



Youth for a Sustainable Future Pacifika Presents: How to Organise a Youth Summit

This column contains a step by step guide to running a youth summit. On the right side is a case study that shows how Youth for a Sustainable Future went through each stage while planning the Pacific Youth MDG Summit held in May 2005.

Stage 1: Identify the purpose and if it is the right solution

In many instances it seems that running a national youth summit could be the be all and end all approach or the best way to make changes within a country in regards to the MDGs. However, this approach is not always right.

The first step involves considering if running a youth summit is actually the best way for you to make an impact on the MDGs or the issues you are trying to resolve. It is always important to first understand what the problem is, which you are trying to solve. In many cases people could jump into doing a youth summit without understanding why.

So first think what you want to change. Is it a countries culture, a lack of drugs for immunisation, more AIDs awareness or is it the people? If you are aiming to educate masses of young people on the MDGs and encourage them to educate other youth and then develop projects to achieve the MDGs then only a youth summit could be a good way to do it.

You must also remember that you can make changes on a number of levels. The impact you make does not always need to be a great plan encompassing the whole country. Very often big plans and events miss out on the little people and problems. You should consider what are the most important issues at hand and then try see what could be the highest priority to achieve. For example you might be able to make a bigger impact by simply creating some brochures on AIDs awareness and handing them out in colleges. Or you may simply organise village meetings where parents of school children could meet their teachers and thus understand the importance of universal primary education and you could make a huge change by doing such a simple grass roots project.

Case Study on how Youth for a Sustainable Future did it when organising the Pacific Youth MDG Summit

(Sep 2003): YSF co-founders first realised that there was a problem with engaging pacific youth with the MDG process at the World Youth Congress in Morocco 2003. This was when the possibility of organising a regional youth summit in the Pacific was first raised. However before planning any conference, they had to make sure that this would present a solution the problem.

(Oct 2003): Speaking to networks and youth in the area for over 3 months, they realised that it was a problem, that youth didn't have access to information on the MDGs and what they could do. It was also hard for them to attend international meetings because of travel distances.

Thus YSF decided to begin pushing for a regional youth summit in the pacific on the MDGs.

How to identify the issue:

Before you help people, it is important to ask those people what help they need. Sometimes we might have different perspective to them. There are many ways to identify what the local problems are and what sort of attention is needed:

- Talk to the people in need
- Surveys
- Look at official statistics and NGO reports
- Speak to local volunteers, NGOs, and aid workers
- Speak to your friends from other countries or villages and ask them what sort of actions they are doing

Once you identify a problem, the following steps must be taken:

1. identify the extent of the problem
2. see if anyone else or any other NGO's are working on it (and if so, contact them and see if you can help, or if there is something they are not doing which you could do)
3. Speak to the government to see what they are doing
4. Speak to the people effected by the problem and ask them what is needed to solve it

Once this is done, you can come up with a solution to the problem. Sometimes the problem and solution would be huge and require several steps such as 'ending poverty' which no one can do on their own, without engaging the entire world. However other problems can be solved through delegates like you bringing the right people together to work on them. For example something as simple as trying to create awareness of AIDs prevention within a small community. You could make a great impact by simply getting a few friends together and organising a educating seminar on the topic.

What are youth summits likely to achieve

Youth summits are great to run if you want to achieve the following:

1. create large awareness on the MDGs
2. Train young people on being good citizens and how to make sure they can act on the MDGs

(Nov 2003): YSF networked with several groups in the pacific and retained many of them as on-going supporters who kept feeding ideas and helping source opportunities to organise the event. The main method YSF networked was by discussing the issue with other pacific delegates at the World Youth Congress, including the Hawaiian group Hui. YSF also networked with the International Youth Parliament pacific members and others through Taking It Global.



3. Create broad impact by training young delegates to go back to communities and each implement projects

So if the problem you have identified are the things above then running a youth summit is a great way to do it!

Also remember that youth summits are only very effective if the delegates go back home and actually do projects or work on the MDGs. Otherwise there is a lot of potential lost. You must keep this in mind and how to select the right delegates when organising your summit.

However remember that a lot of resources such as money is needed to run the summit and you must consider whether it could be better spent elsewhere. Also only a selected few delegates can go to the summit so you must make sure they are people who can make an impact after the summit.

Formalising the vision for a summit:

Now that you have identified the problem you want to fix, and identified that the youth summit is the best way to do it, you must create a aim for the summit. The best way to do this is to write a one sentence 'vision statement' on what you want the youth summit to achieve.

Then Write specific and tangible objectives for the summit. How many delegates do you want? What is expected? Why will your community or country be better of if you run this summit? How will your community be better of? Who will benefit? What will you do in the youth summit to achieve this? Who do you want to attend the summit?

One easy way to think of your vision, is think if someone asked you to describe your youth summit to them in one sentence – what would you say?

This is a very important step and you should not move on without doing it.

It is important to remember that organising a youth summit is no easy task. It will take a lot of time but you must be patient. Take the time to plan it properly. Youth for a Sustainable Future began planning the Pacific Youth MDG summit in September 2003 and it took till May 2005 for the summit to happen.

(Jan 2004): The original vision and objectives designed for the PYMDGS was:

“The youth of the Pacific Island Nations are empowered with the knowledge, strategies and skills and needed to implement initiatives that will lead to the achievement of the UN’s Millennium Goals by 2015 in the region”

Stage 2: Engaging people who share the same vision and building a support team

Now that you have identified what you are doing and why, the next step is to build a team around this ‘vision’ for a youth summit who can help and support its development. Running a youth summit is a HUGE task and you will need a large dedicated team to help. It is also important to get the support of several interested people so that you can lobby governments or institutions to partner with you and finance your project of a youth summit.

The best way to do this could be to set up an email group or just have regular meetings with the whole group of interested people. Finding people who share the same vision can be achieved through online communities or through networking with other existing youth groups and NGOs.

There are several purposes for doing this including:

1. You can gain input for designing the summit from a number of people who share similar interests and build on the teams experience
2. You will find it easier to gain the support of government and NGO organisations to help you financially and in organising the event
3. Credibility
4. More people to do the work means you can co-ordinate something larger

Maintaining a group of supporters is also not easy. You must make sure everyone can keep in touch easily and is updated on what the whole network will be doing. You must ensure that everyone feels ownership about the project so that they all keep actively involved and committed.

Once you establish this group, it is essential to go over your projects vision and objectives again and gain their input.

Stage 3: Project design

(Dec 2003): The YSF email group was born with 15 members from several pacific islands. The main members were from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa and Hawaii at the time. There were also members from other countries like the UK who provided advice and input as well. A few MSN chats were held with 3-5 members of the group to try and discuss ideas and strategies.

(Dec 2003): Birth of YSF Website. Peacechild International donated web space support for YSF. This helped us continue to build support from like minded people in the pacific and also keep everyone updated in what was happening. It also made it easier to approach organisations by saying we had a website with information about the YSF network. YSF received support from several organisations within the UN and also Australian Government, and was ready to look for financial partners now.



Now it is time to do a draft design for the project. Before you approach possible financial partners (partners who will put money and fund the project) and before you approach government agencies about doing your youth summit, it is important to come up with a rough design of what the summit might look like. You should do this engaging the ideas of all the people in your support group. You should also consult the people you're trying to help to ask them what should be in the youth summit.

You should create a draft project design plan with the following details:

1. Purpose of youth summit
2. What impact (tangible) will it make on the community and country
3. What are the outputs of the summit (is it a declaration or a focus on delegates doing local community action when they return)?
4. How many delegates and what selection criteria?
 - a. How will you find delegates?
 - b. How will you screen them?
 - c. How will you make sure they are good?
5. Possible venues
6. How long will the summit go for
7. What will be done on each day of the summit?
 - a. Include a list of activities
 - b. Include a wish list of speakers
 - c. Include wish list of how you want government and other NGOs to be involved
 - d. What training sessions will be held?
 - e. Media involvement plan
8. How will the summit be followed up? What will happen after the summit? How will you support delegates?
 - a. Show details of your follow up plan.
9. Partners
 - a. Who are the parties involves in organising the summit?
 - b. Is there any organisations you would like to have on the organising team?
10. Proposed budget
 - a. What do you need to spend money on
 - b. How much money do you need
 - c. Where do you plan to get the money from
11. Timeline
 - a. When will the summit happen

Early to mid 2004: YSF put tother a large project plan document with much of the details listed on the left side. We communicated extensively within the group of supporters to continue receiving ideas and input. The benefits of having a support network that was spread in many countries allowed YSF to obtain budget figures from a member in Samoa for example.

Early to mid 2004: YSF created a spreadsheet with a timeline and checklist of tasks to complete.



- b. What will happen every month between now and the summit (could do a Gann chart to show this).
12. Your organising team
- a. Who is on your team and who are the supporters
 - b. What skills do they have
 - c. Are they committed to run the summit with you?

Once you have compiled this list of information on your summit you are ready to approach possible partners.

REMEMBER: compiling this list will take a lot of time. Be patient and do it properly. If you don't plan your youth summit or project and go through all of the above details, you may not end up with a good project. Also you will find it easier to find someone to fund your project if you have a solid plan with the above details.

Stage 4: Partnerships

Now is a good time to get some support from organisations who are unlikely to be financial supporters. Meet with as many organisations as you can and get support letters and build contacts. Even though these organisations can't give money they may be able to provide valuable advice in terms of organising and maybe even the content of the summit. Ask them who would be likely to support it.

Get as many support letters as you can and include them with your planning document which was created in the previous step.

You will now have a complete proposal for a youth summit.

The next stage involves finding an organisation that could fund your project or youth summit and partners who could possibly co-host it or carry out the logistical work.

2004: YSF obtained supporting letters from many politicians and organisations enhancing its credibility to organise the summit. The initial approach was to raise \$40,000 and run the summit from YSF's resources. However soon it became clear that that would be too hard and that an external, established organisation would be needed to assist. YSF made several funding requests and was turned down from several foundations. Before approaching any organisation, YSF would still research them thoroughly and prepare a detailed proposal.



How to find a suitable organisation

Before you approach any organisation you should search a number of alternatives and research their current projects, strategies, and goals. Look for organisations that have a similar vision or a need for your project which may be a youth summit. If they have a very youth focused strategy they may be more likely to look at your project. Consider several options and then prioritise which could be the best to approach

How to approach them

The first thing to do is find out who is the right person to speak to within the organisation. This can be achieved by searching on their website or ringing them and asking. Then it is best to write to them either as an email or letter introducing who you are, all your supporters and the main ideals of your proposed project or summit. Ask if you can organise a time to meet and discuss it. You may need to meet with several organisations before you find the right one or before someone is willing to support your project. It is essential to show them the project plan created in the previous step. A good plan is likely to be taken more favourably by the prospective project partner.

The organisation you approach may want to change a few aspects of the youth summit so that they have more ownership over it too. This is fine but you should ensure that it doesn't change the final impact that your project has on its community.

Once you find a partner organisation that is willing to fund your youth summit, it is essential to draw up a memorandum of understanding or (MOU). This will define the roles and responsibilities between you and the organisation. It is important so that everyone organising the summit does not overlap tasks. It is also important to keep everyone accountable to their tasks.

The supporting organisations will become part of a larger organising committee who will run the event. The main people comprising the organising committee are:

1. You
2. your team of supporters and youth
3. the sponsoring (funding) organisation(s)
4. Logistics team (venue and on site management)
5. IT Team

(Jun 2004): YSF co-founder Kate began an internship at the United Nations Development Program in Samoa. This soon turned out to be a lucky break as she realised that running a youth summit in the Pacific would be in line with UNDP's strategy for the MDGs as well. YSF directors prepared a project proposal for UNDP and this was consequently accepted some months after with some changes.

(Late 2004): The UN Resident Coordinators office of Samoa, now championing the project, built a team including UNESCO, UNDP and the Samoan Government to develop the Summit and received funding from the NY head Quarters. Together with YSF and local organisations, the organising team for the PYMDGS was born.



6. Media

At this stage, work through all the parts of the project plan and agree on changes. Then prepare a final project plan and your ready to begin implementing it!

Final details can now be sorted out including the date of the summit and location.

It is essential that the summit's programme is now designed. This involves planning what happens during each day of the summit in detail. Who will be speaking? What are the sessions? Who is presenting?

Then it is important to formalise the timeline that was created before. It will need to be very detailed and include a description what tasks need to be done every week between now and the summit date.

Delegate selection criteria's need to be finalised too. This is important as many instances you will receive applications from many people and it will be hard to determine who you turn down and who you accept.

During this stage it is also good to begin getting media attention. Begin building up hype for the event.

Then open up applications.

Stage 5: Running the summit

Once applications are open it is essential to ensure that they reach the right people. The way you distribute application forms is very important. Sometimes only people who are already "in the loop" find out about events. However the aim could be to ensure that as many people as possible find out and apply. Also if you want a representation from rural and urban areas, extra effort will be needed to promote it locally. The media is a great way to get the message out at this stage.

After the closing date and selection of applicants, it is time for the summit.

If all the above steps have been completed, the summit should work like clockwork, but this rarely happens! Ways to make a summit work really efficiently are:

(Late 2004): Several changes were made to the original plan including changing the name of the summit from Youth for a Sustainable Future to the Pacific Youth MDG Summit. Some of the selection criteria and outcomes were modified too to be in line with UN requirements.

YSF began designing a draft model for the sessions in the summit. During February 2005, the UN created a session plan and YSF made a few adjustments. During this period selection criteria was also finalised.

A lot of the work really fell together only in March and April, the months preceding the summit in May. A lack of solid planning in the lead up made this stage quite rushed and slightly unorganised. It was a hectic period. Sometimes there was overlapping between two groups doing the same tasks.

YSF began promoting applications for the summit online in March. Several applications were received, screened and sent to UNDP for selection. YSF also began planning the follow up work by speaking to their partner Peacechild International to assist with including the outcomes in the World Youth Congress held in Scotland.

The most important element was constant communication between everyone organising the summit.

1. Ensure that everyone has clear roles and knows what they are doing and when.
2. Delegate clearly
3. Constantly review how the delegates feel and if things are flowing to plan
4. include a lot of ice breakers
5. Include relax time so that delegates could get to know each other better. Many of the ideas in summits are actually generated in relax time when delegates discuss each others projects.

Much of running the summit revolves around the session plan which was created in the previous part. Generally speaking expect to have 1 person on the organising team for every 3 to 4 delegates who attend.

It is essential to incorporate an action focus into the summit. Ensure that delegates are trained so they can go home and actually do projects that will achieve the MDGs. These could be as simple as media releases or as big as organising vaccines for a community.

Stage 6: Follow up from the summit

This is arguably the MOST important step.

Ultimately a summit is useless unless there are results coming out of it. A summit is useless unless the delegates go home and engage their communities. A summit is useless unless its outcomes are promoted effectively.

This stage needs to be planed out early on, before the summit is run and before engaging partners.

Delegates need support after the summit to make sure that they can actually achieve the outcomes. Here are the main types of support:

1. communication – they need effective means of communicating with each other and sharing ideas (could be done through an e-group)
2. Opportunities – they need to be kept updated of opportunities in their field of work – a newsletter to all the delegates with updates could achieve this

(May 2005): Much of this involved actually discussing the summits progress with delegates and making sure they were comfortable. There was also a lot of last minute details that had to be done on the run.

YSF and the UN RC's Office realised that because there was such a large scale of outcomes, the follow up needed to take a multi faced approach. UNRC's Office have aimed to follow up on the bigger picture outcomes such as presentation of the declaration to the UN MDG review and to the Prime Minister.

YSF has taken the role of coaching and supporting the delegates in doing localised action projects and initiatives.

Follow up initiatives include:

- Constant updates and resources loaded on the YSF website
- A fortnightly YSF E-Bulletin with stories, updates, opportunities and advice
- A E-group for delegates to discuss with each other
- The publication of documents like this
- A mentoring network (coming soon)
- Connecting delegates with international networks and organisations
- Funding opportunities for delegates (coming soon)



3. They need to be linked to youth networks around the world who may be able to help them – also through newsletters or emails
4. Funding – need access to funding sources for their projects
5. Experience support (mentoring) – they need access to experienced people who could help them with their projects. This is one of the most important. Many people won't know how to run projects or plan. They need on-going support in this. Establish a network of experienced people who could mentor the delegates
6. Ideas – sometimes they need help thinking of ideas about what they could do when they get back.
7. Media – continue to promote the summit's outcomes through media to ensure it gets maximum exposure and impact
8. Recommendations – recommendations from the summit should be handed to the right people who could work it, including governments and NGOs.

All these support networks need to be on going. Their success is the ultimate success of the whole youth summit.

YSF has also aimed to continue to spread world of the summit through the media. It will also present to a meeting of 600 world youth leaders at the World Youth Congress in July 2005.

YSF is currently training selected delegates to be regional coordinators for the network, so that closer attention could be given to each member.

Membership now stands at over 120.

Prepared by Youth for a Sustainable Future Pacifika. For more information please visit www.peacechild.org/ysf

The Pacific Youth MDG Summit which was initiated by YSFP, was held in May 2005, bringing together 56 youth from 13 Pacific Island nations. Its declaration was presented to the UN MDG review for their September meeting and its input to the Pacific plan has been presented to the Prime Minister of Samoa who chairs the Pacific Governments meetings.