health?

   If appropriate, consider making the above activity into a game. Groups can get points for sharing their ideas and for answering questions correctly.
If you are using the mobile phone option, read what the small groups texted or have students read their own texts to the whole group. As before, ask volunteers from other groups to answer the above questions.

7. Tell the group that when they next meet they will select one health risk to focus on. They will need to decide which of the problems they discovered is the most serious and most affects the community.
MODULE 3: PLANNING ACTION
Deciding which health risk should be the focus of this project

❖ Objectives

Upon completion of this activity, participants will have decided on actions the group can take to improve the environmental health of their community and prevent health risks.

❖ Time Required

1-2 hours

❖ Preparation

Think about the local environmental problems the groups have discovered and be prepared to add to the list the large group will be making about the advantages and disadvantages of doing a project on each.

❖ Materials

1. Computers
2. Presentation software such as PowerPoint or word processing software such as Word
3. Projector and screen or light-colored wall
4. If there are technological problems, use a blackboard and chalk or bring newsprint and markers

❖ Steps

1. Lead a discussion about which environmental health risk the large group should address. Cover the advantages and disadvantages of working on each of the problem areas that the small groups found in their community investigation. This discussion will help the participants make an informed selection during the voting activity.

2. If a computer is available in the classroom, type a list of project ideas in presentation software such as PowerPoint or word processing software such as Word. When time to vote, ask participants to come to the computer and type ‘1’ beside the idea they think is best for the group to work on. (It is possible to do more than one project, but it is more time consuming and difficult to coordinate a multiple projects).

3. After counting the votes, announce the project received the most and that it will be the one the group will work on.

4. To instill excitement and help youth prepare for the next meeting, tell them which technology they will be using and some of the roles that will be needed (see the list in the next module). Ask them to begin thinking about possible causes of and solutions to the problem in advance of the next meeting.
MODULE 4: SHARING FINDINGS  
Sharing your work with the community

❖ Objectives

Upon completion of this activity, participants will have created environmental health materials, disseminated them to their community (school, family, or neighborhood), and taken the first steps to address the problem.

❖ Time Required

9-10 hours total: 1 hour to complete the organizational steps below; 2-3 student research hours; and at least 6 more to create and give the presentation. The time assumes basic comfort with the software and does not include time for training.

❖ Preparation

1. Ask a local expert to come to the class to teach youth more about local environmental health risks. Or, if you have access to the Internet, select websites so youth can read about health risks and what they can do to help prevent them.

2. Select the software that best meets the needs of participants and project (see list below).

❖ Materials

1. Large sheets of paper and markers

2. Computers, projector (if available), screen or light-colored wall

3. Word processing software

4. Presentation/slide show software, such as PowerPoint

5. There are a number of software programs you can use. Depending on your needs and ability to access them, each of following choices has benefits:

   **Microsoft PowerPoint:** Most popular presentation software, sometimes comes with PCs. (Check to see if it is on your computer before thinking about purchasing it.)


   [Online Slideshows](http://www.slideshare.net): If you have good Internet access and wish to share this project via the Internet, use websites such as Slideshare [http://www.slideshare.net](http://www.slideshare.net)

6. Microphone and headset if possible (note: many laptops now come with internal microphone and speakers)
**Steps**

1. Explain to the group that before taking any action to limit problems in the local area, they should make others aware of the health risks around them. If they can present this information to the community, they may be able to get community members to support and perhaps work on a follow-up activity, such as a community clean-up day. Explain that one way to make the community aware of the situation is to organize a meeting to share their findings. At this point, help the group decide who they would like to present the information to and the most effective way/s to present it. Write their ideas on the board/newsprint and if necessary, suggest local leaders, officials, family members, neighbors, friends, and oral presentations, guest panels, or bulletin boards with photos and captions.

   There are a number of forms that projects like this might take. If the technology is available, tell the group that one of the most effective ways is with a multimedia presentation using software that makes a slideshow. Explain how this offers a simple and impressive way to attract viewers’ attention while communicating basic information. It can also be used in multiple situations and forums: to present a case at a community meeting, for a community “movie night,” or to loop a slide show on a table at a market, fair, or conference. This is a great way to engage people of various ages, not just students.

2. Provide opportunities for the group to research and learn more about the causes and the issue they are addressing as well the potential health risks. Organize a presentation by a local expert or set up an interview with a local leader (in health or environmental concerns) or even a representative from a business who might be responsible for dealing with this environmental health issue.

3. Print information you found from the Internet. If the group has access to connected computers, give them an opportunity to visit selected websites to read the information online. If they don’t know, you can show more advanced computer users how to use a search engine to look for information.

4. After the group has compiled enough knowledge, help them decide the order of information for their presentation and what tone (for instance, a ‘lobbying’ tone if presentation is to local leaders; a ‘call to action’ tone for peers, etc.).

   (Note: the following steps assume the use of presentation software, but the process below can also be helpful for planning and organize other types of presentations.)

5. Work together to put the information in order by creating a storyboard. Tape several blank sheets of paper on a wall. Tell the group that each sheet represents a photo or slide in the presentation. Working as a group, ask participants to come up to the first sheet and say what information they think should be on the introductory page. Invite one participant to write down the information while another draws an image where a photo should go, if any are to be used. Continue with each sheet until the group has told the whole story behind the health risk they are focused on. Don’t forget to add a slide at the end, if appropriate, that explains what action your group hopes to take and how viewers can get involved.

   Note: Help guide the process by suggesting a flow of information. This might be as simple as having youth report what happened in chronological order. (Slide 1: Our teacher asked us to find... add photo of the teacher and group. Slide 2: We found...add photos of what was observed. Slide 3: We want to warn the community about the risks, etc.). Another approach is...
to organize the presentation by showing a slide with photos of the problem first, then information about the cause, then a slide about possible solutions.

At this point it would be helpful to assess the skills and interests of youth and assign participants to roles. See possible roles for individuals or teams below:

**Project Management**

**Task:** Work closely with the facilitator to organize the overall presentation, assign additional tasks as needed, complete tasks on deadline, and approve final production.

**Technology skills needed:** Some familiarity with presentation software.

**Writing**

**Task:** Type up the text from the class storyboard, revise and add new text as needed, and write a script for the narrator.

**Technology skills needed:** Ability to type in a word processor or presentation software.

**Design**

**Task:** Create any new images needed; select the look, color, and visual theme for the slideshow; input all the pieces (text and images) into the presentation software.

**Technology skills needed:** Ability to create and resize images using graphics software such as MS Paint or Gimp, or presentation software such as PowerPoint.

**Photography**

**Task:** Select the appropriate photos for slides and take additional ones as needed.

**Technology skills needed:** Ability to take photos with digital camera or phone and insert them into MS Paint or PowerPoint.

**Sound**

**Task:** Oversee narration of the slides and select music to go with them.

**Technology skills needed:** Ability to use PowerPoint’s narration feature and possibly Microsoft Sound Recorder.

**Publicity**
Task: Communicate with the public about the project, who the group is and what it is doing, as well as when and where the presentation and any subsequent action will take place.

Technology skills needed: Ability to create fliers and other documents using word processing or graphic design software.

6. Create a schedule and arrange time for groups and/or individuals to use computers. Allow time for training and practice so participants can learn how to use programs that are new to them.

7. After the group creates the presentation, have participants share it with the whole class so everyone can give feedback and make final revisions.

On the day of the event, make sure that the group arrives early to help clear space, prepare places to sit, etc.

8. Immediately after the presentation to the community, ask participants to discuss what they have heard. They may want to know what they can do to help. Mention any ideas you and the group have for the steps beyond the presentations on health risks, and invite participants to join the effort to protect the environment and the health of the community. If there seems to be enough interest, organize a follow-up activity, such as an education campaign or a clean-up day.

9. After the event, use the questions in the evaluation section below to reflect upon it with the group.
OPTIONAL ALTERNATIVES AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Free alternatives with Internet connection

Here are some programs that more advanced computer users with a good connection to the Internet may want to use:

- **Online slideshows**– If you would like to share your project via the web, consider websites such as SlideShare [http://www.slideshare.net], where PowerPoint presentations can be uploaded.

- **If you want students to create animated presentations online**, consider the following sites (you may need to search for similar sites that have versions in your country’s language):
  - Animoto [http://animoto.com/education]
  - Smilebox [http://www.smilebox.com/anytime-slideshows.html]

- **Prezi**– This program allows you to save creative presentations on your computer. [http://prezi.com]

- **Voicethread**– Creates presentations and has features for online commenting and discussion about each slide: [http://voicethread.com]

Networking with other groups

Tell the group about the value of connecting to the wider world. Explain how important it can be to share their projects with and learn from those of other groups. Remind them to take the necessary precautions when communicating and sharing information online, especially with people who they don’t know. Please refer to the ConnectEd Digital Safety Guidelines.

Depending on language and other concerns, you may need to limit your interactions to your own country. If at all possible, however, consider some of the following:

- Have your group look online for other groups that are working on similar issues. You may also want to consider connecting with ConnectEd staff.

- Contact another school or group that is working on environmental health risks and send your photos and material via email or a link to your blog or webpage.

- Invite a group to connect by exchanging contact information (email, Skype name, etc.) and arrange a class conversation with them via phone, Skype, or web conference. Set up the technology for the group. For example, have the phone on speaker or use Skype (or web conference software) and project it so the whole group can participate.
EVALUATION

When the project has been completed*, take to discuss the experience, results, and ways to improve future efforts. Most importantly, focus on what went well and celebrate the completion of the project. Here are suggested discussion questions:

1. What were the highlights of the project for each person?
2. What were the challenges?
3. What could be improved for the next project?
4. Did the work that your group completed meet or exceed your expectations? Why or why not?
5. In what ways was it successful?

If facilitators are interested in learning how they can evaluate student performance using a checklist or rubric, see: http://www.bie.org/tools/freebies/cat/rubrics

For those interested in creating their own project rubrics, see http://rubistar.4teachers.org

*Before completing the project, please contact ConnectEd staff so they can help you post the project summary, photos, and videos on the ConnectEd site.