

## Advance Assignments

### Assignment 11: Your Local Project

Directions: With your Alaska Close Up district team, work through Steps 1-4 of the Local Project before you travel to Juneau. Steps 5 and 6 will be completed during your time in Juneau. Each team member should complete a copy of the Local Project Report Form. Bring the copy with you to your session.

#### Preliminary Step. From Your Team

The team for your local project consists of the students from your district who will be attending Alaska Close Up and the teachers who will be accompanying you. It is best if you have one district project, but community projects are also acceptable.

Make a list of team members and share the list with everyone. Pick a team leader and a recorder. Decide how you will meet to work on the project – face to face? email? bulletin board? audio conference? Okay, you're ready to work! This project will take several hours of your time.

#### Step 1. Identify Need

Every community has needs and problems. Some of these problems may be solved through government intervention. Your local project is an investigation of such a problem, and will teach you, first hand, how to make government work for you. When you come to Juneau, you will have the opportunity to talk with your legislators and other state officials about the concern, to urge them to help with it and to hopefully go back home having made a difference for your community. In the process, you will learn to acquire and use information, communicate and cooperate with others, make decisions and judgments and promote your interests.

Your Local Project should affect a group of people with common interests living in your school district, village, city or borough. The more people affected by your project, the more supporters you will get.

- A. First, draw from your personal experiences by answering these questions with your group and/or Alaska Close Up teacher:
- ◆ How do you define “community”?
  - ◆ What needs do you see in your community today?
  - ◆ What ways can you help solve some of your community’s needs?
  - ◆ What are your skills?
  - ◆ What organizations or individuals do you know who are trying to bring about a change in your community?
  - ◆ What do you think you will learn?
  - ◆ How does being active in a community project fit in with your ideas of living in a democratic society?



- B. Second, explore your community to find needs of which you might not already be aware. Here are some suggested methods to use:
- ♦ *Walking Tour*—Walk or drive through your community. As you roam, pretend it is the first time you have ever been there. What is the first thing that strikes you?
  - ♦ *Talking Tour*—Chat with relatives
  - ♦ *Survey*—Two things to keep in mind should you decide to conduct a survey: make sure it reaches different parts of the community, and the simpler the format, the easier it will be to see and read the results.
  - ♦ *Media*—Newspapers, radio and television are all useful, easily accessible sources of information. You may also go to the library for background information.
- C. Third, make a list of potential projects. For each idea, find out if anything has already been done to correct the problem.

Now, choose one as your Local Project and formulate a problem statement. You need to state the problem *clearly, correctly, and concisely*. The “three Cs” will help everyone know exactly what you are trying to do.

Samples of Local Project problem statements from past Close Up sessions:

- ♦ (Our town) needs improved water or sewer provisions.
- ♦ (Our town) needs improved street signs and road maintenance.
- ♦ Improved recreation facilities will have a positive effect on (our town).
- ♦ Substance abuse is a problem in (our town) that can be improved with an educational and awareness program.
- ♦ (Our town) has a city fuel tank which has become a health and life safety threat and needs to be repaired or replaced.

## **Step 2. Investigate**

You have identified a problem area, need or issue in your community. You have written a clear, correct, concise problem statement. Now you are ready to begin investigating.

Organize well as you search for information related to the problem you are researching. Recording contacts, book titles, newspaper dates and page numbers and web sites will make it easier for you to go back to your notes and be able to share the information with your Local Project group.

### **A. History of the Problem**

Develop a “history” of the problem, issue or need. Use these questions as a guideline:

- ♦ Why is this a problem?
- ♦ What is the history of the problem?
- ♦ Have previous attempts been made in our community or elsewhere to solve the problem? Were they successful? Why or why not?
- ♦ Is any individual or organization working on this problem now? Would they be willing to work with us?



- ♦ Are there existing laws related to the problem that have been unworkable or not enforced?
- ♦ Is there any pending legislation relevant to the problem? Is it at the local, state or national level?

#### B. Suggested Community Resources for Solving the Problem

Here are some general community resources that will help you locate information related to your Local Project. You may find some of these on the internet. If there are local persons you can interview, refer to the interview techniques in Advance Assignment 4.

- ♦ Elected and appointed officials: city/village council members, assembly members, local magistrates, school board members, city managers and clerks.
- ♦ Local boards, councils and commissions: planning and zoning; parks and recreation.
- ♦ Community agencies and organizations: neighborhood associations, regional native and village corporations, and major employers in the community.
- ♦ Non-partisan organizations or agencies: League of Women Voters, Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood.
- ♦ Lobbying organizations: Chamber of Commerce, National Rifle Association and Sierra Club.
- ♦ Local branches of the University of Alaska, especially sociology, political science, and journalism departments.
- ♦ Public documents: city or school budgets and local planning materials.

#### C. Consolidate All Research

Organize everyone's research if there are several students in your group. Teamwork will help your group discover a lot of information in a little time about your problem.

### Step 3. Select Plan

You have chosen a problem as your local project, and have investigated the history and community resources available for solving the problem. Now you need to come up with the best plan for solving the problem.

A. (There is always more than one way to solve a problem.) Brainstorm many different plans. Brainstorming is a method of generating many ideas, so the best ones can be chosen. There are no rules, only guidelines:

- ♦ Don't be judgmental. You cannot be creative if you think you already know the best solution. While brainstorming, it is important to create an atmosphere of acceptance in which all ideas are welcomed and respected.
- ♦ Unusual, impractical, offbeat, wild, even silly ideas are welcome in brainstorming. Fear of criticism and rejection only squelches good possibilities.
- ♦ Quantity is good. The more ideas generated, the greater the chance that some of them will be winners.
- ♦ Look at each idea as a puzzle piece. Combine them, build on someone else's contribution, change, adapt or otherwise rework all the ideas. Consider them all before eliminating any.



## B. Take Stock

You need to decide what kind of resources your Local Project has or will need to get. Ask yourself these questions:

- ◆ Is your problem focused and clear?
- ◆ Is your timetable realistic?
- ◆ Do you need transportation?
- ◆ Are other group members reliable?
- ◆ Do you need money? There should be little or no expense to you, but raising money for a cause behind the project is realistic. Remember, the State budget is very limited in some categories—be careful not to select a project that requires state funding to be successful.
- ◆ Are community resources available? Consider people and facilities that can be used in some creative or unusual way.

## C. Develop criteria for selecting the best plan.

You are ready to choose the best plan for working on your Local Project. Some sample criteria questions are listed below. You may use these to help you make your decision or you may write some of your own criteria questions. Any “no” answers will eliminate that particular plan.

Criteria for determining feasibility and appropriateness:

1. Are you enthusiastic about the project? This is probably the most important criterion.
2. Can the proposed project be stated clearly? Implementation is difficult if the statement is not explicit.
3. Are your expectations practical, considering variables such as the time available, your degree of mobility (i.e. transportation) and your capacity to take responsibility?
4. Is the timing of the project appropriate? You should be able to complete the project plan by the end of the school year.
5. Are monies or other material resources available, if necessary? Most projects should not require major expenditures of money or resources. The citizen should be able to exert influence without significant expenditure or resources.
6. Are your expectations realistic, or do you propose simplistic solutions to complex problems?

## Step 4. Develop Plan

### A. Expected outcomes

What do you expect to happen as a result of your efforts? Write down goals and stick to them. It will help if you check on them periodically to make sure you’re on the right track. These are goal statements from former Close Up students:

- ◆ To get a new teen center on the local “wish list.”
- ◆ To raise awareness of substance abuse in our community as indicated by results of a survey.
- ◆ To bring about a successful vote on (our issue) at a town meeting.



- ◆ To have new street signs designed, made and installed.

B. Organize

Break your plan into workable tasks. Answer these journalistic questions:

- Who... is going to do a specific task?
- What... needs to be done?  
has already been done?
- Where... can we find information or people?  
do we need to focus our efforts?
- When... do we need to do any specific task?  
will events take place that impact the project?
- Why... is this project important to some people?  
do we want to work on this project?
- How... do we begin?  
do we communicate with our Close Up teacher and other team members?

C. Information Sharing with Your Team

Everyone needs to know what everyone else is accomplishing so when you meet as a group each person will be able to share what they have done since the last meeting.

Log all Local Project activities. Do this by making columns with these headings:

Date	Time	Purpose and Nature of Activities	Tasks

Activities to make sure to include:

- ◆ phone calls
- ◆ meetings with teachers and other students
- ◆ community meetings
- ◆ letters to government officials and others
- ◆ collection of printed materials
- ◆ conducting surveys

D. Share and get ideas from your legislators

You have already introduced yourself to your Senator and Representative. Now that you know more about your Local Project, share this information with them. They may be able to recommend others who could contribute to your Local Project.



E. Share your project with other Alaska Close Up participants

As part of your work in Juneau, you will be sharing your project and the progress you have made in a presentation to Alaska Close Up. Your report will be a group project and all of you will contribute.

### **Step 5. Implement**

A. It is time to work the plan. Your group should be meeting frequently and re-evaluation all activities to make sure that the plan is working. If transportation is a problem, you need to work out a plan to centralize your effort. Modify the plan whenever necessary to stay on the track leading toward your expected outcome.

B. Influencing Techniques

Here is a list of ways to exert influence. See how many you can use in your Local Project and add others if you can.

- ◆ letter writing or emailing
- ◆ telephoning
- ◆ distributing materials
- ◆ organizing meetings
- ◆ making speeches
- ◆ getting publicity in the media
- ◆ working on campaigns
- ◆ circulating petitions
- ◆ presenting testimony
- ◆ visiting office holders
- ◆ registering voters
- ◆ making campaign contributions
- ◆ voting
- ◆ lobbying
- ◆ enlisting community support

You will probably be visiting Juneau when you are in this stage of the project.

### **Step 6. Evaluate**

This is a process that may take place during your Alaska Close Up session or after you have returned home. It may even take place a month or two later if you complete some follow-up on work that you did in Juneau. With your group and your Alaska Close Up advisor you should discuss the following questions. Then complete the evaluation portion of the report form.

What was the outcome of the Local Project?

- ◆ Was the problem identified really a problem?



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- ◆ Was the project successful? Did it partially or completely solve the problem? (Keep in mind that the knowledge or skills you may have acquired could be considered a “success” element in your project.)

Did you take any action (or do you plan to take any action) on your local project after your week in Juneau? Describe.

- ◆ What individuals, organizations or agencies did (will) you contact?
- ◆ What are specific influencing techniques that helped?
- ◆ Were you able to use any of the information you acquired during your project research when you were in Juneau?

What did you learn from your Local Project?

- ◆ What knowledge about your subject matter did you acquire?
- ◆ Did you change any of your attitudes toward political participation or toward political leaders? Explain.
- ◆ Are you interested in influencing change in the future?
- ◆ Do you feel positive about the implementation of the project?
- ◆ Has participation in the project helped you grow as a person? Did you gain in self-confidence?

What would you do differently if you were doing a local project again?

- ◆ Was the project well coordinated and organized? Why or why not?
- ◆ Describe any problems you may have encountered during the project.
- ◆ Did you have any difficulties with your timelines?
- ◆ What advice would you give to Close Up students who are working on a local project next year?



## Assignment 11: Local Project Report Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

School District: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

Community: \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 1: Identify Need

Our Local Project Problem Statement is: \_\_\_\_\_

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Step 2: Investigate. (State briefly how you have contributed to the team investigation.) \_\_\_\_\_

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### Step 3 & 4: Select and Develop a Plan

Our Project Plan is: \_\_\_\_\_

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Step 5: Implement (Describe the ways you have contributed or will contribute to the implementation of your plan.) \_\_\_\_\_

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**Step 6: Evaluate** (Determine the effectiveness of your local project and the process you used to complete it. This section is to be completed during Alaska Close Up or when you return home.)

a. What was the outcome of the Local Project? \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Describe any other actions you took (or will take) after your session in Juneau. \_\_\_\_\_

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c. What did you learn from your Local Project? \_\_\_\_\_

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d. What would you do differently if you were completing a Local Project again? \_\_\_\_\_

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*Bring this assignment with you to Alaska Close Up.*