

Leadership Institute Final Action Plan Progress Form

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The food we consume is what keeps us running. Food directly impacts the environment, our health and the lives of the people who produce our food. The goal of my Action Plan is to educate my community in the San Francisco Bay Area about the importance of tracing where your food comes from and learning how to make conscious decisions about what you put into your body, and how that affects the environment around you.

Visiting the banana plantation at Earth University during my time at BELL: Costa Rica was an eye opening experience that developed into the foundation of my Action Plan. The plantation grows bananas which are then distributed to the US grocery chain Whole Foods. The man running the program at the University explained to us that when we go to our local store and pick out 'the perfect banana,' we are putting pressure on growers in countries like Costa Rica to produce more 'perfect' bananas that do not bruise while being shipped and have a longer shelf life. Farmers are forced to mass produce and dispose of perfectly good crops. Hearing this taught me the value of knowing where our food comes from. It is important to know the working conditions of the people producing the food, how it is grown, what chemicals are added and how those impact us and the farmers. One visit to a farm changed my consuming habits, but how could I change the habits of the people in my community?

My initial plan was to start a club at my school where we could meet and discuss the importance of buying local and knowing where our food comes from. These meetings would include discussions about what it really means to be organic and the implications, and feature trips to local farms and gardens. Throughout the course of my Action Plan, a teacher at my school who is very interested in the topic was a dependable mentor to help me reach my goals. My mentor knew of another student who was interested in leading a similar club so she introduced us and we decided to work together. I was hesitant at first, but after our initial meeting we both felt it would be efficient to have two club leaders. After the first 5 meetings, we felt unsatisfied by the numbers we were attracting to the club meetings. We were also struggling to work together and both of us felt a disconnect. We did not have much time available to meet together and I was struggling with the fact that my original ideas were being pushed aside.

It was at this point that I attended the Leadership Institute Symposium on Social Action which reenergized me to work on my Action Plan. At the Symposium, I learned valuable skills such as how to plan and run an effective meeting and how to communicate with people to plan events and activities.

These were valuable lessons which helped me learn to work with and communicate my ideas to others.

The most valuable thing I came away with though were the conversations I had with people about the challenges and successes with their Action Plans. I was inspired by all the amazing projects and I realized I was not alone; people just like me were working hard to complete their plans, energizing me to fully immerse myself in my Action Plan.

When I returned from the Symposium I decided to focus my efforts on planning an 'Organic Foodie Intersession'. Intersession is a week during April at my school when all classes are put on hold for various themed group activities. Students and teachers are given the chance to plan the week surrounding a topic of their choice. After submitting our proposal and getting it approved, we began the planning process. I used the skills I was taught at the Symposium to plan meetings and events and communicate my Ideas with others about my goals.

As April approached, we were ready to lead 18 people to learn about local, sustainable farms and gardens and how they are accessible to us In the Bay Area. We began by watching the movie Fresh, which spoke about the issues raised by the food system in the United States and how individuals can help improve the system. After the film ended, we randomly assigned people into five groups: appetizers, side dishes, main meal, salad, and dessert. These cooking groups were for the dinner we would make at the end of the week. Activities throughout the week included visiting an urban farm in San Francisco that sells at the farmers market, a family owned olive farm which produces olive oil, a coffee roaster, a chocolate factory and places where we could volunteer as a group. One activity that was very Important was a tour of Marin Sun Farms, a farm that produces the meat served to us daily at school. This was one activity that no matter where in the Bay Area the students live they could all relate because they are served this meat dally. Although I knew all the meat and produce we serve at our school is local and seasonal, I still did not know where exactly It came from. It was an amazing opportunity to be able to see and hear about the 'pasture-to-fork' process that is emphasized at Marin Sun Farms. On Thursday, we went split up into our cooking groups and explored the Marin farmers market, shopping for any ingredients we needed for our dinner that night. After gathering our ingredients, we went to the Point Reyes Hostel where we would spend the night and cook our dinner. I felt this was a really important part of the week: after hearing from local farmers and learning about how food affects us, we were able to cook and share a meal together.

After all the effort we had put into the week, it was a good feeling to see it all come together and be a success. Looking back on this school year, I am able to see what I accomplished from my original plan and how it changed over the course of the year. The process of working on my Action Plan

has been so valuable to me, and now after a year of experience I know what is realistic and what I need to change to begin the club strong and keep it going even after I graduate. I have already made a binder in order to keep the club organized and hit the ground running in September, including a calendar with all school breaks and club meeting times so I can create an agenda for meetings and outings. I have also teamed up with the Community Service In Action club to plan the annual food drive for the San Francisco Food Bank.

During my time at BELL: Costa Rica, we did a lot of examining our own leadership skills. A year later, I still have similar strengths, such as my listening and organizational skills, and weaknesses, such as making sure my ideas are equally heard and discussed. I am excited to continue growing as a leader over the coming year and embrace my leadership style.

My Action Plan is far from being finished but I am on track and ready for the upcoming year. Looking back on the events of the past year, I would want to let current Leadership Institute students know that their Action Plans will completely change but it is important to remember the reason you are doing them. Your Action Plan should be your passion. Throughout my challenges I have never once thought about giving up. I still have the same passion behind my Action Plan. Also, to make use of the people in the various Leadership Institute courses, I still stay in contact with the people I have worked with. They have been the most inspirational part of this process. I am so thankful for the experiences I have had since beginning my Action Plan. They have really helped me grow as a leader and member of my community.