



# Youth at the Heart of Change:

How we can influence  
local decision-makers  
using global goals

**equitas**



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# Table of Contents

How to use this workbook .....	4
Overview of human rights .....	5
Overview of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).....	7
Activity 1: Matching projects to the SDGs .....	8
Activity 2: Identifying the issues .....	9
Activity 3: SDG targets and indicators .....	10
What kind of change is possible? .....	11
Defining decision-makers .....	12
A 5-step approach to engaging decision-makers .....	14
Step 1: the “Why”: Defining the problem .....	15
Step 2: the “Who”: Identifying your spheres of influence .....	15
Activity 4: Our spheres of influence .....	18
Activity 5: Reflecting on our roles .....	20
Step 3: the “How”: Deciding on your approach .....	22
Step 4: the “What”: Creating your message .....	23
Activity 6: Breaking down the message .....	24
Activity 7: Fill in the blanks .....	25
Step 5: the Follow-up & Conclusion.....	26
Additional Resources .....	27



# Who is this workbook for?

This workbook is for youth changemakers and partner organizations who have or are currently undertaking a youth-led project. Projects support youth to identify human rights issues in their community and to come up with solutions for change to build more inclusive communities. Youth are capable and innovative members of our community and they have the right to be heard. This workbook will help you develop a strategy for communicating issues that matter to you most and your solutions for change.

## How to use this workbook

This interactive workbook is designed to guide you through the process of linking your projects to human rights issues and Sustainable Development Goals. It will also help you make a plan for engaging decision-makers on issues that matter to you. The workbook can be used by individuals as well as groups, and has different reflective questions and activities to help you amplify your projects with the broader community and specifically with decision-makers who have an impact on important aspects of your life.

## Objectives of this workbook:

- Link the issues that matter to you with human rights and Sustainable Development Goals
- Identify the steps to engage decision-makers in your project
- Understand your sphere of influence and how you can lead change
- Create a message to reach out to decision-makers about your project



# What are Human Rights?

Human rights are rights that belong to all people simply because they are human beings. Human rights are based on the principle that every human being is born equal, in dignity and rights. All human rights are equally important, and they cannot be taken away under any circumstances. Human dignity is a fundamental principle of human rights, which affirms that all people deserve to be respected simply because they are human beings.

## What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) is the founding document of human rights. Adopted on December 10, 1948 by the United Nations, the UDHR stands as a shared reference point for the world and sets human rights standards to achieve. Although the UDHR does not officially have the force of law, its fundamental principles have become international standards worldwide and most States view the UDHR as international law.

# Summary of the articles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

**Article 1** Right to equality

**Article 2** Freedom from discrimination

**Article 3** Right to life, freedom, personal security

**Article 4** Freedom from slavery

**Article 5** Freedom from torture and degrading treatment

**Article 6** Right to recognition as a person before the law

**Article 7** Right to equality before the law

**Article 8** Right to remedy by competent tribunal

**Article 9** Freedom from arbitrary arrest, exile

**Article 10** Right to a fair public hearing

**Article 11** Right to be considered innocent until proven guilty

**Article 12** Freedom from interference with privacy, family, home, and correspondence

**Article 13** Right to free movement in and out of any country

**Article 14** Right to seek and enjoy, in other countries, asylum from persecution

**Article 15** Right to a nationality and freedom to change it

**Article 16** Right to marriage and family

**Article 17** Right to own property

**Article 18** Freedom of belief and religion

**Article 19** Freedom of opinion and information

**Article 20** Right of peaceful assembly and association

**Article 21** Right to participate in government and free elections

**Article 22** Right to social security

**Article 23** Right to desirable work and to join trade unions

**Article 24** Right to rest and leisure

**Article 25** Right to adequate living standards

**Article 26** Right to education

**Article 27** Right to participate in cultural life and community

**Article 28** Right to social order assuring human rights

**Article 29** Community duties essential to free and full development

**Article 30** Freedom from state and personal interference





# What are Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

The Sustainable Development Goals are a global call to action to reduce inequalities and combat climate change. The Goals were adopted by United Nations Member States in 2015. Just like human rights, the SDGs are interconnected. The SDGs are a measurement tool to let us know how well we are progressing towards better protecting people and the planet. Each SDG has targets and indicators to help us measure progress.

To learn more, visit [www.sdgs.un.org](http://www.sdgs.un.org)

[Watch this video to learn more about the SDGs.](#)

## How are SDGs and Human Rights connected?

SDGs aim to realize human rights by setting out a concrete agenda emphasizing the responsibility of duty bearers (decision-makers) to respect, protect, and promote human rights for all. The goal is to have a peaceful and prosperous planet where all human beings can thrive. For example, Goal 13: Climate Action, addresses the interconnectedness of the health of both people and the planet. When human beings have their rights respected, we can all contribute to a healthy and happy planet.

# Activity 1: Matching Projects to SDGs

Read the descriptions of youth project samples and match them with the SDGs the project works to address. There are no right or wrong answers – you can choose one or multiple SDGs per project. **Draw lines between the examples on the left and the SDGs list on the right.**

A group of youth decide to start a recycling program at their school. They offer incentives for students who bring reusable containers for lunch, and also collect reusable container donations for students who cannot afford to buy their own.

A group of youth decide to design a set of workshops that teach other youth about their rights. The workshops go so well that a partner organization requests a virtual workshop for their international partners.

A group of youth decide to photograph places in their community where newcomer youth can access mental health services. They host a photo exhibit where they share a list of resources for youth and facilitate activities that help newcomer youth build new friendships.

- Goal 1: No poverty
- Goal 2: Zero hunger
- Goal 3: Good health and wellbeing
- Goal 4: Quality education
- Goal 5: Gender equality
- Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation
- Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy
- Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth
- Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- Goal 10: Reduced inequalities
- Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities
- Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production
- Goal 13: Climate action
- Goal 14: Life below water
- Goal 15: Life on land
- Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions
- Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals



## Activity 2: Identifying the issues

The following reflective/discussion questions will help you identify the issues you are working on and how they are linked to broader human rights issues and SDGs.

What is the issue you hope to address through your project?

Why do you want to help solve this issue? What is the change you hope to see?

What are the human rights associated to this issue?

What are the SDGs related to this issue?

# Activity 3: SDG Targets and Indicators

To know how well we are doing to make progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, each goal has a set of targets and indicators. Targets help break down each goal into measurable successes (by using measurable language such as "all people" or "for all") and indicators let us know where we are at (by showing the specific measurement by which those targets can be assessed).

An example is:

Sustainable development Goal #4 Quality Education	
<b>Target 4.1</b>	<i>Ensure all children complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education</i>
<b>Indicator 4.1.2</b>	<i>Number of children who have completed primary or secondary education</i>

In this activity, you will be able to incorporate what you have learned about SDGs targets and indicators into your work.

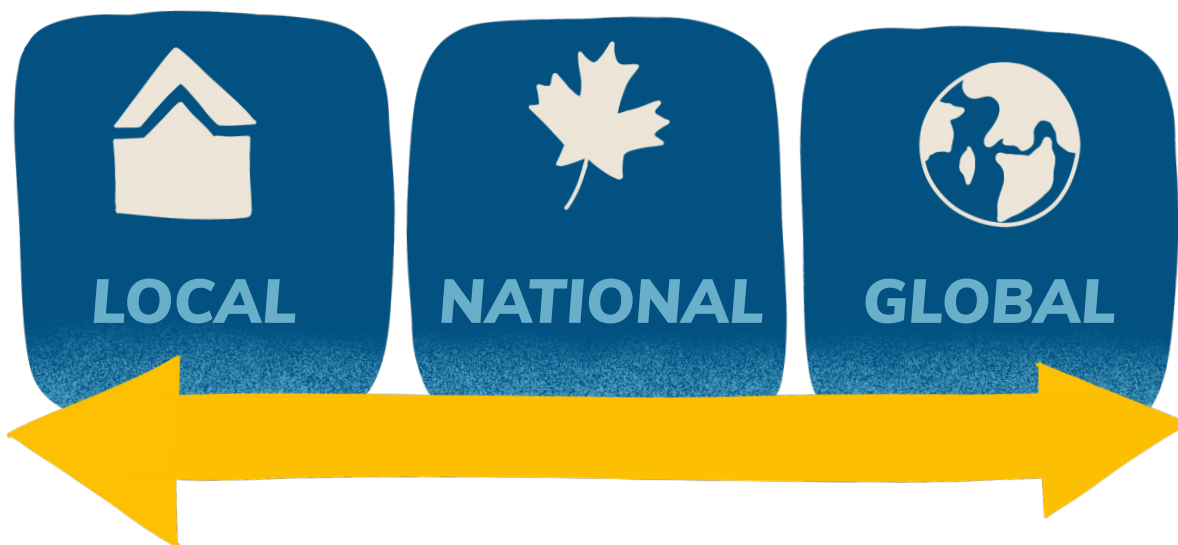
## Steps:

1. First, choose an SDG you would like to focus on this year and write it in the SDG box below.
2. What change would you like to see in regards to this goal? Write this down in the Target section.
3. How will you know you reached your goal? Write it down in the indicator box.

<b>SDG</b>	Eg: SDG 4: Quality Education
<b>Target</b>	Eg: We want more youth to have programs to go to after school where they can feel included
<b>Indicator</b>	Eg: There is at least one free program being offered at our school

## What kind of change is possible?

Before we define decision-makers, let's take a moment to think about the change we want to see. We have reflected on human rights and which SDG we want to focus on, now let's look at the types of change that are possible.



The change you see as a result of your project will depend on the issue you are focusing on and the type of decision-makers you are able to engage. Unfortunately, change can be very slow, even in our fast-paced society. Change can happen at the local, national and global level, and all levels are important.

**Example: you might host an event for your community on what mental health resources are available in your area. This is a local change. Perhaps you invite a reporter to write a story about your event, and the news article is shared on the news agencies' national website. Although your event happened in your town, someone across the country may see the article and be inspired to host their own mental health resource event.**

As you journey through the remainder of this workbook, keep in mind that all levels of change are important and keep expectations realistic. If you are able to impact even one person's life through your project, you have succeeded!

# Defining Decision-makers

A decision-maker is any adult who is responsible for making decisions that affect a young person's life. Decision-makers are responsible for protecting and upholding the rights of young people. Unfortunately, not all decision-makers are held accountable when they fail to protect the rights of young people or consider their best interests when making decisions that affect their lives. Often, key decision-makers reinforce the systemic barriers that your projects are trying to address.



All people in our communities have some level of influence, and everyone has a role to play, no matter how much perceived or actual power we have. However, it can be difficult to advocate for change, especially when trying to communicate with decision-makers. The language decision-makers use is not always accessible, especially to youth and people who experience marginalization in our society.

But when we expand our idea of who holds different types of power and has different spheres of influence in our society we can find creative ways to create change. There are many people in our immediate circles over whom we have influence, and we also have allies who can reinforce our efforts.



## Types of Decision-makers

It helps to break down decision-makers into different categories to better understand how we can most effectively communicate for change. On the next page, we have placed decision-makers into three categories: policy makers, allies/influencers, and community members.



# Types of Decision-makers

See below table for descriptions of each category.

Policy Makers	Allies/Influencers	Community members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• municipal, provincial, and federal elected leaders</li><li>• they are responsible to the people living in their riding (community)</li><li>• they present and vote on all different types of policy that affect our lives (e.g., minimum wage, employment of young people)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• groups or individuals who help advocate on behalf of young people (e.g., Representative for Children and Youth, Human Rights Commissioner)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• all adults who serve young people, such as teachers, spiritual and religious leaders, doctors, afterschool program leaders, or parents/guardians</li></ul>



# A 5-step approach to Engaging Decision-Makers

These steps are not linear, or in a straight line, but they go forwards and backwards as you go through this process – and that's okay! Amplifying your impact takes time and is not a clear-cut process, but a creative one. These steps are just recommendations to help break down the process so you can see where you're heading.





## The “Why”: Defining the Issue

When we start our projects, it is easy to get caught up in the actions we take to address the issues that matter to us. However, it is important to be able to explain why the issues matter to us in the first place. People will connect to the message behind your project – why you are doing what you are doing. In other words, the WHY is the purpose, the very reason why your organization is doing what you are doing.

### Take a moment to reflect:

**Why does this issue matter to me? Does this issue affect me or others differently based on our identities (e.g., religion, socio-economic status, sexual orientation etc.)?**

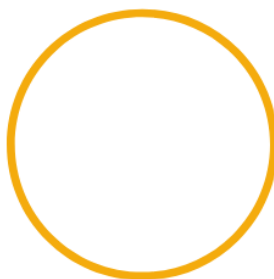
## The “Who”: Spheres of Influence

Engaging with decision-makers and enacting change is hard work, and even though it can feel isolating, it should not be. In fact, sustainable change happens when people come together and make joint efforts towards a common cause. Here we will learn about the concept of spheres of influence and how to build a network of support.

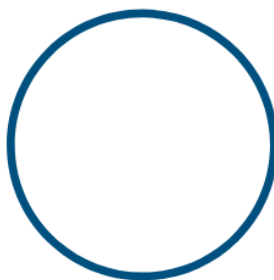
Earlier we explained the types of decision-makers and allies. Now let’s look at your spheres of influence. Later we will introduce some strategies for engaging decision-makers and allies to help you make progress towards your goals.

To start, we will build on this concept of spheres of influence to understand who the actors are that you can reach out to support your issue. Spheres of influence is a concept that originates mostly in political science and often has to do with geographical “spheres” or areas. But it has also been used in other fields to explore the people in your personal and professional networks for whom your opinion matters. Not everyone in your “sphere” will value your opinion equally, but you have the ability to influence opinions within your sphere in different ways and to a certain extent.

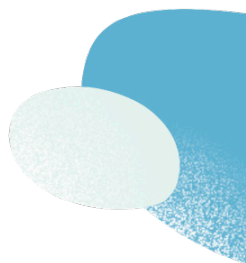
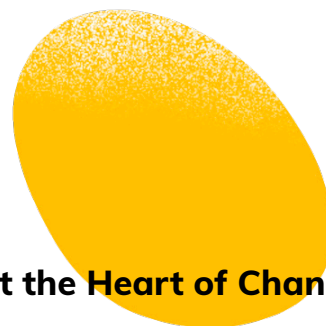


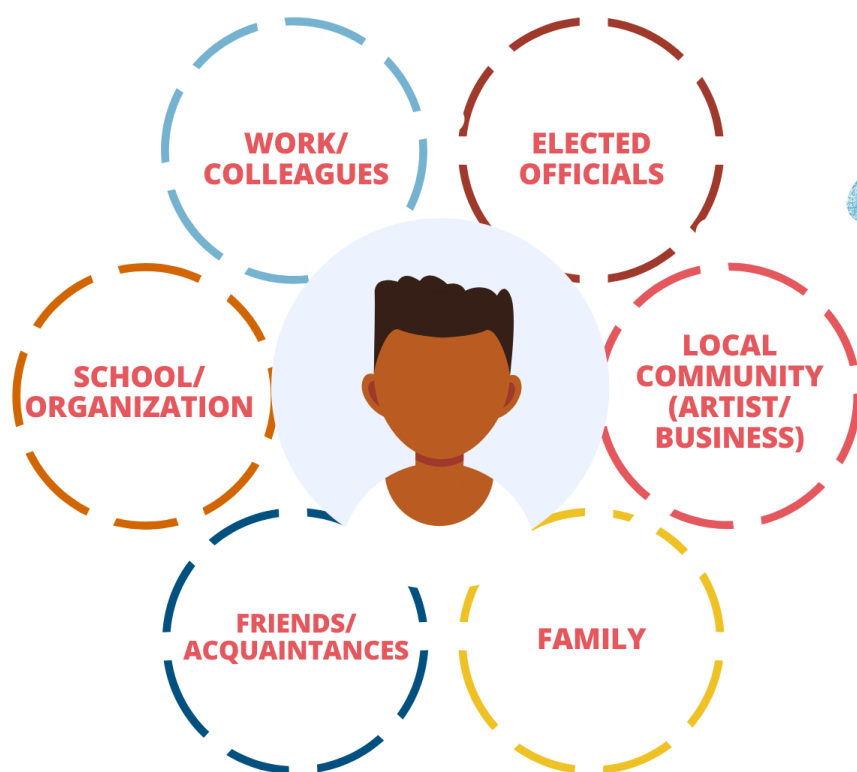


**The sphere of  
Influence you  
think you have**



**The sphere of  
influence you  
actually have**





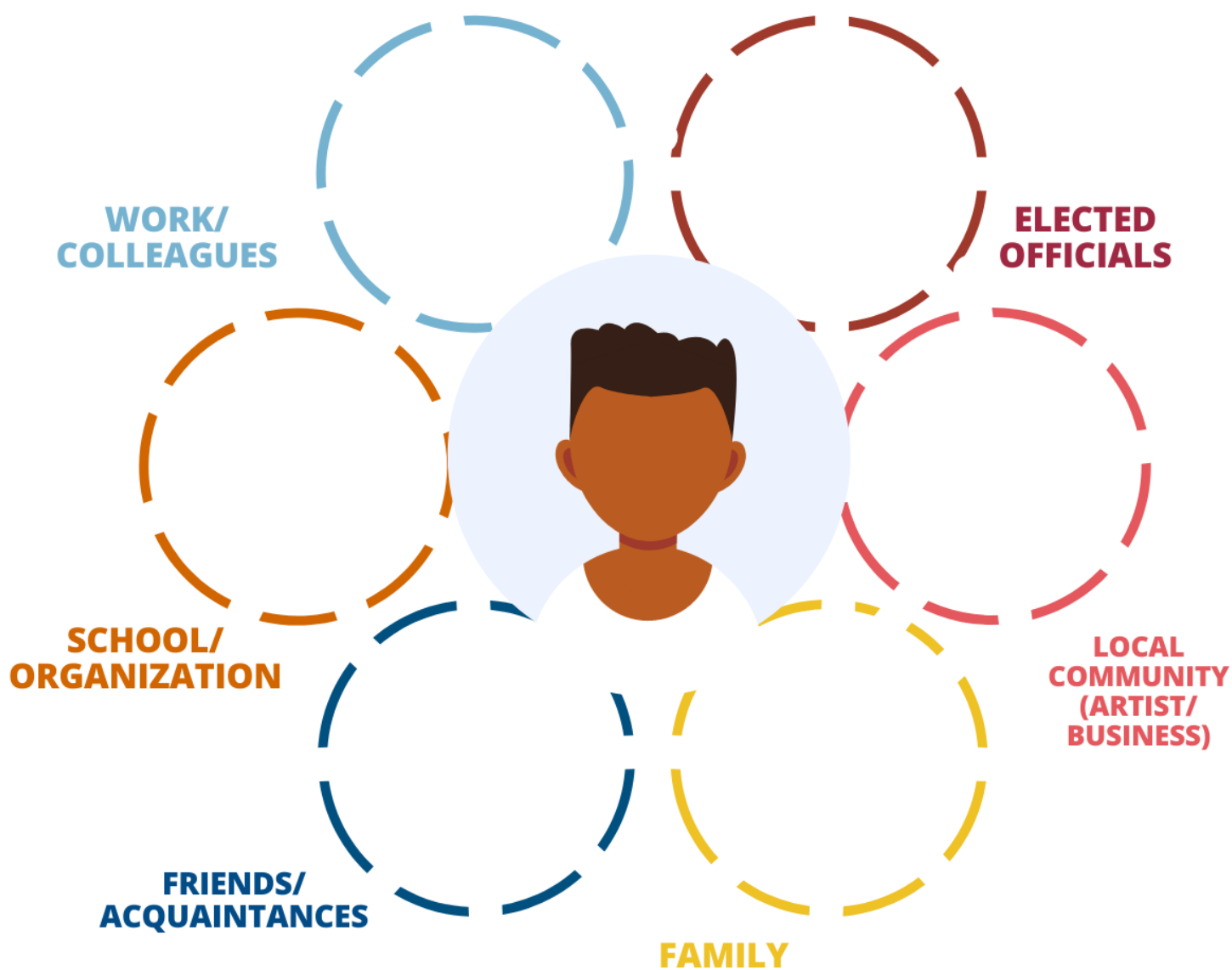
When we try to break down our sphere of influence – our overall bubble – we see that it is made up of many people from different spheres or areas of our lives. Sometimes, we don't even realise how many people are actually in our spheres of influence until we break it down into smaller parts.

When we build our own expanded spheres, it is possible to think about each context and its actors and think outside the box to determine who is truly part of our smaller spheres. Sometimes there are people we haven't even thought of, but who are part of one of our spheres and whom we can ask for help.

**Example: ask your Principal if you can send an email to parents or share a blurb in the school newsletter about your project.**

## Activity 4: Our spheres of influence

Reflect on the different people in your spheres of influence. Fill in the names of people you know in each circle below.



# Our Roles



So far, we have explored how our issues are connected to SDGs and human rights. We then looked at why it is important to connect with decision-makers and allies to help make progress towards the change we want to see. Before we introduce some concrete actions we can take to engage with decision-makers, let us take a moment to think about the roles we hold within our projects.

The next activity includes reflection questions for us to consider as individuals or as groups, based on the roles we hold.



## Activity 5: Reflecting on our roles

As youth changemakers and adults who support youth, we have different responsibilities. In our projects, youth are identifying and addressing human rights issues in our communities. Adults are there to support youth-led projects and help them keep on track.

Consider the following questions individually or as a group :

### Youth

**What are some things you already have that are helping you address issues in your community** (e.g. caring adults, community spaces etc.)?

**What are some things that you still need to help you address issues in your community?**

**What can adults do to better support you to address issues in your community?**



# Adults/Staff



What issues do you feel affect youth's inclusion and participation in the community where you work?

How can you offer support to youth to not only address issues that matter to them, but to help amplify their work with decision-makers?

What do you need to be better able to support youth?

## The “How” – deciding your approach

Depending on the type of decision-maker or ally you want to reach out to, there are different approaches you can use. Some approaches are more formal and necessary; for example, when reaching out to elected officials. Other methods can be tailored to your own needs and style. For example, you might DM a potential ally on Instagram.

Here are some examples to get you started:

- Email
- Phone Call
- Mail a letter
- Ask for a meeting
- Invite Decision-Makers to your event!
- Social media



## ***And perhaps the most important approach: Ask Equitas!***

Your coach is always there to support you with your project. We know that one of the most challenging parts is to amplify your projects and issues with decision-makers. We will continue to create spaces for youth to speak to decision-makers, and in the meantime, we are always available to think through your plan with you and help connect you with decision-makers and allies. If you do not know your coach, you can email us at [canada@equitas.org](mailto:canada@equitas.org).

## The “What” – creating your message

When engaging with decision-makers, and in particular with policy makers, it is helpful to mention which SDG your project focuses on, as they have a responsibility to make progress on the SDGs. Remember, many types of decision-makers are accountable for reporting our progress towards achieving SDGs. Therefore, it is strategic to explain how your project is connected to SDGs and point out how it helps your community advance towards achieving these goals.

Sample:

Hello! My name is Jo and I work with a community organization that supports youth who face barriers to inclusion by giving them access to recreational spaces. I do this work because I believe in the importance of having access to equitable services for all youth. Our project supports SDG #3 because it increases the good health and wellbeing of youth by giving them the opportunity to build strong relationships. To continue this work, we need financial support - can we count on your help?

## Let’s break the message down into three key parts:

Sustainable Development Goal #3 Good health and wellbeing	
The WHAT: what your cause or project is	Hello! My name is Jo and I work with a community organization that supports youth who face barriers to inclusion by giving them access to recreational spaces.
The WHY: link to human rights/ SDGs and your reason for doing what you do.	I do this work because I believe in the importance of having access to equitable services for all youth. Our project supports SDG #3 because it increases the good health and wellbeing of youth by giving them the opportunity to build strong relationships.
The HOW: your call to action to your audience.	To continue this work, we need financial support – can we count on your help?

## Activity 6: Breaking down the message

Fill in the following table to practice crafting your message.

Sustainable Development Goal:	
The WHAT: what your cause or project is	
The WHY: link to human rights/ SDGs and your reason for doing what you do.	
The HOW: your call to action to your audience.	

## Activity 7: Fill in the blanks

Before introducing our final step (the follow up), practice writing your message one last time by filling in the blanks!

**Fill in the blanks to create a sample message!**

We are (I am) \_\_\_\_\_, and we believe (I believe) in \_\_\_\_\_  
[org name] [value/right]

in order to \_\_\_\_\_ of that \_\_\_\_\_. We believe  
[desired change] [purpose]

(I believe) that by \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, our work will  
[principle/idea] [principle/idea]

lead to \_\_\_\_\_, which will benefit \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.  
[result] [target] [target]

Since you \_\_\_\_\_, we would like to ask you if it would be  
[DMrole/title]

possible to/for \_\_\_\_\_ with the aim of \_\_\_\_\_.  
[service requested] [desired change]



# The follow up

Make a plan to follow up with the decision-makers you contacted to keep them informed and remind them of your cause.

You can:

- Send a follow-up email or make a phone call
- Send a picture of your group in action

And remember:

- Think about your short-term and your long-term goals
- Be realistic
- Stay positive
- Be patient

## Conclusion

We hope that you enjoyed this workbook and were inspired to continue participating in your community and making positive change. We know how difficult it can be to advocate for change and better protection and promotion of our fundamental human rights. Remember you are not alone and there are many individuals and organizations who are doing this work with you and for you. Please reach out to your Equitas coach at any time if you need help with your project.



To learn more about the SDGs,  
check out our [living resource list](#).

## Connect with us online!



**/equitas**



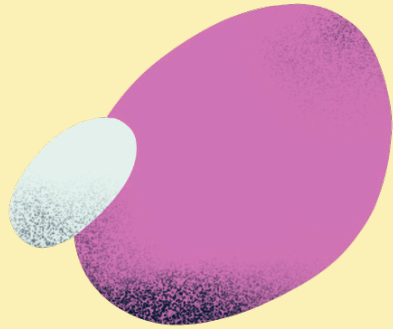
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