Targeting an Issue for Action

In Part 1 through Part 6 of your research, the team has learned about many issues related to food and nutrition around the world and in your community. Being aware of and understanding the variety of food and nutrition issues is a helpful first step when deciding what actions to take. The next step is deciding which specific food and nutrition issue your team is going to focus your action plan on to address the problem question: How do we ensure good nutrition for all?

There are many issues you can focus your Community Action Plan on to work on this question. Only you can make that decision. This is why you conducted research to learn more about the problem in your community. Now you must decide which issue you would like to take action on.

1. Go to the Task 7-3 folder to get the EcoTeen Action Article and Brainstorming and Selection Sheet.

2. Read the EcoTeen Action Article about teens taking action on issues about food in their community. Use the discussion questions in the task folder to discuss the issue that team identified in their community.

3. Using the Brainstorming and Selection Sheet, as a team document all the different food and nutrition issues in your community that team members learned about during your research. All issues should be considered during this brainstorm. No issue is too small to consider at this time!

4. Using the list from the team brainstorm, determine which issue the team or several smaller groups would like to focus their action plan on.

5. Outline why you have selected this particular issue for your Community Action Plan. Understanding your reasons for why your action plan is focused on this issue will be helpful when developing your action plan and communicating it to others.
How to foster food sustainability in your school, community, and beyond!

August 2, 2019 | Matthew Capuano-Rizzo and Garreth Bartholomew

Start small

Shades of green surrounded us as Garreth and I descended a trail in Shenandoah National Park toward one of several waterfalls along our eight-mile route. We had arrived with several other of our friends and a few parents the previous day and observed the leaves of the trees around us coated with droplets of rain that had been falling intermittently throughout the day. As rising seniors, I started our summer conversation with future plans, as does any stranger when he hears that you are between the ages of 14 and 20. Unlike most of our peers, however, Garreth was focused on the actions he would take during senior year to improve our school community rather than his professional trajectory afterwards. “Food and Hunger Task Force” echoed through my mind as Garreth explained his vision for uniting the school community around realization of the United Nations’ second Sustainable Development Goal. Food waste served as our principal concern, and I shared my experience working with DC Central Kitchen and their efforts to promote economic development through food, while eliminating waste. My recent interaction with CEO Michael Curtin echoed through my mind; “There’s no reason why you can’t start what we’re doing here in your schools and communities.”

We first needed to understand the impact of George C. Marshall High School’s 2,173 students in areas such as food waste. Holding a food waste audit on November 20, we instructed students to place their food waste in the trash can corresponding to their class and we added a miscellaneous bin for faculty and staff. With only 60% of the student body present on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving break, we found that Marshall wasted more than 100 pounds of food, with the freshman class recording the most waste at 23 pounds. Inquiring with the school registrar led us to find that 17% of our school population receives free or reduced-price lunch. The variance of our food waste and our school’s need led Garreth and me to embark on different paths in achieving the Task Force’s goal of reducing food waste and insecurity.

Involve as many people and organizations as possible

At the onset of senior year, I did not envision leading five different clubs and honor societies. It just sort of happened that way. I thought I love French and Social Studies and English and I’m already leading Octagon and Writing Center, so why not add on a few more? While such a decision led to many nights organizing Google Classroom announcements and planning events, involvement in many organizations facilitated their partnership in Food and Hunger Task Force events, as well as others such as a Mental Health Seminar and Meditation.
My first project was The Share Table, a table in front of the trash cans and recycling bins on which students may place unopened packages and uneaten fruits and vegetables. After many meetings with leaders of the Second Story, Octagon Club, Key Club, Marshall PTSA, National Honor Society, Student Government Association, and the purchasing of a small refrigerator with Octagon Club funds, I implemented the Share Table on March 1st. Donations from the table would be taken by PTSA volunteers on Tuesday mornings to the teen shelter Second Story’s office to be given to at-risk youth. Throughout the year, National Honor Society members, and volunteers from Octagon, Key Club and Marshall’s leadership class staffed the table, making announcements about eligible food and encouraging donations. We recovered nearly 90 pounds of food in the Share Table’s first year.

At the conclusion of the last lunch, volunteers place leftover food in the refrigerator located in the cafeteria and PTSA volunteers transport donations in the cooler situated to the left of the refrigerator. In the spring, we organized a school-wide waste audit, with recyclable and trash values in addition to food waste data. I publicized the event to the English, French, and Social Studies and National Honor Societies as well as the Octagon and Key Clubs. We recorded more than ten volunteers per lunch sorting waste and found a 30% reduction in food waste, from 100 to 70 pounds, despite a higher percentage of the student body present. The involvement of several school organizations unsurprisingly led the audit to run with increased efficiency than our fall audit in which Garreth, myself, and a few others sorted a school’s worth of waste.

Lily Toruteva, a Social Studies and French Honor Society member, poses with our separation station in the middle of the George C. Marshall High School cafeteria.
Believe

Most of what we accomplished in our final year of high school, I never thought would be possible. We are often conditioned to accept the barriers of precedents and regulations and do not move past the initial indignation of these barriers’ existence. After being stymied by administration in my efforts to raise money for my friend Vivian’s relative’s charity in Mexico, I isolated my fundraising operations to Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF. Unfazed, however, by county and state regulations on the activity, Garreth organized a school-wide benefit concert for the organization Food for Others to provide summer meals to Fairfax County students. The concert raised $857 for summer meals, contributing to around 8,570 meals for kids over the summer!

Garreth Bartholomew circulates in the school courtyard as Marshall’s student-led jazz group The Brassholes prepares to play at the Marshall Rocks Benefit Concert.

Regardless of whether you are already a leader of a club or have recently joined the environmental movement, we all have a responsibility and a role to play in preserving the future well-being of our planet and all that inhabit it. All issues connect to environmental issues and we must recognize the social consequences of issues such as food waste, plastic pollution, and climate change to ensure we respond to address the scale of the problems we have created. Instead of dividing stakeholders into “part of the problem” and “part of the solution,” we can unite in the reshaping of our economy and way of living in which our present use of resources does not diminish our future quality of life. Such an approach encourages citing actions, governments, and corporations that perpetuate these issues, but also provides an alternative to undesirable behavior and fosters cooperation.

Together, we can, quite literally, turn the tide. We just have to believe.
World Wildlife Fund intern and Smithsonian Folklife Festival Sustainability Coordinator Anna Johnson and Matthew Capuano-Rizzo of Eco-Teen Action Network demonstrate how to perform a waste audit at an Eco-Teen Action Network Open House on April 18, 2019.

Discussion Questions

1. What was the primary issue these teens identified that they wanted to address?
2. What actions did they choose to address the issue?
3. Why did they choose those actions?
4. What were some of the effects of their actions on the issue?
Task 7-3. Targeting an Issue for Action—Brainstorming and Selection Sheet

Around the circle, brainstorm and document all of the food and nutrition related issues that you are aware of from your research, such as malnutrition and obesity. Think about global issues but also local community issues you learned about during your research. No issue is too small to consider!

How do we ensure good nutrition for all?
The issue our action plan will target is . . .

We have selected this issue to focus our action plan on because . . .