#YLAIEmpowers Communities Action Week

Toolkit for Planning a Community Service Event

Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative

#YLAIEmpowers

#YLAIEmpowers Communities Action Week (July 17-24) is a week to celebrate volunteerism, community service, and servant leadership as key aspects of leadership development, and it is a great opportunity to organize a volunteer event to benefit your community. Giving back to the community is something that can be done by individuals, but can be even more powerful when undertaken by businesses and other community groups. In particular, community engagement can be hugely beneficial for businesses because it provides an opportunity to connect with community members outside the usual selling context.

Your **#YLAIEmpowers** Communities event can take many forms, and the following toolkit will help you plan and run a successful event that best fits your interests and your community's needs.

This toolkit is written specifically for small business and social entrepreneurs who are interested in conducting a **#YLAIEmpowers** Communities event, however the content would be valuable to anyone with a few small modifications.

In the following sections, you will find helpful prompts for thinking about how to plan an event: the type of event you would like to hold, the logistics of the event, and opportunities for continuing to engage with your volunteers after your event. You may want to read through the toolkit in its entirety so you have a good idea of the process, and then work through it section by section as you plan your event.

DON'T FORGET

The YLAI Network Online Course *Community Organizing for Action* (https://ylai.state.gov/community-organizing-action/) provides a great introduction to community engagement. Be sure to complete the course before you begin planning your event.

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Step 1: Define The Event

Having a documented purpose and goal for your #YLAIEmpowers Communities event will make it much easier to undertake the subsequent steps with a clear vision for what you need to accomplish. This planning step is also a great opportunity to think about partners with whom you could work to make your event an even bigger success. Be sure to think through the following prompts before moving on to planning.

Define the need:

Use your existing understanding of your community and its needs as a guide, and be sure to talk to community leaders and advocates about what they believe would be of most benefit.

What need exists in your community, that you would like to address?

- ☐ Providing information on topics such as entrepreneurship, business, or community engagement
- ☐ Providing education on health topics
- ☐ Local beach or park maintenance
- ☐ Public safety projects like trash removal, public hygiene, or pedestrian safety awareness
- ☐ Creating a more inviting environment for school children or the community
- ☐ Reducing soil erosion and bettering the environment
- ☐ Starting a mentoring program
- ☐ Other _____

Define the event:

Based on the community need you would like to fill, think about what type of event would be best to conduct.

What type of event would best serve the need you defined?

- ☐ Facilitating a YLAI Network Online Course (see all the course topics at https://ylai.state.gov/online-courses/)
- ☐ Awareness campaign (health, public hygiene, pedestrian safety, etc.)
- ☐ School or community space beautification (painting, planting a garden, etc.)
- ☐ Environmental action (tree planting, beach cleanup, etc.)
- ☐ Mentoring event
- ☐ Other _____

Step 1: Define the Event

Create a mission statement:

Include the need you will serve, the activities you will perform, and the people who will benefit. For example: As part of *#YLAIEmpowers Communities Action Week, my company will host an event helping students at a local school plant a garden. This will achieve several outcomes: support science lessons and teach the children about how plants grow; teach the children life skills for growing their own food; and provide fresh produce for school lunches.*

Mission:

Set a goal for your event:

Consider things like the number of people you will train, the total area you will clean up, or the number of trees you will plant. Make sure your goals are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound).

How will you measure the impact of your activities?

What is your specific goal for the event?

Identify potential partners:

Working with another person or a group will reduce the burden of organizing an event, and it is a great opportunity to build connections in your community. Working together on one event might even lead to a long-term partnership!

Do you already have a community partner that might be able to support the event?

- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ Name of group
  - ☐ Contact information
- ☐ No (Continue to the next question)

Step 1: Define the Event

Would you like to partner with another individual or group to plan the event? If so, consider the following:

- ☐ Research potential partners: Try to select an individual or group who has an existing interest in the topic your event will be covering.
- ☐ Use your network: See if you have any connections who can introduce you to the individual or group, as you're more likely to be successful if there is a personal connection.
- ☐ Prepare for the first meeting: Especially if you will be contacting someone with whom you don't have an existing relationship, prepare a letter or script to introduce yourself and the event you would like to plan together. The donor letter template on page 10 can be adjusted to work for this purpose.
- ☐ If the partner is interested in working together, set a time for your first planning meeting and complete the remaining steps together:
  - ☐ Name _____
  - ☐ Contact information _____
  - ☐ Date/time of planning meeting _____

DON'T FORGET

If you have not yet set overarching goals for your ongoing volunteer experiences, be sure to check out the *Personal Volunteer Development Plan* resource at https://ylai.state.gov/communities/. Your #YLAIEmpowers Communities event can help further your ultimate goals!

FURTHER READING

Learn more about setting goals, to ensure the #YLAIEmpowers Communities event you plan aligns with your own long-term vision: https://ylai.state.gov/setting-achieving-goals/

Learn more about corporate social responsibility and why it is important to run a business that gives back: https://share.america.gov/corporate-stewardship-millennials/

Learn more about the importance of connecting with other entrepreneurs — your event could be a great opportunity to build a relationship with another local business or group: https://share.america.gov/entrepreneur-beats-information-technology-barriers/

Step 2: Plan Logistics

Setting the logistics is where you really get into planning the specifics of your event. You'll want to think through factors such as where and when you'll hold the event. Also consider how many volunteers you need, and whether there are any resources you need to hold the event.

Select a venue:

The type of event you are holding will determine the best place to conduct it. If you are planting trees, you'll need to find an outdoor space where the trees will be welcome. If you are holding a class or awareness event, you may have options such as a local school, library, or community center. Consider whether your office has space to host the event — or if a local partner might be able to offer space.

Where will you hold your event?

- ☐ Workplace
- ☐ School
- ☐ Library
- ☐ Park
- ☐ Community center
- ☐ Health Clinic
- ☐ Outdoor space (where?) _____
- ☐ American Space (find locations in the "Education & Culture" section of the website for the US Embassy in your country: https://www.usembassy.gov/)
- ☐ Other _____

Determine how many volunteers or participants you would like to have:

Depending on the type of event you are holding and your goals for the event, you will need to estimate the number of volunteers required to accomplish that goal. If you are running a health awareness campaign, you will need volunteers to help you share information. If you are repainting a school, you will need volunteers to do the painting. If you are leading a YLAI Network Online Course, you may not need any volunteers, but you will need participants to attend the class. If you are planning the event for your workplace, decide whether you would like to encourage all employees to participate, or if this will be an extra event they can decide whether to attend.

Step 2: Plan Logistics

How many volunteers will you need? (if applicable)

_____

How many participants would you like to have? (if applicable)

_____

Confirm the date:

#YLAIEmpowers Communities Action Week is July 17 - 24, and you can choose any day in that week that works for you. If no dates during that week work for you, that's ok! You can pick another date.

Will your event be held during the week of July 17-24?

- ☐ Yes (Date of event: _____)
- ☐ No (Date of event: _____)

If your event will be held outside, what is your rain date (alternate date)?

- ☐ Date: _____

Set the times of the event:

The type of event you are planning will dictate how long the event should be. If you are presenting a YLAI Network Online Course, you may want to have a two-hour event. However, if you are planting trees or cleaning a beach, you may want to hold an all-day event. Also consider when your volunteers will be available. Do you need to accommodate work or school schedules? Especially if you are planning the event for your workplace, decide whether you want it to take place during or outside of business hours.

- ☐ Duration of event: _____ hours
- ☐ Time of event:
  _____ to _____

Identify resource needs:

Think through the supplies and other resources you will need for your event. This could include anything from trees to plant and planting equipment, if you are holding a tree planting event, to trash bags and gloves for a beach cleanup, to a computer, a projector, and internet service if you are facilitating a YLAI Network Online Course.

What resources do you need for your event? These might include:

- ☐ Computer
- ☐ Projector
- ☐ Internet access
- ☐ Information flyers or publications
- ☐ Signs or banners
- ☐ Trash bags
- ☐ Gloves
- ☐ Paint
- ☐ Paint brushes, rollers, and other painting supplies
- ☐ Trees to plant
- ☐ Shovels
- ☐ Water/refreshments for volunteers/participants
- ☐ Name tags for volunteers/participants

- ☐ Pens and notepads
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Brainstorm potential sources:

Some types of events may be more resource-intensive than others, but that doesn't mean you'll need to spend a lot of money to hold your event. If the event is on a topic similar to your company's line of business, the business may be able to supply the needed resources. Other local groups or businesses also may be willing to donate materials for your event, often in return for talking about their business during the event. If you end up needing to buy materials, think about whether your business or organization will do the purchasing, or how you will raise the money to do so. You may be able to solicit donations from other local groups or businesses.

Will your small business or group be providing all of the needed materials?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (Continue to next question)

Who else might be interested in donating or lending resources? Consider the following suggestions:

- ☐ Printing shop
- ☐ Plant nursery
- ☐ Hardware store
- ☐ Local clinic or hospital
- ☐ Paint store
- ☐ Grocer or market
- ☐ House of worship
- ☐ School or university
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Reach out to potential donors:

If you determine you will need others to donate to your event, you'll need to reach out and make a pitch for them to contribute. As part of your pitch, you'll need to specify exactly what you are asking them to provide, as well as why your event is important and how their donation can make a difference. Lastly, you can indicate what they will receive in return for their donation — such as a mention at the event (i.e., free publicity!). Even if someone declines to donate, be sure to thank them for their time. For each donor, consider:

What exactly are you asking them to provide?

_____

What can you offer them?

- ☐ Thanking them during your introductory speech
- ☐ Displaying their banner at the event
- ☐ Including their company name on printed materials
- ☐ Other: _____

Step 2: Plan Logistics

The following template can help you as you craft your own introductory email, letter, or phone call:

Dear _____ ,

My name is ____NAME____ and I work for ____NAME OF BUSINESS/GROUP ORGANIZING THE EVENT____. I am hoping you can help us improve ____INDICATE THE NEED TARGETED BY YOUR EVENT____ in our community. Specifically, I am hoping you can contribute ____NOTE WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE THEM TO DONATE____ for an upcoming event.

As you may know ____SHARE A FACT OR STATISTIC THAT SUPPORTS WHY YOU ARE HOLDING THIS PARTICULAR EVENT____. Because we would like to improve this situation, we are organizing an event on ____DATE____as part of the #YLAIEmpowers Communities Action Week. At the event, we will ____PROVIDE A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF YOUR EVENT____ .

I would greatly appreciate it if you would get involved with this event by donating ____REITERATE WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE THEM TO DONATE____, which will allow us to ____NOTE SPECIFICALLY WHAT THE DONATION WILL BE USED FOR____. We would also love to have you and/or members of your staff participate, if you are interested in doing so! In gratitude for your donation, we can ____MENTION WHAT YOU ARE OFFERING IN RETURN____ .

Thank you very much for considering this request.

Document donations:

Be sure to keep track of who donates to your event, so that you can thank them appropriately. A table like the following can help you record who has donated or lent various resources.

Resource	Donated/Lent By

DON'T FORGET

Thank all of your donors, and for those who choose not to donate, thank them for their time. You never know when you might have the opportunity to work with any of them in the future, so be sure to leave them with a good impression!

FURTHER READING

Learn about recruiting a celebrity to participate in your event:
https://share.america.gov/how-to-attract-celebrity-to-your-cause/

Learn about the importance of mentorship programs:
https://share.america.gov/hispanic-kids-find-bridge-to-mainstream-society/

Step 3: Promote Your Event And Recruit Volunteers

Depending on the event specifics, promoting your event may entail recruiting volunteers and/or participants. It also may be a matter of making sure the larger community knows about the event. For example, are you organizing a donation drive and need people to donate materials or do you plan to occupy a public space where people are used to having access?

Recruit volunteers:

If you are planning the event for your small business or group, you have a ready-made pool of volunteers among the employees or group members. If you are planning the event on your own, or will need more volunteers than are available through your company/group, then you will need to recruit volunteers.

If you will be using volunteers solely from within your company/group, think through the following prompts and then identify the best way to encourage employees to get involved:

- ☐ Is participation required for employees?
- ☐ Will the event be held during work hours?
- ☐ Do the skills required of volunteers align with the skills of people in your company/group?
- ☐ Are there any incentives for people to participate (competition, prizes, etc.)?

If you will need to recruit volunteers, think through both the number of volunteers you need to support your event (identified previously) and any particular skills you would like them to have. What populations would be best to recruit from for your specific needs? How can you best reach them and entice them to participate?

What skills would you like volunteers to have?

- ☐ Ability to do physical labor
- ☐ Comfortable talking to others
- ☐ Medical training
- ☐ Administrative skills
- ☐ Other: _____

Step 3: Promote Your Event and Recruit Volunteers

Where can you recruit volunteers?

- ☐ School/university, including volunteer groups or clubs
- ☐ House of worship
- ☐ Community group
- ☐ Local clinic or hospital
- ☐ Social media networks
- ☐ Resident associations
- ☐ WhatsApp group
- ☐ Local business(es)
- ☐ Local non-governmental organization (NGO)
- ☐ Other: _____

What is the best way to reach this potential volunteer population?

- ☐ Flyers
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Social media posts
- ☐ Face-to-face meeting
- ☐ Other: _____

What messaging can you use to encourage volunteers to participate?

- ☐ You'll be helping those less fortunate in the community
- ☐ We all have a responsibility to share our knowledge and talents
- ☐ Volunteering is good experience for your resume
- ☐ A notable person from the community will be participating
- ☐ The event is a good networking opportunity
- ☐ Other: _____

How will people register to volunteer?

- ☐ Email
- ☐ Phone call
- ☐ Social media
- ☐ WhatsApp group
- ☐ Other: _____

Organize volunteers:

Planning out the day in advance will ensure the event runs smoothly. Complete the following planning tasks and communicate with volunteers in advance so they know what to expect.

- ☐ Create a schedule for the event.
- ☐ Depending on the number of volunteers and the number of activities being conducted, consider breaking volunteers into small groups.
- ☐ Break large tasks down into smaller pieces, and ensure that each volunteer or group of volunteers has a task that can be completed within the timeframe of the event. People want to feel that they completed something.
- ☐ If you know volunteers' skills, assign tasks that they are best suited for; if you don't know their skills, allow people to select the tasks they will most enjoy.

Step 3: Promote Your Event and Recruit Volunteers

- ☐ If your event will be large, designate leaders among the volunteers and hold a brief planning/orientation session with them to prepare for the big day.
- ☐ Contact volunteers prior to the event, to provide them with the information you have identified above. Be sure they know when and where to arrive, and provide information about what they will be doing during the day. This communication could be sent via email, social media, WhatsApp, or any other channel you feel is appropriate.

Advertise your event/inform the community:

You'll want to help get the word out about your event, to attract those community members you are intending to serve and to make sure the community is aware of the event and knows how to get involved. Think about who would be most interested in attending the event and how to reach them.

Is there a specific demographic for which the event is intended?

- ☐ Women
- ☐ Men
- ☐ Students
- ☐ Specific age range:
- ☐ Speakers of a specific language: _____
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ No specific demographic — everyone is welcome

Where is the best place to advertise the event to reach that group?

- ☐ Schools/universities
- ☐ Houses of worship
- ☐ Community centers
- ☐ Social media networks
- ☐ Resident associations
- ☐ Local businesses
- ☐ Other: _____

What is the best advertising material for this audience demographic?

- ☐ Flyers
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Social media posts
- ☐ Face-to-face presentation
- ☐ Other: _____

Do participants need to register in advance to attend the event?

- ☐ Yes (Be sure your promotional materials include information about how to register!)
- ☐ No

Step 3: Promote Your Event and Recruit Volunteers

Notify the media:

Community service events make great human interest stories, and the local media may be interested in covering the event in advance, day-of, or after the fact. Be sure to reach out to any local media to let them know about the event and ask if they would cover it.

What local media might be interested in the event?

- ☐ TV station: _____
- ☐ Radio station: _____
- ☐ Daily newspaper: _____
- ☐ Weekly newspaper: _____
- ☐ Community newsletter: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

DON'T FORGET

If people register in advance for the event, be sure to send them a reminder notification (via email, WhatsApp, social media, etc.) a few days before the event. Don't forget to send a reminder to your volunteers, also!

FURTHER READING

Learn tips for planning an event that volunteers will enjoy:
https://share.america.gov/it-takes-grit-to-help-volunteers-have-fun/

Learn some of the benefits of volunteering, which you can use in your messaging to potential volunteers: https://share.america.gov/4-ways-volunteering-benefits-you/

Learn about getting people to participate in your efforts:
https://share.america.gov/5-tips-for-building-successful-campaign/

Learn about how young people can make a difference by getting involved with community service:
https://share.america.gov/surinamese-student-plans-to-be-amazing/

Step 4: Conduct The Event

After weeks of planning, it's finally here! All your hard work will pay off in big benefits to your community. The following prompts will help you ensure the event goes smoothly and that not only do you achieve your goals, but that volunteers and participants have a great time as well.

1-2 Days in Advance

Double-check your to-do list:

A day or two before the event, do a final check to make sure you've completed all the planning steps and that you have all your supplies on-hand and ready to go. It might help to make a schedule for the day of the event, especially if you have tasks that need to be completed by you and your volunteers before participants arrive (setting up computer, posting signs, receiving materials, etc.).

Remind participants and volunteers:

Use Facebook, WhatsApp, email, etc. to remind your participants, community, and volunteers about your event 1 to 2 days in advance.

Day of the Event

Relax!

You have put a lot of work into planning the event, and now is the time to see that hard work pay off. Enjoy the event and reflect on how you are supporting your community!

Ensure volunteers are having a good time:

Even if you have organized your volunteers in advance, be flexible — people may want to switch tasks or groups, and that's ok!

Showcase the work you are doing:

Be sure to document the event, particularly by taking photos. Time permitting, you can share your event on social media as it is happening, or share photos after the fact. If you have established any media contacts, see if they can stop by the event to share it with a wider audience.

Day of the Event (Continued)

Get feedback:

Have volunteers and/or participants complete a short survey or feedback form after the event, but before they go home. It may be harder to get this information from them once they have left the event. Their feedback will help you improve when you plan future events. You can ask questions such as:

- ☐ Did you feel your participation in the event was valuable? Why or why not?
- ☐ Did you feel the event was well organized? Why or why not?
- ☐ What was your favorite part of the event? Why?
- ☐ How would you improve the event?

Thank volunteers for their involvement!

Make sure they understand the importance of their contribution, and the impact of the event.

Thank donors:

Be sure to thank anyone who donated or lent resources for the event. Written notes are best!

DON'T FORGET

Report back on your event to the YLAI Network — please stay tuned for more information on how to do that! We'd love to see your photos on social media as well! You can use the #YLAIEmpowers hashtag to share your activities with the entire YLAI Network.

FURTHER READING

Learn how an environmental problem was transformed into a business opportunity: https://share.america.gov/recycling-fishing-nets-into-skateboards-carpets/

Learn tips for startups — maybe your event will lead to an idea for a new business or community group: https://share.america.gov/its-startup-world/

Step 5: Follow Up After Your #YLAIEmpowers Event

Measuring and evaluating the success of your event will give you crucial data on how well your plans met your goals and if you made a difference in your community.

The volunteers or participants who were involved in your event can form a great foundation for future events or other community involvement activities you might plan. Be sure to keep in touch with them! Consider the following prompts to think through how you can continue your community engagement beyond one day.

If you planned an event on behalf of an organization, such as a business or community group, think about how your organization might want to continue to be involved in community activities. If you are the owner or a leader of the business/group, you may be able to decide on your own to continue a community involvement program; if not, you will probably need to talk to the organization's leadership to get their approval for additional events — and the success of your first event is a great opportunity to make the case for future activities! If possible, get approval for an ongoing program so that you don't need to get approval for each individual future activity.

Assess your level of engagement:

Do you want to start planning community events on an ongoing basis? Would you prefer to hold additional events on an infrequent basis? Would you rather not commit to additional events, but perhaps instead share information with others via channels such as email or social media? Are there ways you could incorporate community involvement or social responsibility into your business model?

What level of involvement feels right to you?

- ☐ I would like to hold more events — on a weekly, monthly, or semi-annual basis!
- ☐ I might plan another event in the future, but I'm not sure how often.
- ☐ I will stay in contact with my volunteers or participants, but mainly by sharing information.
- ☐ We will incorporate community involvement/ social responsibility into our business model.
- ☐ Other: _____

Evaluate volunteer needs:

Once you have a sense of what community engagement efforts you would like to undertake long-term, think about how your volunteer pool might be able to assist.

Step 5: Follow Up After Your #YLAIEmpowers Event

How can volunteers stay involved?

- ☐ Participating in future events
- ☐ Recruiting additional participants
- ☐ Planning their own events
- ☐ Forming a community group that meets periodically
- ☐ Other: _____

Contact volunteers:

Within a few days of the event, be sure to contact volunteers and thank them again for their involvement. This is a great time to share success metrics, such as the number of people who received information from the event, the number of trees planted, the volume of trash collected, etc. It's also a great opportunity to lay the foundation for ongoing communication. Let volunteers know what your plans are for future activities, and ask them to let you know if they would like to stay involved.

Establish a communication channel:

Once you know which of your volunteers would like to be involved in future activities, think about the best way to stay in contact with them. For example, you may want to start a WhatsApp group, create an email list, or start a Facebook group.

What is the best way to stay in touch?

- ☐ Email list
- ☐ Office message board
- ☐ Facebook group
- ☐ WhatsApp group
- ☐ Announcements at community events
- ☐ Community message board
- ☐ Other: _____

DON'T FORGET

You now have a great resource at your disposal — a group of volunteers who are interested in contributing to future community engagement efforts! Especially if these volunteers are not from your company or group, be sure to stay in touch with them, and make the most of this great opportunity to continue making a difference in your community. Plus, you never know when the relationship with one of your volunteers or participants will lead to a business partnership or entrepreneurship opportunity!

FURTHER READING

Learn how one community program can develop into others:
https://share.america.gov/growing-strong-one-community-at-time/

Suggested Timeline

The list of event planning tasks can seem overwhelming, but it doesn't need to be. By mapping out when tasks should be completed, you can approach the planning in smaller pieces. Provided below is a suggested timeline for planning an event during the #YLAIEmpowers Communities Action Week.

Week 1 (June 26-July 2):

- ☐ Take the YLAI Network Online Course *Community Organizing for Action* (https://ylai.state.gov/community-organizing-action/)
- ☐ Identify a need in your community, and select a type of event that could address that need
- ☐ Create a mission statement and goals for the event
- ☐ Identify and reach out to potential partners
- ☐ Set a location, date, time, and duration for the event
- ☐ Determine how many volunteers/participants you will need

Week 2 (July 3-9):

- ☐ Identify any resources you will need
- ☐ Solicit donations if needed — for supplies, refreshments for volunteers, etc.
- ☐ Promote the event
- ☐ Recruit volunteers and/or participants; make a plan for organizing volunteers

Suggested Timeline

Week 3 (July 10-July 16):

- ☐ Notify local media about your event
- ☐ Plan for the day of the event
  - ☐ Make a schedule
  - ☐ Assign volunteer roles
  - ☐ Communicate key information to volunteers
- ☐ Hold an orientation session with volunteer leaders, if appropriate
- ☐ Double-check last minute details and make sure you are all set for the event
- ☐ Identify things that can go wrong and establish back-up plans
- ☐ Send a reminder to volunteers and/or participants

Day-of (During the week of July 17-24):

- ☐ Hold your event
  - ☐ Arrive early
  - ☐ Take photos
  - ☐ Collect feedback
- ☐ Keep track as activities are completed — make sure you'll be able to determine whether your event met the goal you set

Post-event activity:

- ☐ Promote the success of your event — publicize it on social media, or approach local media about featuring the event
- ☐ Thank volunteers for participating
- ☐ Thank donors
- ☐ Think about ways to keep your volunteers engaged — and start planning a future event!