

Plan Your Attack

The past several steps have armed you with information about your issue and a deeper understanding of its context. Now, it's time to put that information and understanding to work. This is where you'll shift from research and analysis mode into action mode. But don't go knocking on all your neighbors' doors just yet—you need a plan first. In this step, you'll develop a written plan of action for your issue.

Your Objective

The first part of making a plan is to articulate your **objective**, which is the end result you'll be working toward. An objective is something specific and measurable that you can take concrete steps toward achieving. Even though it is the end result, your objective is also your starting point because every action you plan to take will be designed with your ultimate objective in mind.

To start thinking about an objective, look back at the analyzing community problems packet and the TIEA organizer you developed earlier in the semester. Develop this problem into a question for you to look at. Is this still the question you want to answer in this project? Has your Basic Question shifted because of anything you've learned? After all the research you've done, you could easily have realized that your original Basic Question isn't quite the right question to be asking. Maybe you were assuming something that turned out not to be true or you realized the problem isn't exactly what you thought it was. Take a new look at your Basic Question and decide whether it needs to be revised. If so, update your Basic Question on your Action Plan Worksheet.

Now, all you have to do is answer the question, and you'll have an objective. There are lots of possible ways to answer your Basic Question, of course, but you're looking for something achievable that could actually move the needle with a reasonable amount of effort. Consider these possibilities:

- **Root Causes.** Could you move the needle by doing something to address one of the root causes?
- **Current Efforts.** Could you make a difference by improving or adding to what's already being done?
- **Laws and Policies.** Could you push to change a law or government policy related to your issue?
- **Blind Spots.** Could you address some important factor that nobody seems to be paying attention to?
- **People's Attitudes.** Would a campaign to change people's attitudes make a difference?
- **Political Climate.** Could you work to show people or politicians that your issue transcends politics?
- **Unique Factors.** Is there a factor unique to your issue that you could address?

These are only a few ways of thinking about how to tackle your issue. Use your Action Plan Worksheet to brainstorm possible answers to your Basic Question. You'll need an active verb and a measurable action for each idea, like the examples on the side of this page. When you're ready, choose one of your ideas and formalize your objective by re-writing it without the words "I could." Then, copy your objective onto your formal Action Plan.

Your Action Plan

Any time you take on a big project that has a lot of moving parts, you pretty much need a plan. Working without a plan is fine in some situations, like if you're on a cross-country drive and you just want to see some sights. But if your objective is to visit as many national parks as possible in two weeks, taking random roads and hoping to run into a national park isn't going to work. You'll need to map out a plan in advance. The same thing is true with answering your Basic Question. How are you going to get there? Your objective is the "what"—it tells what you're trying to do. The rest of your Action Plan will describe how you plan to do it.

Action Steps

What will you need to do in order to make your objective happen? To answer this, imagine carrying out your objective from start to finish. What actions can you already predict you'll have to take? For example, Sean's list for his volunteer tutor idea might include things like this: Get the school's cooperation; arrange for a space at the school, recruit volunteers, publicize the program. Like your objective, these should have action verbs and measurable outcomes. In fact, think of these as mini-objectives—you'll need to accomplish these action steps in order to reach your overall objective.

Brainstorm action step ideas on your Action Plan Worksheet. List things in any order you think of them and write down anything that comes to mind. The point is to get the possible steps out of your head and onto the paper.

Next, you'll want to narrow your list of steps if you can. Are any of the steps you listed actually part of another step on the list? On your Action Plan Worksheet, draw arrows linking sub-steps back to the main step. Then, circle the main action steps.

Finally, try to put your main steps into a logical order. Which step would need to happen before you could start any of the others? Which steps would need to come before or after other steps? On your Action Plan Worksheet, number the steps you circled in the order that seems most logical to do them, with #1 being the thing you should do first. Then, write them in order on your Action Plan itself.

What You'll Need

There will be things you'll need in order to make each action step happen. These aren't just tangible objects—they could be people, information, methods, ideas, or more actions. For example, in order to recruit volunteers, Sean might need a way to identify people who might be interested, methods for raising awareness about the need for volunteers, and a list of requirements for school volunteers. On your Action Plan itself, write down what you'll need for each action step.

Challenges

Finally, think through potential challenges you might run into with each action step. Where might you meet with resistance? What obstacles might require extra planning? You won't be able to anticipate everything, but some things will be foreseeable. On your Action Plan, list any possible challenges for each action step.

MOVE-THE-NEEDLE TOOLBOX

In order to reach your objective and take your action steps, you're going to need tools. Fortunately, there are lots of effective tools in your move-the-needle toolbox. Check out the examples below. (Don't freak out if some of these things sound intimidating. You're only planning.)



COMMUNICATION

How can you talk to people you want information or support from?

Phone Calls

- Be sure to leave messages and don't be afraid to keep calling back. Sometimes you have to be persistent.

Email

- Follow up if you don't get a reply. If they still don't respond, call. (It's that persistence thing again.)

In-Person Meetings

- Meet people face-to-face. It can be very effective and help give your issue personal significance.

AWARENESS



How can you spread the word about your issue?

Social Media

- Start a page for your cause or just post things to call people's attention to the issue.

Website

- Give people a place to find all the information about what you're trying to do.

Flyers

- Find community bulletin boards or other places where people can post information.

Presentations

- Find out which groups hold monthly meetings and ask to be a speaker and present your issue.

Informational Meetings

- Organize a meeting of your own and publicize it to get as many attendees as possible.

Tables

- Set up a table at local events to hand out flyers and get contact info from supporters.

Op-Ed Letters

- Write a letter to newspaper editor persuading people to support your cause.

Broadcast Media

- Ask to appear on a local radio or TV show to talk about your issue.



PRESSURE

How can you harness the power of numbers to push for or against something?

Petitions

- Ask volunteers to circulate petitions collecting signatures of people who support your goal.

Stakeholder Meetings

- Organize a meeting to bring together all types of people who have an interest in your issue.

Letter/Email Campaigns

- Ask supporters to write to leaders who are in a position to change how your issue is handled.

Demonstrations

- Organize a visible gathering in support of your issue at a park or a meeting of public officials.

ACTION



How can you get people to help you take action on your issue?

Work Parties

- Organize a time and place for supporters to come help out by folding brochures, making posters, writing letters, posting to social media—whatever needs to be done.

Organized Events

- Plan a picnic, a speaker, a walk, a parade float—any event that gets people interacting with each other around your issue so they feel involved and included.

Volunteer Opportunities

- Offer ways for volunteers to help, either in an organized setting or on their own time. Prepare a list so you're ready when people ask what they can do.

Action Plan Worksheet

Copy your original Basic Question here:	Update your Basic Question here (if necessary):

Use this space to brainstorm answers to your Basic Question:
I could:

Choose an answer that will become your focus for the rest of this project. Circle it. Then, re-write it as a formal objective below. Make sure to include an action verb and a measurable outcome.

Objective:

Use the space below to brainstorm the action steps you'll need to take to reach your objective. Follow the directions in the reading to connect related steps, identify your main steps, and put those steps in a logical order.

Action Steps:

Write your objective and your action steps on your Action Plan Template. (You may need more than one template depending on how many action steps you have.) Follow the directions in the reading to add "What You'll Need" and "Possible Challenges" to your Action Plan Template.

