

A FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM FOR MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY ACTION

YOUTH-LED COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

Curriculum Framework

From community curiosity to evidence-informed action



DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH VALHALLA COMMUNITY SCHOOL



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YOUR GUIDE TO THE JOURNEY

Inside this framework

A practical architecture for supporting young people to listen, investigate, design, act and learn with their community.

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HOW TO READ THE MODULES



Each module names the intended learning, the teacher’s role, a suggested sequence, evidence of progress and the companion resources that can be developed. The sequence is coherent but not rigid.

About this curriculum

Youth-Led Community-Based Research invites students to learn with and from their community while taking purposeful action. Students are not positioned only as recipients of information or helpers in an adult-designed initiative. They become researchers, collaborators, decision-makers, project leaders, and communicators whose questions and insights shape the work.

This curriculum grew from the learning design used at Valhalla Community School. The original plan unfolded across a school year; this version removes fixed dates and named assignments so teachers can adapt it to different grades, timetables, community contexts, and project lengths. The modules retain a coherent progression but are intentionally recursive. Students may revisit listening, planning, evidence gathering, or consultation whenever new learning changes their direction.

The framework also reflects the work students and adults actually undertook during the first implementation: story-based interviewing, authentic calls and emails, project selection, feasibility studies, business planning, SWOT analysis, self- and peer assessment, community-expert clinics, fundraising, curriculum research, social media communication, community showcases, and presentations to decision-makers. These are offered as adaptable pathways rather than requirements for every project.

Curriculum aims

- Strengthen students' sense of agency, belonging, and responsibility within community.
- Develop ethical, relational, and practical research capabilities.
- Help students transform community knowledge into feasible, evidence-informed action.
- Build collaboration, communication, leadership, project management, and reflective judgment.
- Create reciprocal relationships among students, school, families, community members, organizations, and decision-makers.

What makes the work youth-led

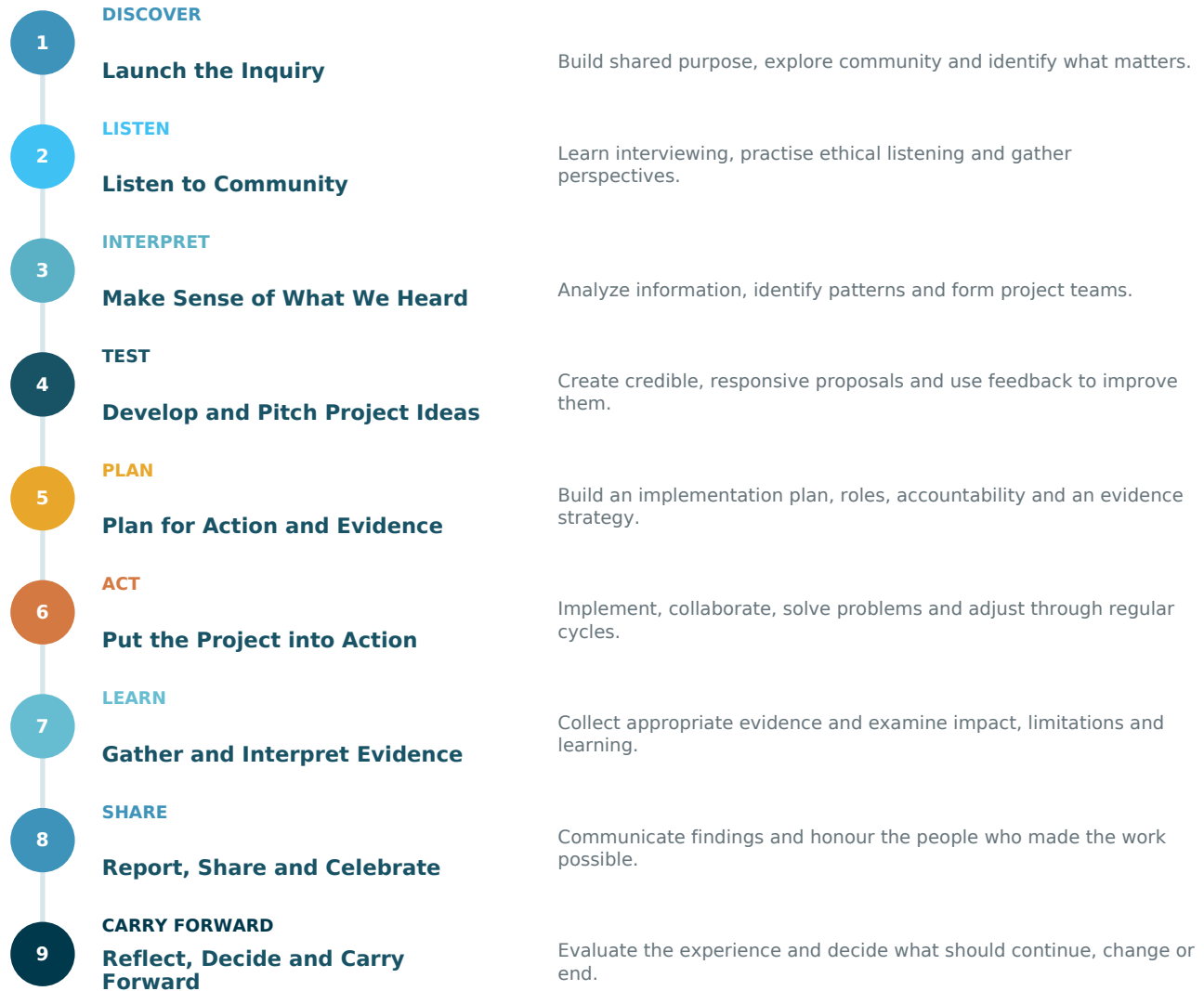
- Young people help frame the questions and decide which ideas move forward.
- Students hold meaningful roles and exercise real influence over project decisions.
- Adults contribute knowledge, access, feedback, and safeguards without taking ownership away from students.
- Evidence is gathered with community members, not merely about them.
- Students communicate findings and recommend what should be sustained, revised, shared, or concluded.

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



Youth leadership does not mean students work without structure. Teachers create the conditions, teach essential skills, attend to ethics and safety, connect students with partners, and gradually release responsibility as capacity grows.

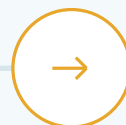
Framework at a glance



YOUTH VOICE



COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE



PURPOSEFUL ACTION



LEARNING & IMPACT

Using the framework

ONE COHERENT PATHWAY - MANY POSSIBLE PACES



Pacing and pathways

The framework may support an intensive inquiry, a semester project, a year-long experience, or a multiyear sequence. Modules are not equal in length. Listening, implementation, and evidence gathering often require more time than launching or celebrating. Teachers may pause, combine, repeat, or deepen modules in response to the project and community.

Suggested instructional rhythm

- 1 Brief explicit instruction or provocation introduces a timely capability or question.
- 2 Students apply the learning immediately within their project work.
- 3 Teachers confer with teams or offer optional skill clinics based on need.
- 4 Teams share progress, barriers, evidence and next steps.
- 5 Students record decisions and reflections so the project history remains visible.

Assessment approach

Assessment should value both the quality of the research-and-action process and the learning students demonstrate. Project outcomes may be affected by resources, timing, community response, or circumstances beyond students' control. A project can encounter difficulty and still produce significant learning.

- Use multiple sources: project artifacts, observations, conversations, student reflections, peer feedback, partner feedback and presentations.
- Make criteria visible before major tasks and co-construct indicators where appropriate.
- Assess individual learning as well as team products.
- Provide frequent formative feedback during project work rather than waiting for a final presentation.
- Build regular opportunities for project groups to support one another with specific, respectful and actionable feedback tied to shared criteria. Feedback should help learners understand what is working, what could be strengthened and what next action will support growth.
- Invite students to use evidence to self-assess their growth, contribution and next steps.

Where the program is embedded in a provincial course or local program of studies, teachers should map authentic project evidence to the relevant outcomes. In the Valhalla implementation, the Career and Technology Foundations (CTF) curriculum from Alberta's Programs of Study provided one useful curricular connection. Readers outside Alberta should identify the equivalent curriculum, competencies or local learning outcomes in their jurisdiction. A one-point rubric, paired with student self-assessment and structured peer feedback, can keep attention on growth while still supporting formal reporting requirements.

Ethics, safety and inclusion

- Use age-appropriate consent and explain how information will be used, stored and shared.
- Avoid collecting personal or sensitive information unless it is necessary and appropriate safeguards are in place.
- Seek school or system guidance when a project could be considered formal research, involves vulnerable participants, or is intended for publication beyond normal learning activities.
- Teach students to represent community perspectives accurately, respectfully and without claiming that a small sample speaks for everyone.
- Plan accessible ways for every student to contribute; public speaking, writing and fieldwork should not be the only valued roles.
- Clarify adult supervision, transportation, financial, media, photography, online safety and community-site requirements before implementation.

MODULE

1

DISCOVER

Launch the Inquiry

**PURPOSE**

Create a shared understanding of youth-led community-based research and open space for students to notice strengths, needs, tensions, possibilities, and questions within their community.

Learning outcomes

- Explain the purpose and key features of youth-led community-based research.
- Map personal and collective connections to community.
- Generate questions about community strengths, experiences, needs and possibilities.
- Establish agreements for respectful, ethical and collaborative work.

Youth-led research principles in focus

- Agency and shared decision-making
- Asset-based orientation
- Belonging and multiple ways to contribute

Teacher role and preparation

- Select examples that show young people contributing to meaningful community change.
- Clarify the authentic scope: what students may influence, available resources, non-negotiables and adult responsibilities.
- Identify whose perspectives are present or missing and prepare inclusive entry points for students.

Suggested learning sequence

- 1 Introduce the project through a local story, image, object, walk, guest, question or community challenge.
- 2 Co-create definitions of community, research, action, leadership and youth-led.
- 3 Map community assets, relationships, places, histories, questions and opportunities.
- 4 Invite students to notice what they value, what they wonder about and what they may want to strengthen.
- 5 Develop community agreements and an initial question bank.

Evidence of learning and progress

- Community map or asset map.
- Student curiosity notes and initial research questions.
- Shared agreements and individual reflection on interests, strengths and possible contributions.

Supplementary resources to accompany this module

- Project launch slide deck
- Community mapping template
- Question-generation protocol
- Team agreements template



ADAPTATION NOTE

Use the sequence flexibly. A step may take part of a class, several classes, or recur throughout the project. Move forward when students have sufficient understanding, relationships, and evidence-not because a calendar says it is time.

LEARNING INTENTIONS IN MOTION



NOTICE



WONDER



FRAME

MODULE

2

LISTEN

Listen to Community

**PURPOSE**

Develop the skills and relationships needed to learn directly from community members through ethical, purposeful conversations.

Learning outcomes

- Develop open-ended questions aligned with an inquiry purpose.
- Use attentive listening, follow-up questions and respectful body language.
- Explain the project and seek informed participation.
- Record, verify and protect information responsibly.
- Reflect on how identity, assumptions and power shape an interview.

Teacher role and preparation

- Recruit a diverse group of community participants and communicate the purpose and expectations clearly.
- Teach consent, privacy, note-taking, recording and attribution appropriate to the context.
- Create a psychologically and physically safe interview format; speed interviews, circles, panels or small-group conversations can all work.
- Model an interview and facilitate fishbowl practice before community conversations.

Suggested learning sequence

- 1 Study and critique sample questions.
- 2 Co-create an interview guide with a welcoming opening, core questions, probes and closing.
- 3 Model and practise interviews; use peer feedback on listening and follow-up.
- 4 Prepare roles, logistics, consent and a plan for capturing information.
- 5 Conduct community conversations.
- 6 Write a prompt reflection immediately afterward and identify questions requiring clarification.

Evidence of learning and progress

- Interview guide and participation/consent process.
- Observation of practice interviews.
- Interview notes or approved recordings.
- Reflection on insights, assumptions, surprises and responsibilities.

Supplementary resources to accompany this module

- Community invitation template
- Interview planning guide
- Consent and information templates
- Fishbowl observation tool
- Interview note-catcher and reflection



ADAPTATION NOTE

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LEARNING INTENTIONS IN MOTION



ASK



LISTEN



HONOUR STORIES

MODULE

3

INTERPRET

Make Sense of What We Heard

**PURPOSE**

Move from a collection of comments to a careful interpretation of patterns, differences, possibilities, and unanswered questions.

Learning outcomes

- Organize and code qualitative information using accessible methods.
- Distinguish a repeated idea from a personally preferred idea.
- Identify assets, needs, tensions, outliers and missing perspectives.
- Develop evidence-informed opportunity statements.
- Form teams based on shared interest and complementary strengths.

Teacher role and preparation

- Remove identifying details where appropriate and prepare information for collaborative analysis.
- Teach a simple coding or affinity-mapping process.
- Guard against premature consensus and invite attention to contradictory or less-heard perspectives.
- Support transparent team formation without ranking students or ideas.

Suggested learning sequence

- 1 Revisit the inquiry purpose and analysis agreements.
- 2 Individually highlight compelling ideas, then cluster excerpts or notes collaboratively.
- 3 Name patterns and tensions using language grounded in what participants said.
- 4 Ask what may be missing and whether further listening is needed.
- 5 Write opportunity statements: “How might we... so that...?”
- 6 Select promising directions using agreed criteria and form project teams.

Evidence of learning and progress

- Annotated notes, codes or affinity map.
- Evidence-supported themes and opportunity statements.
- Rationale for project direction.
- Team strengths inventory and preliminary roles.

Supplementary resources to accompany this module

- Qualitative analysis mini-lesson
- Affinity mapping materials
- Opportunity statement template
- Idea-selection criteria matrix
- Team strengths and roles inventory



ADAPTATION NOTE

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LEARNING INTENTIONS IN MOTION



ORGANIZE



INTERPRET



CHOOSE

MODULE

4

TEST

Develop, Test and Pitch Project Ideas

**PURPOSE**

Turn a promising community-informed idea into a clear, credible proposal; test whether it is workable; and use authentic feedback to strengthen it.

Learning outcomes

- Explain the community opportunity and the evidence behind it.
- Assess feasibility using research, consultation and an appropriate planning tool.
- Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, partners, resources, risks and assumptions.
- Communicate persuasively for a specific audience.
- Receive, evaluate and apply feedback.

Teacher role and preparation

- Clarify pitch criteria, audience, format and what decisions the event will inform.
- Provide short provocations or expert contributions about credibility, storytelling, feasibility, budgeting, business planning or media.
- Invite students to contact relevant organizations or experts through supervised calls and emails.
- Arrange feedback from community partners, decision-makers, families, peers and potential supporters.
- Protect space for revision after the pitch; the event is a learning checkpoint, not simply a competition.

Suggested learning sequence

- 1 Analyze the elements of an effective one- to two-minute pitch and practise strong openings.
- 2 Draft a project concept: opportunity, evidence, idea, people served, proposed action, partners, resources and intended impact.
- 3 Conduct a proportionate feasibility study using web research, community consultation, phone calls, emails, cost estimates and site or policy questions.
- 4 Use a tool such as SWOT analysis to surface possibilities, constraints and assumptions.
- 5 For enterprise-oriented ideas, develop the relevant portions of a business plan; other projects may use a service, event, advocacy or program-design plan.
- 6 Build and rehearse a concise pitch with equitable speaking roles.
- 7 Present to an authentic audience and capture feedback about value, feasibility and support.
- 8 Revise, combine, pause or discontinue ideas using transparent criteria and explain the decision.

Evidence of learning and progress

- Project concept brief and source evidence.
- Feasibility study, SWOT analysis or equivalent test of assumptions.
- Pitch artifact and oral presentation.
- Audience feedback and project-ranking evidence used carefully alongside other criteria.
- Revision memo explaining what changed and why.

Supplementary resources to accompany this module

- Pitch development slide deck
- Project concept canvas
- Feasibility study guide
- SWOT template
- Business/service/event/program planning pathways
- Pitch criteria or rubric
- Audience feedback form
- Revision memo template



ADAPTATION NOTE

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LEARNING INTENTIONS IN MOTION



TEST



ASSESS



PERSUADE

MODULE

5

PLAN

Plan for Action and Evidence



PURPOSE

Build a practical plan that connects activities, people, resources, evidence, and intended community value.

Learning outcomes

- Translate a project idea into sequenced actions and milestones.
- Select a planning format that fits the project: action, event, service, advocacy, learning program or social enterprise.
- Define meaningful, equitable roles and accountability routines.
- Identify resources, funding, permissions, partners, mentors, risks and contingencies.
- Develop a proportionate evidence plan linked to the project's aims.
- Present a plan clearly enough that others can support or challenge it.

Teacher role and preparation

- Approve scope, safety and ethical requirements before implementation.
- Teach planning as a living process rather than a promise that conditions will remain stable.
- Conference with student leaders and ensure responsibility is distributed across the team.
- Connect teams with adults who can advise without taking over.

Suggested learning sequence

- 1 Define the project aim, intended participants or beneficiaries and boundaries.
- 2 Select and adapt a planning format; avoid forcing every idea into a business-plan template.
- 3 Develop a work breakdown, milestones and decision points.
- 4 Assign roles such as chair, planner, researcher, communicator, graphic designer, secretary, finance or inventory lead according to actual team needs.
- 5 Create a resource, funding and partner plan, including budget, fundraising, donations or procurement where relevant.
- 6 Identify a mentor or expert-support plan and clarify how students will prepare for and follow up on meetings.
- 7 Identify risks, ethical considerations and course-correction triggers.
- 8 Design an evidence plan: what will help the team understand reach, experience, quality, change and unintended effects?
- 9 Share the plan for feedback and approval.

Evidence of learning and progress

- Implementation plan and timeline chosen by the team.
- Roles and accountability agreement.
- Resource, funding, mentor, risk, ethics and permissions check.
- Evidence plan with methods, responsibilities and intended use.
- Plan presentation and response to feedback.

Supplementary resources to accompany this module

- Planning-pathway chooser
- Implementation plan template
- Roles and accountability matrix
- Budget, fundraising and resource planner
- Mentor meeting guide
- Risk/ethics/permissions checklist
- Evidence planning menu
- Plan review protocol



ADAPTATION NOTE

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LEARNING INTENTIONS IN MOTION



SEQUENCE



RESOURCE



PREPARE

MODULE

6

ACT



Put the Project into Action

**PURPOSE**

Implement the project while sustaining relationships, monitoring progress, solving problems, and adapting responsibly.

Learning outcomes

- Carry out agreed responsibilities and communicate progress.
- Use project records and feedback to make timely decisions.
- Seek support and direct instruction when a capability is needed.
- Respond constructively to uncertainty, setbacks and changing conditions.
- Demonstrate care for partners, participants, resources and team members.

Teacher role and preparation

- Use short, timely provocations rather than front-loading every possible skill.
- Offer bookable skill clinics or conferences on topics teams need.
- Arrange returning experts or mentors who can respond to increasingly developed work.
- Hold periodic leadership-team meetings while other students continue project work.
- Monitor safety, ethics, workload, group dynamics and community commitments.
- Keep decision-making with students wherever possible while making adult accountabilities explicit.

Suggested learning sequence

- 1 Begin each work cycle with priorities and a brief evidence check.
- 2 Implement the next actions and document what happens; actions may include research, curriculum mapping, fundraising, purchasing, making, teaching, hosting, advocacy or service.
- 3 Pause for a timely provocation, expert input or skill clinic.
- 4 Prepare for mentor or partner meetings, ask focused questions and record commitments.
- 5 Meet within teams to compare plan, progress, evidence and emerging issues.
- 6 Use a simple decision log to continue, adapt, stop, seek help or gather more information.
- 7 Close the cycle by naming an accomplishment, a challenge and the next most important action.

Evidence of learning and progress

- Products, communications and records generated through the project.
- Team check-ins, decision logs and updated plans.
- Teacher observations and conferences.
- Partner feedback and evidence of responsible follow-through.
- Individual reflections on contribution, leadership and learning.

Supplementary resources to accompany this module

- Project work-cycle board
- Decision and change log
- Team check-in protocol
- Leadership meeting agenda
- Mentor meeting planner and follow-up log
- Skill-clinic menu
- Fundraising and procurement tools
- Partner communication templates



ADAPTATION NOTE

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LEARNING INTENTIONS IN MOTION



ACT



ADAPT



COLLABORATE

MODULE

7

LEARN

Gather and Interpret Evidence

**PURPOSE**

Use appropriate evidence to understand what happened, whose experiences are represented, what changed, and what remains uncertain.

Learning outcomes

- Select methods that fit the question, participants and project scope.
- Gather evidence consistently, ethically and accessibly.
- Organize and analyze quantitative and qualitative information.
- Distinguish findings, interpretations, limitations and claims.
- Use evidence to improve the project and prepare responsible conclusions.

Teacher role and preparation

- Review evidence plans before collection begins and ensure necessary permissions.
- Teach only the methods teams require: observation, interview, focus group, survey, count, artifact analysis, feedback wall or other appropriate approaches.
- Help students avoid overclaiming causation or representativeness.
- Build in opportunities to check interpretations with participants or partners.

Suggested learning sequence

- 1 Restate the evaluation questions and audit the evidence plan.
- 2 Prepare and test instruments or observation tools.
- 3 Collect evidence and maintain secure, organized records.
- 4 Clean, sort, code, count or visualize information as appropriate.
- 5 Compare sources and attend to convergence, difference, silence and unintended outcomes.
- 6 Develop findings, note limitations and invite partner feedback on interpretation.
- 7 Use emerging evidence for a final course correction when useful.

Evidence of learning and progress

- Data collection tools and ethical procedures.
- Organized evidence set.
- Tables, charts, themes, quotations or observational summaries as appropriate.
- Findings linked to evidence, with limitations stated.
- Record of how evidence influenced project decisions.

Supplementary resources to accompany this module

- Data collection methods guide
- Survey/interview/observation templates
- Evidence organizer
- Introductory analysis guide
- Findings and limitations template
- Interpretation feedback protocol



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LEARNING INTENTIONS IN MOTION



GATHER



ANALYZE



LEARN

MODULE

8

SHARE

Report, Share and Celebrate

**PURPOSE**

Communicate the project's story, evidence, learning, and recommendations to the people who contributed and the audiences who can act.

Learning outcomes

- Tailor communication to different audiences and purposes.
- Build claims that are proportionate to the evidence.
- Combine project narrative, evidence, community voice and reflection.
- Make actionable recommendations.
- Acknowledge contributions and celebrate learning with integrity.

Teacher role and preparation

- Clarify expectations for board, community, media, school and online communication.
- Secure consent for names, images, quotations and student work.
- Invite community partners to review relevant representations before public sharing.
- Design a hybrid showcase when virtual access can broaden participation.
- Design a celebration that values every team and does not reduce success to polished performance.

Suggested learning sequence

- 1 Identify audiences and the decisions or understanding each communication should support.
- 2 Draft a report containing context, question, process, actions, evidence, findings, limitations, learning and recommendations.
- 3 Create audience-specific forms such as a board briefing, timeline, display, video, podcast, social-media clip, media release or community presentation.
- 4 Rehearse for clarity, accessibility and respectful representation.
- 5 Host a community showcase where guests can ask questions, offer feedback and indicate whether they can mentor or support a project over time.
- 6 Share with stakeholders and invite response.
- 7 Thank contributors and celebrate collective effort.

Evidence of learning and progress

- Final report or equivalent record.
- Board/community briefing or presentation.
- Public-facing artifact where appropriate.
- Evidence of ethical attribution and consent.
- Audience response and student reflection on communication.

Supplementary resources to accompany this module

- Final report template
- Board briefing guide
- Presentation/storytelling planner
- Media and image consent checklist
- Celebration planning guide
- Thank-you templates



ADAPTATION NOTE

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LEARNING INTENTIONS IN MOTION



COMMUNICATE



RECOMMEND



CELEBRATE

MODULE

9

CARRY FORWARD

Reflect, Decide and Carry Forward

**PURPOSE**

Consolidate learning and make evidence-informed decisions about the project, relationships, and future possibilities.

Learning outcomes

- Evaluate individual, team, project and community learning.
- Identify how assumptions, skills, relationships and sense of agency changed.
- Determine what should continue, transfer, change, pause or conclude.
- Document recommendations for future students, teachers and partners.
- Close relationships responsibly and identify ongoing commitments.

Teacher role and preparation

- Create conditions for honest reflection beyond celebration.
- Invite feedback from partners about both outcomes and the quality of collaboration.
- Make continuation decisions transparent and realistic; avoid leaving unfunded or unsupported commitments with students or community members.
- Preserve useful records and remove or archive sensitive information appropriately.

Suggested learning sequence

- 1 Revisit the original questions, maps, goals and success indicators.
- 2 Analyze evidence of impact alongside evidence of learning and relationship quality.
- 3 Complete individual and team reflection using artifacts and feedback.
- 4 Consult partners about next steps and unresolved commitments.
- 5 Decide whether each project will continue, transition, be redesigned, be shared for others to use, or conclude.
- 6 Create a handover or closure plan and add advice to the curriculum resource bank.

Evidence of learning and progress

- Individual evidence-based reflection.
- Team retrospective and partner feedback.
- Continuation, transition or closure decision with rationale.
- Handover record and recommendations for a future cohort.
- Final acknowledgement of contributions and commitments.

Supplementary resources to accompany this module

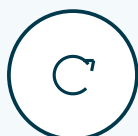
- Individual reflection template
- Team retrospective protocol
- Partner feedback form
- Continuation decision guide
- Handover/closure template
- Program-level review tool



ADAPTATION NOTE

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LEARNING INTENTIONS IN MOTION



REFLECT



DECIDE



CARRY FORWARD

Program-level assessment and documentation

Across the modules, a portfolio can provide the clearest account of growth. Students select and annotate artifacts rather than submitting every document produced. The portfolio should show how thinking and action changed over time.

Suggested portfolio strands

- Community understanding and ethical research
- Analysis and use of evidence
- Project design and adaptive action
- Collaboration, leadership and accountability
- Communication and community relationship
- Reflection, agency and future action

Possible indicators of program quality

- Students can identify decisions they genuinely influenced.
- Community perspectives visibly shaped project choices.
- Projects build on community assets as well as respond to needs.
- Students can explain how evidence informed a decision or course correction.
- Partners describe the relationship as respectful, reciprocal and worthwhile.
- Students who do not routinely occupy visible leadership roles have authentic opportunities to come to the forefront.
- Students with different strengths have visible, valued ways to contribute.
- Claims about impact are careful, transparent and supported.
- Continuation or closure decisions are responsible and communicated.

Supplementary resource suite

This curriculum framework establishes the learning architecture. The companion resources have been created as separate, updatable documents so teachers can select what fits their context.

Companion resource	Purpose
Teacher Handbook	Detailed facilitation notes, sample pacing pathways, inclusion considerations, ethics and safety guidance, assessment supports and troubleshooting.
Student Researcher Handbook	Student-facing explanations, checklists, reflection prompts and examples organized by module.
Community Partner Guide	Purpose, roles, expectations, consent, communication and ways adults can support youth leadership without taking over.
Project Toolkit	Editable canvases, planning templates, protocols, organizers, feedback tools, logs and report structures.
Mini-Lesson and Provocation Decks	Short instructional resources timed to authentic project needs, including interviewing, pitching, teamwork, evidence, reporting and course correction.
Assessment Toolkit	Co-constructed criteria, conference prompts, portfolio guidance, self/peer assessment and adaptable rubrics.
Implementation Guide for School Leaders	Conditions, staffing, scheduling, partnerships, risk management, resourcing and indicators for sustaining the program.



RESEARCH WITH COMMUNITY. ACTION WITH PURPOSE. LEARNING WITH CONSEQUENCE.

Young people learn that careful listening, thoughtful evidence, shared responsibility and reflective action can help them contribute meaningfully to the communities of which they are already a part.

