

County Solutions Unit Overview

Time Needed: 10-12 class periods over the course of a semester + time outside of class for students to work (*Some steps may not need an entire in-class period.*)

Materials:

- Student internet access
- Student readings, worksheets, and templates (*available in paper or fillable PDF versions*)
- Student access to PowerPoint or other presentation software (*optional*)

Unit Objectives: By the time this project is finished, students will know how to...

- Determine which community issues they care about and why (and choose one to work on)
- Find information that will help them understand what's really going on with their issue
- Identify bogus sources of information
- Analyze the causes of the issue they're addressing and identify realistic ways to help
- Strategize effective ways to influence people and gather support for their ideas
- Pitch their ideas to a real-world audience



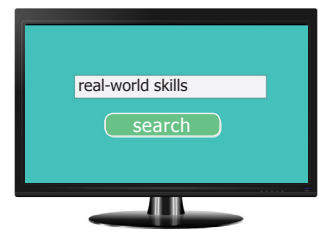
By the end of this project, students will have an action plan that they *could actually carry out in the community* to make positive change related to an issue they care about. Each student will have a proposal, strategy, and starter kit of materials that can be used to gather support for their ideas. Even if students don't actually carry out their plans, they will come away knowing exactly what to do when they want to take action on issues in the future.

Unit Design

This unit gives you a classroom-based, long-term civic engagement project broken into a series of lessons and assignments.

- **Steps:** This unit breaks the project into 10 steps. Each step introduces a new phase of the project and builds on the work students have already done.
- **In-Class Instruction:** Instructional materials with each step let you teach students what they need to know to complete the work for the step. Some steps include activities to reinforce the concepts before students apply them to their own project work.
- **Assignments:** The main part of each step is the actual project work. Templates guide students' efforts and help them apply what they learned in class to their own project.

Please note: Internet research has become a basic skill in today's society, so we've made this project internet-based even though internet access varies widely among schools. Depending on your students' internet access, this could mean working on classroom computers when other work is finished, scheduling computer lab time between project steps, having students complete assignments outside school, or working on one issue together during class time.



Choosing Issues

You can adapt the project by reconfiguring how issues are assigned:

- Allow each student to choose an issue.
- Assign groups or pairs of students to work on a single issue together. This may be especially effective if your class uses a digital platform like Google that will let them collaborate in a single document for each step.
- Work on one issue together as a class. This may be a good option if your students need support with fundamental skills.

The Steps

Here's the nutshell version of what your students will learn and do in each step of the project:

Step 1: Change the World?

Find out what it means to "move the needle" and identify an issue that matters to them.

Step 2: Find What You Need

Learn to find reliable information online and gather a list of relevant sources for their issue.

Step 3: Become an Expert

Read their sources with an investigative purpose and learn to compile and organize information.

Step 4: Consider the Context

Analyze the relationships among major factors that influence their issue.

Step 5: Identify Your Stakeholders

Figure out who is affected by their issue and who their potential supporters and opponents are.

Step 6: Plan Your Attack

Establish an objective, learn the tools they can use to get there, and make a plan of action.

Step 7: Fill the Holes

Identify information gaps they need to fill and reach out to info sources by phone and email.

Step 8: Talk It Up

Develop and practice talking points and an elevator speech for their issue.

Step 9: Grab People's Attention

Design attention-getting swag and obtain cost estimates for promotional materials.

Step 10: Make Your Pitch

Develop and deliver a presentation designed to win support from a targeted audience.

End Product Ideas

The default end product is a presentation, but you can change the end product as well as its purpose to give the project real-world meaning. Here are two ideas:

- **Portfolio:** Have students assemble a paper or digital portfolio to present their work on this project. Students could submit their portfolios to a member of the community who works with the issue and request feedback.
- **Civic Fair:** Organize a "science fair"-style "Civic Fair" where students can present their work. Invite the community to attend, especially local leaders. Students should be prepared to discuss their issues and make their pitches in person as community members circulate through the fair.



Suggestions for Success

Don't skip the check-ins. The Step-by-Step for each lesson gives instructions for planning a check-in with students between steps. Keep problems from snowballing by making time for these check-ins.

Insist on organization. Decide before you begin the unit what options you'll give students for keeping track of their project materials. Consider spot-checking students' organization at each step.

Be flexible. This unit is designed to be versatile, but you may discover aspects that don't completely mesh with an issue a student has chosen. Let students come up with modification ideas, and don't hesitate to adjust as you see fit.

If you have a digital platform, consider using it. A shared digital platform like Google Classroom can make it easy to monitor and give feedback on students' progress. Have students collect and organize information in documents that they share with you. This lets you hop in, leave a few comments, and hop back out. You can monitor their presentation slides the same way by having them use the presentation builder that goes with the digital platform (e.g., Google Slides).