

# BEYOND GREEN ACTIVATOR TOOL-KIT

## **The Activator Tool Kit**

We want you to write the best application possible for Beyond Green. In addition to getting to know your talents & filmmaking expertise, we want to know about the types of stories you'd like to produce. In fact, our co-application, which will be written by both an adult mentor and a youth filmmaker from your organization, asks you to pitch us up to two stories that we'd consider for further development.

Of course finding good stories can be challenging. That's why we're providing you this "activator toolkit." It will help you unearth important perspectives and personal stories about ways youth interact with their environment. It will be the basis for a great youth/adult co-application.

Let's start with the definition of "environment:"

### **Environment, n.**

1 : the circumstances, objects, or conditions that surrounds one

2 a : the cluster of physical, chemical, and living factors (as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival

2 b : the sum of social and cultural conditions that influence the life of an individual or community

As you can see, "environment," goes beyond green. Of course stories about the natural environment will be a big part of Beyond Green, but what about other environments?

- What are the social conditions that have great consequences for lives of youth?
- What are the cultural beliefs that hinder youth from succeeding in life?

Some of these "social and cultural conditions" may not have a direct relationship to the natural environment. Other stories may connect the cultural conditions to the ecology or the physical world. Some may be solely "green," emphasizing direct interaction with the natural environment. For Listen Up!, they are all valid stories. For us, talking about youth & environment means talking about all the "shades of green."

Please consider sharing this definition with family, friends and teachers – you may find there are really interesting types of environments you haven't even thought of!

## **WHAT ARE ACTIVATORS?**

The term "Activator" is used to describe activities to engage youth in a topic before they begin production. Activators will call up past experiences, trigger memories, reveal beliefs & misconceptions and even expose tensions concerning conflicting perspectives. Activators are effective brainstorming tools because they are:

INTERACTIVE,  
PARTICIPATORY,  
ENGAGING,  
HANDS-ON,  
CENTERED ON LISTENING TO YOUTH VOICES

## **PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE**

The following activators were written for the adult mentors who assist youth in media production. This guide is just that – a guide and a resource. Feel free to adapt it, change it to fit your needs or borrow freely from the several strategies offered. This toolkit is not aimed at defining or prescribing topics from the outside but rather activating the knowledge and stories from within.

This activator toolkit was developed by Mindy Faber, an award-winning filmmaker, curator and media educator. She is currently the director of Open Youth Networks.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

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### EXPLAIN THE VALUE OF THE ACTIVATOR

The story ideas that you propose to Listen Up! are to be generated out of the real experiences of youth in your community. Often, however, these stories are hidden or undiscovered, even as they greatly impact the daily and future lives of youth. Explain to youth that these activators are actually ways that they can participate in research about one another, where and how they live, and how they interpret their surroundings.

### PREPARE PROMPTS OR QUESTIONS WITH YOUR COMMUNITY IN MIND

Prompts may ask youth about relationships, beliefs, experiences, behaviors or awarenesses. They will be most effective if they:

- Genuinely relate to the youth participants' lives and the environmental contexts in which they live
- Aim at uncovering important new knowledge and understandings among the youth concerning both commonalities and differences
- Link to actual experiences and personal relationships (facts) as opposed to opinions not backed up by evidence.

### CONCLUDE EACH ACTIVATOR WITH GROUP DISCUSSION OR WRITING

If the activator does its job, the youth will have a lot to talk about. Give everyone a chance to express their views.

- Prepare prompts for writing and questions for discussion.
- Have them write first as it often helps encourage participation by all (you may even have the youth themselves write questions for the discussion)
- Encourage and describe full participation and listening by everyone
- As a facilitator, talk less, listen and facilitate more
- Ask for clarification when you don't understand (Rephrase – “do you mean this” or “can you give an example or tell me more.” Restate the response – “is that what you said?”)
- Record important points (A-ha! moments, story ideas, discoveries, points of doubt) on charts
- Keep discussion on overall topic but allow youth to pursue their own authentic questions as they arise. Often a good discussion will end up in a very different place than it began.

### LISTEN FOR A GOOD STORY TOPIC

During the discussion, facilitators and youth may know they are onto a strong potential story topic when:

- The topic is returned to over and over again by several participants in discussion.
- A shared question, tension or a point of doubt emerges that captures the attention of the group and compels them to want to know more.
- At least some participants have strong personal connections to the topic
- The participants are passionate about raising awareness about the story or topic
- The story is unusual, unique, nuanced or provocative.

# ACTIVATORS

## STAND TO THE LINE

### Purpose:

To help youth producers identify possible story ideas that are personal, genuine and compelling to them all. If you watched the movie, *Freedom Writers*, you may recognize this activator. It can be a very powerful way for youth to unearth hidden commonalities and shared connections about the impact of the environment on their lives.

### Summary:

Participants separate into two lines facing each other. A long strip of colored tape is used to create a line between the two sides. Facilitator asks youth to “step to the line” if they have had a particular experience or if they have a certain belief. When this occurs, youth will often be up-close and face-to-face with others to whom they share a connection.

### Participants:

Best for a medium to large sized group of 10-20 youth with at least one facilitator and one recorder/note-taker.

### Materials:

Easel and large paper, white board, markers or chalkboard  
Solid Colored tape  
Writing paper and pens for youth

**Time:** 30-50 minutes

### Steps

1. Facilitator prepares a list of 10-15 prompts in advance (see *Ideas for Prompts* below) each beginning with the phrase, “Step to the line if...” You may wish to also use this as an icebreaker at first by beginning with a series of light and fun prompts (e.g. *Step to the line if you love ice-cream*). Gradually the prompts become more focused on eliciting environmental perspectives and experiences.
2. Keep the pace quick but make sure that the youth are actually touching their toes to the line. Also encourage them to be honest and pay attention to how many step forward and how many do not.

3. When facilitator has read all the prompts, have the youth sit down and write for at least five minutes responding to the following questions posted in large print in the room.
  - A) What did people seem to have in common?
  - B) What is something you were surprised to learn?
  - C) What personal connections do you have to any of the topics brought up just now?
4. Beginning with the first question, have each participant share what they wrote while a recorder accurately captures responses on the board. Use stars or check marks to denote multiple responses. *(Note: By the end of this process, there should be a list of both common and differing experiences and views.)*
5. Now ask participants to share their personal reflections or connections. A well-prepared set of Prompts will likely trigger many individual memories thoughts, emotions and connections among youth about topics raised. Encourage participation by everyone and listen carefully to all that is said in order to identify possible topics or themes for a video. *(See Tips for Facilitators Pg.2)*

## IDEAS FOR PROMPTS

### *Fill-in-the-Blank Examples:*

- Step to the line if you believe \_\_\_\_\_ (belief/value)
- Step to the line if you have ever (action verb such as: traveled to, participated in, spoke up out about) \_\_\_\_\_ (action or behavior)
- Step to the line if you know someone who \_\_\_\_\_ (relationship)
- Step to the line if you have ever \_\_\_\_\_ (personal experience)
- Step to the line if you (action verb i.e.: live, play, work, go to school) \_\_\_\_\_ in (place) \_\_\_\_\_ . (action/behavior)
- Step to the line if you feel (emotional descriptor) \_\_\_\_\_ at/when \_\_\_\_\_. (emotion)

### *Sample Prompts*

- Step to the line if you know someone who has been a victim of violence in their own neighborhood. (relationship)
- Step to the line if you frequently played in playgrounds and parks when growing up. (experience)
- Step to the line if you live in more than one home. (action/behavior)
- Step to the line if you feel safe at school. (emotion)

# A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

## **Purpose:**

To learn first hand how two places can be close in distance but also are worlds away. This activator takes more time but it can have a profound experiential impact on the participants. It is also a great way to help youth producers think about how environmental concerns are linked to issues of justice or fairness.

## **Summary:**

Participants will visit two different places that are nearby but are very different in terms of their environments. They then share their observations and documentations and engage in discussion.

## **Participants:**

Excellent activity for small to medium size groups youth (4-10) with at least one facilitator.

## **Materials:**

Using any combination from list below, select preferred method of documentation:

Still cameras  
Journals for writing and drawing  
Audio recorders  
Checklists  
Surveys

**Time:** Depends on travel distance between sites. But allow for 20 minutes introduction and preparation and at least 30 minutes at each site.

## **Steps**

1. Prepare to visit two different nearby sites. These sites could be two different schools, neighborhoods, villages or towns, playgrounds, train stations or even buildings that are right next-door. But they should be observably different. They should also be different environmentally. For example, two apartment buildings may sit across the street from each other but inside they appear to be a world apart.
2. Instruct youth to observe and record observations using whatever instrument you choose. You may also wish to have them conduct interviews or surveys with people in the area.
3. Conclude with a discussion and record observation onto wallpaper charts. Sample prompts include:
  - What surprised you about what you saw?
  - Which place seemed more comfortable, friendly or safe?
  - Who lives in the two communities?
  - What are some reasons that these two communities may be so different?

# CAROUSEL BRAINSTORM

## **Purpose:**

Works especially well with a large topic that can be divided into subtopics and with a fairly large group with various opinions and experiences.

## **Summary:**

In small groups, participants rotate around a room from one chart to the next, pausing for several minutes at each chart to brainstorm and record what they know about each subtopic. Each group has a different colored marker and they end up back at the chart where they started – able to see what others have added. Conclude with group sharing and discussion.

## **Participants:**

12-24 participants

## **Materials:**

Large chart paper and different colored markers for each group

**Time:** 40-60 minutes

## **Steps**

1. Write a question or subtopic on each chart
2. Divide youth into groups of 3-4 per group
3. Send each group to a chart with a designated recorder and color marker
4. Direction to youth: Brainstorm responses to the question or topic and take 3 minutes to record your views. Stop when you hear this signal.
5. Rotate and repeat until each group ends up at original spot.
6. Have each group study the chart to see what developed. Now discuss.

## **SAMPLE PROMPT: HOW DO OUR ENVIRONMENTS SHAPE OUR LIVES?**

CHART ONE: What are the three environments that you inhabit the most?

CHART TWO: What aspects of your environment have the most positive and the most negative influence on your daily life?

CHART THREE: What would you most like to change about your everyday environment?