

MOBILIZING YOUTH FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

TOOLS FOR CREATING A SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS ALLIANCE
ON YOUR CAMPUS



Mobilizing youth for the SDGs: Tools for creating a Sustainable Development Goals Alliance on your campus by ReImagine17 is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/), except where otherwise noted.



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ReImagine17 is a national community of youth working to reimagine sustainable development through intersectional and interdisciplinary collaboration. Our goal is to amplify youth action on the SDGs through facilitating a space for knowledge-sharing, program development, and advocacy.

Check out our social media using this QR code!



OUR STORY

Where we started: This toolkit was authored by the founding student members of Sustainable Development Goals Alliances (SDGAs) at Canadian post-secondary institutions and includes the key takeaways from our experiences in grassroots campus SDG advocacy. This document is designed to be a guide and reference for other students looking to grow or initiate similar youth-led initiatives to advance the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#).

Where we're going: During the development of this toolkit, our group realized a shared vision to amplify youth action on the SDGs through a national collaboration framework. Thus, in November 2020 we founded ReImagine17, a national community of youth working to reimagine sustainable development through intersectional and interdisciplinary collaboration. Our goal is to amplify youth action on the SDGs by creating spaces for knowledge-sharing, program development, and advocacy.

How you can be involved: We intend for this toolkit to be a living resource that evolves over time, and as such we are always looking for ways to add new experiences and best practices. To be a part of this ongoing project, feel free to reach out to our team at admin@reimagine17.ca. We look forward to connecting with you!

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ReImagine17 is a national organization based in what is currently Canada. Our team operates digitally across the country, however, our organization exists within the unceded territories of the x̱m̱əθḵ'əy̱əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̱x̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish), and Seḻíḻw̱iṯuḻh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

We are grateful to the Indigenous peoples who have and continue to protect and steward these lands and waters, since time immemorial. We also recognize and honor the work of Indigenous peoples across the planet who continue to defend and advocate for climate justice and sovereignty. We are grateful for the opportunity to learn and question the ways in which we can pursue a future that is sustainable, healthy, and just.

Why do we do land acknowledgements?

Land acknowledgements allow us to show our respect for the land and the traditional communities and peoples who reside here. For non-Indigenous peoples, land acknowledgements provide an opportunity to reflect on the impacts of colonialism and the authentic history of Canada and North America. To build respectful relationships, ones that are rooted in reconciliation and justice, we must commit ourselves to learning about the people and stories that have been historically excluded ([Calgary Foundation](#); [Future Ancestors Services](#)).

We believe it is critical for us to ask questions and take it upon ourselves to learn about reconciliation and the actions we can take as individuals and as an organization. For more resources we recommend reviewing the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action](#) and the [Native Land](#) tool.

GETTING STARTED

WHAT ARE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS?

The [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) are a set of 17 global goals adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With a pledge that “no one be left behind”, the 17 interconnected goals and their 169 associated targets span across all three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic, and environmental. Achieving the SDGs requires that all countries take bold and transformative action on sustainable development, through means that center collaboration, inclusivity, and justice.

Young people play an important role in all levels of SDG implementation. Across Canada, many youth are interested or already engaged in advocating for change, sharing their perspectives, holding governments accountable, and proposing innovative solutions. Empowering and uplifting young people is crucial in amplifying our global efforts to advance the SDGs.

WHAT IS AN SDG ALLIANCE (SDGA)?

An SDGA is any student-led group at a post-secondary institution that seeks to increase youth engagement in and implementation of the SDGs. Members of an SDG Alliance can include individuals and/or groups interested in advancing one or more of the SDGs. An SDGA:

- Recognizes the value of centering youth voices and experiences in the pursuit for just and sustainable futures, and views post-secondary campuses as potential sites for youth action, innovation, and collaboration in sustainability.
- Brings diverse people and aspects of sustainability together, rather than interconnected work being siloed and separated. This can accelerate action and facilitate collaboration with the campus community and administration!
- Leverages local, national and international efforts to progress the SDGs, with the goal of increasing impact through partnership and collaboration.

YOU MAY FIND THIS TOOLKIT USEFUL IF YOU:

- Are a student/youth, or are interested in supporting students/youth
- Have an interest in the SDGs and community engagement
- Are passionate about creating sustainable, equitable, and just futures
- Are looking for ways to engage with and spark change in your community

HOW DO I USE THIS TOOLKIT?

This toolkit is organized into seven chapters and two appendices that our team has identified as central to the process of creating and running an SDG Alliance. We encourage you to view each chapter as just one component of a circular, evolving process, as you may find yourself reviewing chapters out of order, or re-visiting past chapters as needed.

Each chapter is separated into the following sections:

- **Keys to Success:** key concepts, tips and advice
- **Potential Challenges:** obstacles or barriers you may come across
- **Get Inspired:** specific examples and case studies from our experiences at the University of British Columbia (UBC), University of Calgary (UCalgary), Université Laval (ULaval), and University of Waterloo (UWaterloo)
- **Reflection:** guiding questions for you and/or your team to complete on your own and discuss as a group as you move through the toolkit.

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Although the process for starting an SDG Alliance is presented linearly in this toolkit, building an SDG Alliance is a continuous process that behaves more like a cycle.



1. LAYING THE FOUNDATION

VALUES

The values of your Alliance are a set of core principles and beliefs that are critical in shaping the **work you do** and **how you do it**. Values operate at the individual, team, and organizational, by driving long-term goals and decision-making, and influencing how team members work together.

KEYS FOR SUCCESS

- Collaboration and team buy-in are central to identifying the values of your Alliance.
 - Consider using online tools such as mind maps, Google Jamboard, or word clouds to start this conversation and gather input from all relevant stakeholders.
 - Dedicated workshops and co-working time can also be useful in engaging your entire team in this creative process.
- Values are more than just aspirations - they should be integrated into your Alliance's day-to-day culture and practices. Getting buy-in from your team and partners early in this process will help ensure the promotion of these values in the long-term.
- Revisit your core values on a regular basis to ensure they are still relevant to the goals and activities of your Alliance.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Take your time with the value creation process! Organizational values can sometimes be difficult to articulate or reach mutual consensus on, particularly in the early stages of building an Alliance.
- Values can also develop organically and evolve over time, through trial-and-error as you learn from mistakes and grow as an organization.





GET INSPIRED

University of British Columbia: *Value creation at UBC's SDG Alliance has been very intentional from the start. Conversations and workshops around team priorities have helped identify what people bring to the table and what needs to be developed for the organization. Collaboration and critical analysis of the SDG framework are two dimensions of our organizational values.*

University of Calgary: *Value creation at UCalgary's SDGA took place through an organic process over the past three years. Our work was initially framed as student-led and student-serving, before finally settling on an established [values statement](#) that centers around being engaged, being committed to learning, and building community.*

REFLECTION

- 1 Write down a minimum of three core values that are important to your SDGA. Feel free to reference [this list from Brené Brown](#) for ideas.
- 2 How will these values influence the work of your SDGA?
- 3 How will these values influence how your team's working culture?

MISSION

The mission of your new Alliance is a clear and concise statement that describes the **overarching purpose and goals** of your organization, and lends direction, strategy, and consistency to your work.



KEYS FOR SUCCESS

- Develop your mission collaboratively, ensuring that the values and goals of your overall team and each individual member are reflected in the final product. These values and goals often arise out of in-depth conversations and brainstorming sessions.
- Regularly map the activities of your Alliance back to this mandate, to check for alignment and ensure they are contributing to your goals.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Over-saturation of similar initiatives can result in individual organizations working in silos and competing against one another, while also neglecting opportunities to share knowledge, resources, and capacity. When faced with this challenge, consider your context by:
 - Assessing your campus ecosystem by performing an environmental scan or a [SWOT analysis](#).
 - Rather than replicating the work of another group, think about how you can carve out your own niche or form a partnership with an existing group
- Developing a clear and meaningful mission statement can take time - and that is okay! Remember that the purpose of your Alliance may evolve over time in response to changes in your campus community.

GET INSPIRED

Université Laval: *The Alliance étudiante en développement durable de l'Université Laval aims to make the university community aware of the objectives of sustainable development through collaboration between students, associations and administration.*

University of Calgary: *The Sustainable Development Goals Alliance is a student-run organization that works to amplify youth voices and action on sustainable development through three guiding pillars of engagement: student engagement, community training, and regional advocacy.*



REFLECTION

- 1 What is your purpose? What makes you unique?
- 2 What gap are you trying to fill and how do you plan to fill it?
- 3 Conduct a SWOT analysis:
 - *Strengths:* What do you do well? What unique resources can you draw on?
 - *Weaknesses:* What can you improve on?
 - *Opportunities:* What opportunities are available to you?
 - *Threats:* What threats could harm you?

THEORY OF CHANGE

A Theory of Change (ToC) is a tool that Alliances can use to describe the **outcomes** you hope to see with your work and a **plan** for how you intend to achieve them. Creating a ToC can help your team develop a shared understanding of the Alliance's mission and how your planned activities contribute to these goals.



KEYS FOR SUCCESS

- Ensure that your ToC aligns with your organizational values and mission. For additional resources on creating a Theory of Change, check out this [comprehensive NPC guide](#) and [this article from the Stanford Social Innovation Review](#).
- Consider aligning part or all of your ToC with your campus' strategic goals for sustainability; shared goals and activities can serve as a stepping stone for future collaboration and support from your institution.
- The universal nature of the SDG framework means that Alliances can engage in a multitude of different activities to advance your goals. Here are some ideas to get started:
 - **Collaboration:** creating spaces and opportunities for campus stakeholders in sustainable development to engage in dialogue and collaboration with one another. This may include individual students and staff, student clubs, institutional offices, or other campus groups.
 - **Consulting:** supporting other groups on campus to advance their sustainability efforts through mentorship, advising, and resource-sharing. This could look like supporting students with grant applications, advising institutional bodies on integrating the SDGs, or acting as a liaison between staff and student initiatives.
 - **Education:** organizing events and developing resources to strengthen understanding, skills, and knowledge on sustainability and the SDGs.
 - **Advocacy:** amplifying youth voices and perspectives to institutional and community leaders to advocate for policy, funding, and social changes that reflect stronger commitments to sustainability and communities.
- *Capacity- and community-building* are two common themes that underlie many SDGA activities:
 - **Capacity-building** through an SDG Alliance occurs at multiple levels, with the underlying understanding that combining individual knowledge, skills, and experiences can amplify our collective capacity to advance the SDGs.
 - **Community-building** also occurs through an SDG Alliance, as like-minded individuals who share common goals and values gather through events, collaboration, or consulting. As a sustainability leader, consider how you can center these two themes in your work.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Avoid siloed work and replicating existing initiatives on campus by performing an environmental scan
- Be aware of your team's capacity; take note of existing connections, partnerships, and the interests and skills of your team, while also considering the feasibility and practicality of your SDGA's activities

GET INSPIRED

University of Waterloo:
The Impact Alliance [Terms of Reference](#) guides our work and how we operate as a team.

University of Calgary:
The SDGA [Organizational Guide](#) is intended to be a landing page for anyone joining our team or getting involved in our work.



Photo: UBC University Sustainability Initiative

REFLECTION

- 1 What are the long-term goals of your SDGA? What are the overall changes you want to see on your campus?
- 2 What are the intermediate outcomes or goals of your SDGA, that contribute to achieving your long-term goal(s)?
- 3 What are the activities of your SDGA? How do these contribute to your intermediate and long-term goals?
- 4 How does your theory of change align with the values and mission of your Alliance? Of your campus?



2. STRUCTURING YOUR ALLIANCE

CREATING AN SDGA

KEYS FOR SUCCESS

Formalizing your SDGA within your post-secondary institution or in the local community can help increase your legitimacy and opens up new opportunities for funding and partnership. There are many options for formalizing your Alliance; the specific approach you take can differ based on your campus context and what is most practical for your team.

Some options include:

- Registering as a student club through your campus students' association (or similar body)
- Forming an institutional partnership with your campus' sustainability or development offices
- Pursuing an external partnership with community organizations, such as through the [national SDSN Youth program](#)



Photo: Yeshi Matsuzaki

LEADERSHIP TEAM

KEYS FOR SUCCESS

Tackling the pressing problems in sustainability requires **interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches** grounded in strong team dynamics. An effective leadership team structure brings together individuals with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences to progress towards shared goals.

When forming your team, it is important to develop hiring practices and a team culture that prioritizes equity, diversity, and justice. Working to ensure that “no one is left behind” requires us to interrogate and counteract systems that drive inequity and harm for marginalized communities.

Consider how your team will center equity and justice in your work by:

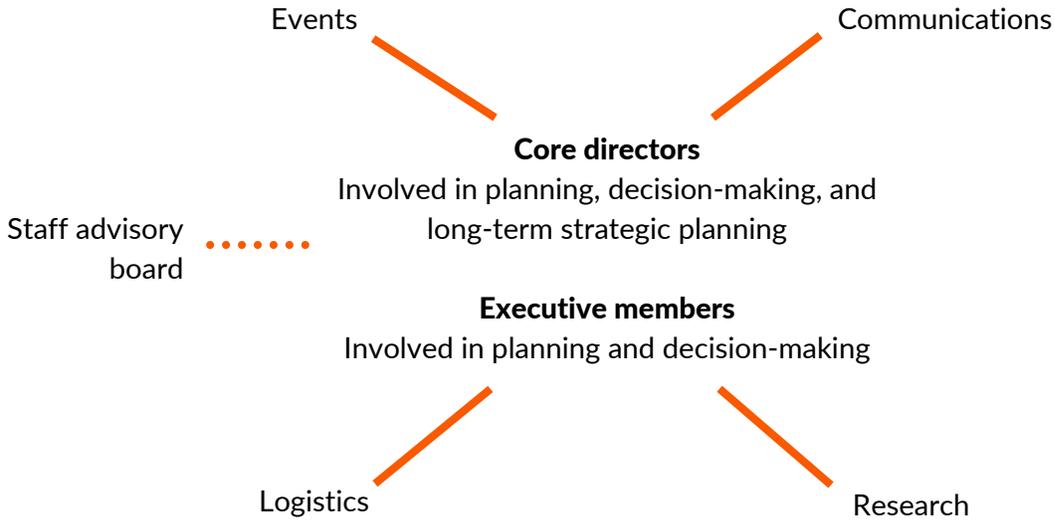
- Committing to hiring practices that prioritize diverse backgrounds and experiences, particularly those from underrepresented groups
- Researching and building internal capacity for anti-oppressive approaches to your work
- Creating team policies that promote a culture of safety, transparency, and accountability
- Creating mechanisms for engaging respectfully with the communities you serve and operate in
- Committing to continuous self-reflection, learning and unlearning

There are two main approaches to structuring your team, flat and hierarchical.

	Flat or Decentralized	Hierarchical
Definition	A flat structure has a horizontal chain of command, where power and decision-making are shared equally within the team.	A hierarchical structure has a vertical chain of command, where team members report to senior members, who are involved in decision-making.
Pros	<p>Shared decision-making allows for the incorporation of diverse perspectives, and greater team collaboration and transparency</p> <p>Shared responsibility allows for greater personal commitment and accountability from team members</p> <p>A flat structure can make your SDGA more accessible and welcoming to the greater community</p>	<p>It can be easier to create niche positions where members can specialize in a specific role</p> <p>Team members can more easily receive direction, guidance and supervision</p> <p>There is a clear sense of organization and responsibility</p>
Cons	<p>Flat structures can sometimes lead to micromanagement or delays in decision-making</p> <p>Team members often contribute to multiple projects and tasks, so it can be hard for individuals to specialize in a specific role</p>	<p>Team members may lack freedom in their work and decision-making</p> <p>Hierarchical structures can be prone to bureaucracy, siloed work, and a lack of collaboration across roles/teams</p>

GET INSPIRED

University of British Columbia: flat leadership structure



University of Calgary: hierarchical leadership structure

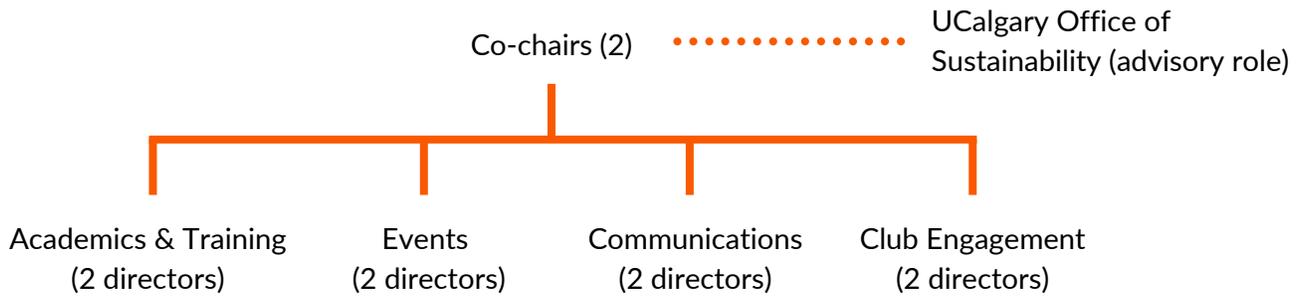


Photo: Pierre-Antoine-Décosteaux



Photo: Stefan Kurbotfinski



3. CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS

TEAM DYNAMICS

Building strong relationships within your team will be the cornerstone of your work, strategies, and success as a group. Making the effort to connect with your teammates on both a personal and professional level can help to enhance everyone's experience in your Alliance.

KEYS FOR SUCCESS

- Create a set of [community guidelines](#) or a [team contract](#) that describe how your team will engage with one another. These guidelines can include information about the individual values of each member, and how they would like to be addressed in conflict.
- Understanding the motivations of individual team members can help foster strong working relationships. Creating an honest and shame-free environment around personal goals can help your team acknowledge diversity and stay motivated.
- **Make respect the standard for your team.** It is crucial to maintain respect for others, even amidst disagreements and conflicts, to ensure that everyone is respected, included, heard, and valued.
- Don't be afraid to have some fun! Here are some ideas on how you can foster strong relationships within your team:
 - Incorporate check-in questions at meetings to get to know your teammates better
 - Set aside time before/after meetings to catch up as a team and bond.
 - Plan regular social events (e.g. dinner and movie, cooking/baking days, picnics, virtual socials, etc.).
 - Hold an informal year-end "awards ceremony" to celebrate your team's successes and recognize the contributions of each member.

What were the highs and lows of your week?

If you were a wrestler, what would your entrance song be?

What is an ordinary thing that brings you joy?

What is your go-to caffeinated beverage of choice?

What is your favourite brunch item?

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Finding a time and place for social events outside of regular meetings can be challenging. Consider meeting virtually to reduce commute times and still create intentional spaces for connection
- Conflict is a natural and often inevitable part of team formation. Recognizing this, discuss how your team would like to manage conflict when it arises.
 - When addressing conflict, be mindful that individuals often share common goals and aspirations but disagree on the ways in which to accomplish them.
 - Some useful strategies for conflict resolution include: finding common ground, avoiding assumptions, and listening to learn about different perspectives.
 - It can be useful to schedule conflict management time to bring the team back on track and avoid potential setbacks down the road.
 - For additional resources on conflict resolution, check out these blog posts from [Brené Brown, Forbes](#), and [Psychology Today](#).

GET INSPIRED

University of British Columbia: *Being a newly-formed Alliance during the COVID-19 pandemic, all our meetings have been conducted virtually. Thus, our biggest challenge was feeling connected to the entire team. However, once community guidelines were established with input from every team member, we had a stronger understanding of everyone's values, goals, and how they would like to be treated. Moreover, planning fun check-in questions and regular social events (online Scribblio or card games!) helped our team feel more connected and unified. Our team also addresses conflict in the following ways:*

- Group Feedback Sessions where each member of our team identifies the strengths and weaknesses of a proposed idea, project, or current team dynamics. Participants are given a set amount of time to discuss their perspectives and key points are noted. These sessions help our members to understand the motivations of their peers, and the experiences that inform their preferences.
- Conflict Transformation Sessions where participants are given time to defend a point of view that runs contrary to their own. This enables participants to appreciate opposing perspectives and to discover potential benefits or detriments of an approach that they may have missed.



REFLECTION

- 1 For each member of your team: What do you want to accomplish with your involvement in the Alliance? What is this project bringing to your personal or professional life?
- 2 How will you ensure your team is a respectful and culturally safe environment for all?
- 3 How do you plan to hold space for marginalized/oppressed identities, perspectives and experiences?
- 4 How do you plan on addressing conflict?

FORMING PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are a powerful tool for your Alliance and can amplify your work by providing support and funding, increasing awareness of your SDG Alliance in the community, and creating new opportunities for **learning, collaboration, and the sharing of best practices.**

A successful partnership involves two or more parties with mutually beneficial goals and shared values. Look for partners:

On campus, such as student groups, institutional departments/offices, and individual faculty and staff members.

An institutional partnership can be particularly beneficial, by providing access to additional resources, funding, and contacts

Off-campus, such as speakers, employers, non-profit organizations and businesses that operate in the broader community. Examples of organizations currently working in the SDG space include: Reimagine17, [SDSN Canada](#), the [International Institute for Sustainable Development](#), [Alliance 2030](#), [Accélérez 2030](#), the Government of Canada SDG Unit, and the [Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation](#).

KEYS FOR SUCCESS

- Identify your goals for collaboration as a team by discussing what you hope to put in and get out of the partnership.
- Work with others to create a map of the existing actors in sustainability and potential partners on your campus to get a feel for the collaboration landscape. An example of this is the [BCCIC Movement Map](#).
- Start by reaching out to existing connections within your team, either in-person, over email, or through social media. Interacting with social media posts from other student groups or sustainability organizations is a great way to start conversations!
- **Be intentional** about forming relationships by creating informal and formal opportunities for relationship-building, such as:
 - Hosting a casual meet-and-greet or a networking event
 - Scheduling one-on-one meetings with clubs and student associations
 - Collaborating with other campus groups to co-plan an event or promote one another's initiatives
 - Creating a digital community for students and groups to interact and share opportunities, such as a Facebook group or Discord channel
- **Be intentional** about maintaining partnerships by promoting open communication and scheduling regular check-ins. Regular communication is key in ensuring both partners are aware of one another's goals and activities and can also facilitate new opportunities for collaboration.



Photo: Emma Brown

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Finding partners can be challenging. When approaching a new collaboration, consider what you are bringing to the partnership, and how you can support the goals of others.
- By limiting yourself to groups advancing only one aspect of sustainability, you may find yourself constantly collaborating with the same partners (and same audiences). Consider adding [transdisciplinary partnerships](#) to tap into new approaches to sustainability and reach new audiences.



GET INSPIRED

University of Calgary: We have a formal partnership with the Office of Sustainability on our campus, which was developed over a period of several months when we collaborated with their staff members on an event and realized we shared common goals and values. Through this relationship, we have been able to receive annual funding, new contacts, access to event space, and valuable mentorship and advice.

University of Waterloo: During our GooseChase scavenger hunt, we partnered with over 35 campus clubs, offices, and services. This was the first time our university came together in this capacity on sustainability. These partnerships were formed through a combination of outreach to our Alliance's networks and additional contacts from existing partners. This event showed that when groups come together, large positive impacts can be made no matter the contribution size.

Université Laval: We see our Alliance as a conglomerate of both individual students and student groups. Every single student is considered a member of the Alliance, with the Alliance being there to support and promote the work of its members and help facilitate collaboration. The large number of student organizations involved in the Alliance has also helped us gain credibility among administration.

REFLECTION

- 1 What do you hope to achieve through collaboration and partnership?
- 2 What can your SDG Alliance offer to potential partners?
- 3 Brainstorm 3 potential partners located within your campus community
- 4 Brainstorm 3 potential partners located outside of your immediate campus



Photo: Kenneth Fung

Continuation photo credit



4. PROGRAMMING

EVENTS

Events are a popular engagement tool used by student groups to raise awareness, share information, generate dialogue, or mobilize action. They are also a great way of building momentum in the early stages of your Alliance. The [attached table](#) outlines a number of different events previously organized by SDG Alliances.

The event planning process involves developing content, organizing logistics, promoting the event, and evaluating its outcomes. Below are some of the key steps in this process:

- 1 Organize your team:** Clarify team expectations, goals, roles, and how you plan to keep each other accountable. Use timelines, checklists, Gantt charts or other organizational tools to map out the event planning process.
- 2 Select a date** that is convenient for your target audience (i.e. avoid exam periods for a student event) and a **venue** that is accessible and convenient.
- 3 Reach out to speakers, collaborators, and funders:** Use email templates to streamline your outreach. If you are approaching partners for funding or in-kind donations, consider creating a sponsorship package as well.
 - Start early! Larger organizations and speakers often require several months' notice for sponsorships or speaking engagements.
- 4 Promote the event:** Create a communication strategy that includes a calendar for posting, content ideas, email templates, and branding guidelines. There are many ways to promote an event, including social media, email campaigns, newsletters, or your institution's website.
 - For social media, we recommend promoting events through Instagram and Facebook. Other platforms to consider include Twitter, LinkedIn, and Snapchat. If your budget allows, consider paying for targeted ads to increase your online engagement.
 - Reach out to partners to see if they would be willing to share your event on their website, social media, or with their network.
- 5 Organize logistics:** Organize catering, volunteers, photography/videography and venue set-up. Be mindful of accessibility needs and consider how you can best create a welcoming and comfortable event space for both speakers and attendees.
 - Create an event rundown for the day-of, that outlines specific tasks and responsibilities for each member of your team
 - Event planning can be unpredictable, so it is important to remain flexible and create contingency plans

KEYS FOR SUCCESS

- Creating a just and sustainable world requires moving beyond words to work towards mobilizing action and implementing change. When planning events, consider how you can go beyond simply sharing information, and instead equip attendees with the skills and tools required to change their behaviour or implement action.
 - For example, if the goal of your event is to encourage attendees to adopt proper waste disposal practices, a panel discussion featuring experts may be less effective than a series of hands-on waste identification and sorting workshops.
- Ensure that the event itself reflects **best practices for environmental and social sustainability**. This could involve:
 - Starting the day with a meaningful land acknowledgement
 - Striving for diversity and inclusivity among speakers
 - Embedding anti-racist and anti-colonial practice into the event planning process
 - Minimizing waste and environment impact from food, paper, energy use, and transportation

GET INSPIRED

University of Waterloo

The **GooseChase**, a week-long scavenger hunt at the University of Waterloo, gathered 400 students, faculty and staff to engage in sustainability activities. The hunt featured 35 on-campus clubs and services, hosting online and offline activities to enhance collaboration and awareness for sustainability and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Each club and service was aligned with a Sustainable Development Goal to showcase their on-going work to advance development at the university. Employees, staff and students from all faculties on campus competed for a grand prize worth \$600.



Photo: Yoshi Matsuzaki

In 2019, the Impact Alliance hosted the first **Global Solutions Conference** at the University of Waterloo. The [concept note](#) and [itinerary](#) for the conference can be found in the attached links.

University of Calgary

The **SDG Summit** is an annual training conference hosted by the SDGA and the Office of Sustainability in the Fall semester that engages youth on topics surrounding sustainable development and the SDGs through opportunities for learning, discussion, and networking. Each year, we have a different theme that we convey through our workshops, panel discussion, synthesis activity and keynote. The past three Summits have incorporated interactive programming that uses critical discussion, case studies, and action-oriented learning to strengthen student skills in advocacy, innovative thinking, leadership, and self-efficacy. Some of our key learnings include:

- Brainstorm the message and theme you want to convey early on and continue building your programming after you have a clear idea of what it is you want people to learn.
- Subcommittees are crucial in dividing up team work effectively. It's important to have a good understanding of the roles for each team so work can be divided accordingly.
- Highlighting voices from different groups will bring forward new insights and ideas that are integral for creating an inclusive space.
- Develop a design inspiration board to give you a clear picture of how you want to portray the theme through social media and promotional activities
- Reach out to different media partners who can help spread the word through their own contacts

We recently introduced a new program in 2020 called **SLIP (Sustainability Leadership Innovation Program)** which is a leadership development program that pairs students with a mentor to create and execute SDG-related projects on-campus and within the community. With a focus on skill development, this new program aims to empower students to become sustainability leaders, while supporting action-oriented initiatives that have a meaningful and long-term impact locally and/or globally.

REFLECTION

- 1 What is your event? What is its purpose?
- 2 Who is part of your event planning team and what are their roles?
- 3 Who do you need to connect with to make this event successful?
- 4 How will you let people know about your event?
- 5 How will you ensure your event is sustainable?



Photo: Yoshi Matsuzaki

ADVOCACY

Students and youth are uniquely positioned to advocate for policy and practice changes that advance the SDGs on campus and in the community. Student-led advocacy that centers youth experiences and voices can have a significant and tangible impact, and often takes the form of **direct policy action**, **grassroots organizing**, or **social disruption** to elicit change.



KEYS FOR SUCCESS

- Do research to understand the political structure within your institution. For example, many campuses have student governance groups which regulate student organizations. To implement changes involving student groups on campus, in this scenario you would need to reach out and build partnerships with your student government to advocate for these changes.
- There is strength in numbers – build support for your advocacy initiatives by developing relationships with other student organizations, seeking out opportunities for collaboration, and creating an organic and engaged social media following
- Be proactive by reaching out to individuals and groups that have decision making power
- Establish partnerships within your institution (e.g. with a sustainability office) to lend credibility and institutional backing to your advocacy work



Photo: Raiza Vasquez



POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- All post-secondary institutions will have different political structures and you will need to adapt to the framework that has been laid out.
- Communication with student government and other institutional offices can be challenging, which is why it's important to develop healthy relationships with these offices early on.
- Don't be discouraged if this work takes time - advocacy is a long-term endeavour that, while slow at times, can yield tangible action and systems-level change



GET INSPIRED

Examples of possible advocacy initiatives include:

- Conducting a campus survey or focus groups on student attitudes towards sustainability/SDGs
- Campaigning for better waste management practices, such as removing single-use plastics from the dining hall or introducing a compost program in residence
- Communicating student concerns to senior leadership through letter-writing, petitions, or town halls
- Calling for greater institutional commitments to sustainability, such as through adoption of the SDG framework, creation of a sustainability strategy, or divestment from fossil fuels
- Advocating for change in your surrounding community - check out [this guide](#) on climate action advocacy at the municipal level and [this list](#) of regional advocacy resources created by Youth Climate Lab

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Below, we have listed additional examples of SDG Alliance projects and ideas:

- Taking on a supportive role by distributing funding or providing consulting services, such as assisting students with writing funding applications or advising on sustainable event practices.
- Facilitating connections on campus by bringing together individuals and groups to collaborate collaboration, and amplifying/promoting other student-led projects and events.
- Generating and sharing knowledge on the SDGs, by developing workshops, coordinating awareness campaigns, conducting research, or creating a resource or toolkit. We recommend engaging with students and faculty at events to find out what people are interested in learning about.

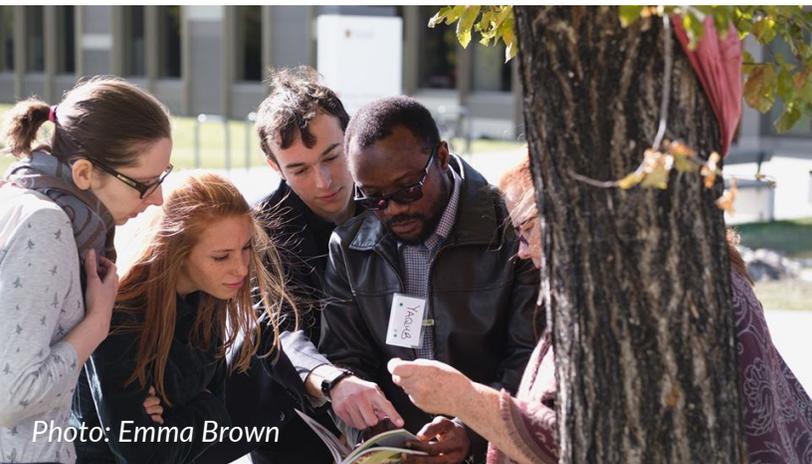


Photo: Emma Brown



GET INSPIRED

University of Calgary: *Our Alliance works closely with student clubs to support them with grant applications and sustainability funding from our university. We often advise on how to make events and programming more sustainable and connect students with the right resources to make that a reality.*



5. FINANCES

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

There are many different funding opportunities available to support youth-led initiatives. We recommend doing some research to identify the grants you would like to apply for, their eligibility criteria, and application deadlines. While specific grants will vary based on your institution and geographic location, below we have summarized the main types and sources of funding.

TYPES OF FUNDING

Project-based (grant) funding: a one-time sum intended to fund a specific project or event over a set timeline. Upon receiving the funding, you may have certain conditions on spending (e.g. money cannot be used to pay salaries) or reporting requirements to the funder (e.g. submission of a final report). Grants are generally the most common funding source for youth-led initiatives and events.

Operational funding: a fixed sum that is disbursed on a regular basis (e.g. annually) to support an organization's general activities or goals. Operational funding tends to have fewer restrictions on spending but will generally still have reporting requirements. This type of funding is more challenging to obtain but benefits from greater long-term stability.

Sponsorships and donations: consider reaching out to local businesses, community organizations, and campus offices to support your SDG Alliance through sponsorships or non-monetary contributions. Examples include matching donations for a fundraiser, reducing/waiving the cost of catering or venue rental, providing services at a reduced cost, or donating gift cards and prizes.



Photo: Natalie Youssef

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

CAMPUS

- **Students' associations** may offer grants for student groups and activities
- **Campus grants** targeting themes such as sustainability, student leadership, innovation or improving the campus community.
 - [University of Calgary Quality Money program](#)
 - [University of Waterloo Sustainability Action Fund](#)
- **Individual offices** on campus may run their own grant programs or have part of their budget allocated to supporting students. Consider reaching out to your campus' sustainability, international, leadership, or community engagement offices - these are great opportunities to form partnerships and pursue project-based and/or operational funding.
 - [UBC Centre for Community-Engaged Learning](#).
- Participate in **competitions and hackathons** hosted by your institution

COMMUNITY

- Search online and on social media for **community development organizations, foundations, and professional associations** who offer funding for youth-led projects or calls for special event proposals
 - [CASID Call for Proposals](#) for International Development Week Events
 - [United Nations Associations in Canada](#) offer many different types of grants and employment opportunities for youth-led projects
- Funding opportunities through the [Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation](#)

GOVERNMENT

- Look for grant opportunities at the **municipal, provincial, and federal** level
 - Explore the Canada Service Corps [TakingItGlobal #RisingYouth program](#), which is a highly accessible program for youth funding
 - Government of Canada [Sustainable Development Goals Funding Program](#) offers large-scale funding (up to \$100,000) for projects



Photo: Yoshi Matsuzaki

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Funding can be a tricky topic to find information on. We recommend speaking to partners, mentors, campus staff, and student leaders about potential funding opportunities and application tips. They may know of upcoming grants and can point you in the right direction! Also check out institutional newsletters or mailing list updates.
- Some grants require reference letters or support from a staff or faculty member. If this is the case, reach out to these individuals early and involve them in the project planning and application writing process.

WRITING A WINNING GRANT APPLICATION

KEYS FOR SUCCESS

- Before starting the application, read the eligibility criteria to ensure your project qualifies. Are there specific conditions tied to the funding? Do you need an organizational affiliation to apply?
- Plan ahead to ensure you have enough time to complete the application, particularly if the grant requires supplementary materials or pre-approvals. Grant writing is an iterative process - continuous revision to best convey your ideas is essential!
- Carefully review the grant selection criteria and clearly explain how your proposal fulfills them. How does your project align with the strategic priorities and values of the funding program and/or funding organization?
- Grant writing is persuasive writing - you have to sell the reader on your proposed idea/project. Use future-oriented language and tangible descriptions of outcomes to convey your passion, enthusiasm, and the potential impact of this work.
- Be concise, specific, and realistic. Avoid using technical language and wordiness that may make your application harder to review, as grant competitions often receive many applications. Instead, focus on conveying the project's feasibility and potential.
- Check out the following grant writing resources [here](#) and [here](#).

BUDGET MANAGEMENT

5 Tips for Effective Budget Management

- 1** Use spreadsheet software to manage your grant applications, display your entire budget, and track funding from all sources. An example spreadsheet is available [here](#).
- 2** Calculate taxes and account for all possible hidden fees and service charges prior to applying for grants. Look for hidden fees or service charges noted in the small print—these may add up to significant sums for large-scale events.
- 3** If possible, set aside approximately 10% of your funding for emergencies/last minute developments. Additional funds enable you to have peace of mind and act quickly to fix potential mistakes.
- 4** Update your budget sheet immediately following any expenses or funding. If you have a large team, inconsistencies may emerge in your budgeting if changes are not represented right away. This is particularly important for the management of large events with many small expenses.
- 5** Understand the different types of funding sources (see section on *Funding Opportunities*). Note that some grants have limits on specific expenditures (e.g. equipment costs, overhead costs, honorariums)



Photo: Emma Brown



Photo: Pierre-Antoine Descôteaux



6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

MONITORING & EVALUATION

Monitoring helps your team understand whether your Alliance's activities, inputs, and outputs are progressing as planned and on schedule.

Evaluation helps your team assess the extent to which your work is meeting the goals and objectives of your Alliance.

By engaging in monitoring and evaluation with your SDG Alliance, you can identify strengths and weaknesses, quantify your impact, share your work with the community, and map your work back to your Theory of Change. Monitoring and evaluation are also important when submitting grant and funding proposals (as evidence of your past impact) and may be required when reporting to existing funders and partners.

Examples of monitoring and evaluation practices

- Administering surveys during and after an event
- Conducting surveys, interviews, or focus groups with students, staff, or community members who have engaged with your Alliance
- Engaging in informal conversations with Alliance members or event attendees
- Building individual and group reflection into your team meetings
- Scheduling regular, informal check-ins with members of your team
- Conducting a team debrief session following a major event or project
- Tracking metrics for student engagement (e.g. number of event attendees), social media engagement (e.g. number of new followers), recognition (e.g. awards, funding received), or other outputs (e.g. publications, policy changes)
- Collecting photos, videos, testimonials, and quotes
- Annual reporting

This [University of Calgary](#) [toolkit](#) provides an in-depth, comprehensive guide to program evaluation.



KEYS FOR SUCCESS

- Start early! While evaluation is often thought of as something that takes place after an event, initiative, or project, it can be incorporated right from the beginning at project conception, all the way through to planning, implementation, and completion.
- Set aside time every two weeks or so to record key conversations, activities, and social media engagements. Creating a consistent “data culture” that records the impact of your Alliance can go a long way in terms of securing future funding.
- Create a formal report at the end of every event or project. This may include a short summary of the event, engagement numbers, participant survey responses, team feedback, key strengths and areas of improvement, and photos/quotes.
- Whenever possible, keep your survey questions, metrics, and reporting templates consistent. This will allow you to compare outcomes more easily from year to year.



Photo: Kenneth Fung



POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Monitoring and evaluation can be time consuming - while some methods require long reports and complicated research protocols, simpler methods such as event surveys and regular team reflections are easier to organize, and similarly effective in obtaining feedback on your organization’s work.
- Avoid low response rates or data that is not useful by:
 - Being intentional about what you are evaluating and why you are evaluating
 - Designing your surveys, interviews, and reflections to be simple and easy to complete. Too many open-ended questions can create fatigue for the respondent, while Likert-scale/multiple choice questions are easier to answer and usually more familiar to respondents - aim for a balance of both!
 - Consulting with advisors, funders, or other resources about best practices and any monitoring/evaluation requirements for your student organization.



GET INSPIRED

University of British Columbia: *Our team engages with stakeholder committees to incorporate new perspectives and ideas and to ensure we remain accountable to the greater campus community. A faculty/staff advisory committee is consulted on the Alliance's greater values and directions, while a student advisory committee is convened monthly for any students who are interested in suggesting ideas for the group.*

University of Calgary: *We collect attendee surveys, team reflections, and engagement metrics to assess the strengths, weaknesses, and overall impact of our major initiatives. This information is compiled into an annual report that is shared with the Office of Sustainability, our Alliance's main funder and institutional partner. Currently, we are also conducting a qualitative research study using interviews and digital surveys to explore the impact of the SDG Alliance over the past three years.*



Photo: Natalie Youssef



Photo: Ludovic Gauthier

REFLECTION

- 1 Where do you see monitoring and evaluation fitting into your SDG Alliance?
- 2 How can you use monitoring and evaluation to grow your SDG Alliance?



7. PASSING THE TORCH

PASSING THE TORCH

Passing the torch, or **succession planning**, is an ongoing process that includes identifying, hiring, and onboarding new student leaders to take over your Alliance. Succession planning is key to the long-term sustainability of your organization, by ensuring that executive transitions are seamless, knowledge is passed on, and momentum is sustained as your organization grows and evolves.

SUCCESSION PLANNING ROADMAP

1 - PLANNING

Initiate the transition conversation early, by asking current team members about their plans for the following year. This can be accomplished through a simple email or conversation, an “Intent to Return” form, or a more formal check-in meeting with each member.

When determining when to run recruitment cycles for your team:

- Consider the capacity and time commitment of your team during the year; pick a period of time where your team has enough capacity to help with the hiring and onboarding process
- Usually, the end of the academic year (March-April) is a good time to recruit new executives. The beginning of the academic year (September) or the beginning of the second semester (January) can also work well.
- Recruiting team members for a fixed term (e.g. 1 academic year) can help ground commitment

2 - RECRUITMENT

When seeking to fill a new position:

- Look **internally**, within your existing team, for students who have the interest, experience, and/or capacity to “step-up” to a new position. Specific students in your organization can also be mentored over a period of a few months to a year to take on a larger leadership role.
- Look **externally**, within your campus community for students who can infuse your organization with new perspectives. During the recruitment process, take the time to ensure new folks are not only qualified, but also aligned with the values, goals, and team dynamics of your organization.



3 - TRANSITION

Transition/onboarding is the period of time (ranging from a week to several months) where a new hire is integrated into the team.

- Hosting an onboarding session or orientation with new recruits helps to ensure they are oriented to their role and the larger team.
- Compile documents and resources containing important information about your organization. These documents should be accessible to all team members (e.g. on a shared drive) and can be passed down to new recruits to ensure knowledge is carried forward into the new team.
- Make it fun! Bringing new faces onto a team provides great team-building and relationship-building opportunities. Bring snacks and lots of icebreakers!
- The onboarding process is also an opportunity for the entire team to revisit their individual positions and set goals for the upcoming year.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- **Team attrition** (loss of team members, where vacant positions are not filled) can result in a slowing of momentum between teams. Possible reasons for this include:
 - New executives are underprepared for their roles, as a result of rushed or inadequate transition between teams.
 - Poor fit between the new hire and their position or the organization itself
 - High rates of turnover in a single year, when a large number of executives leave and the incoming team is composed primarily of individuals who are new to the organization
 - The organization no longer meets a need within the campus community
- Some of these challenges can be mitigated by hiring students from diverse programs and years of study. This avoids the scenario where a significant portion of members graduate and leave the organization at the same time.
- A diverse leadership team will often experience lower and more consistent rates of turnover. This creates a supportive environment where new hires are able to be adequately mentored and coached by current leaders.

GET INSPIRED

University of Calgary: *We design our application and interview questions to determine whether candidates are qualified for the position they are applying, passionate about sustainability and/or the SDGs, and resonate with the Alliance's overall values and goals. During onboarding, new hires attend an orientation session, work one-on-one with the outgoing executives, and review a series of "Living Documents", which provide context to the history, values, and current work of the SDGA. "Living Documents" are updated annually by the executive team.*



APPENDIX A: ENGAGING IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

APPENDIX A:

ENGAGING IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically shifted the landscape for student engagement, with the majority of classes, events, and workshops now taking place online. Despite the challenges presented by virtual spaces, this shift also presents new opportunities for implementing action and continuing conversations on the SDGs.

KEYS FOR SUCCESS

- Instead of seeing a virtual event as a substitute for an in-person event, consider how a virtual event is **an event on its own**, and the ways in which technology can be used to enhance or transform the event experience
- Use engagement features such as icebreakers, whiteboards, chat, polls, Q&A periods and breakout rooms to ensure everyone can contribute to the conversation. These features can help accommodate different learning styles and deepen attendee engagement with the subject matter.
- Take advantage of social media to reach a broader online audience.
- Check out Appendix B for a list of online tools for collaboration, project management, and virtual events.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Technology can present significant challenges when hosting virtual events. While technological issues are almost inevitable at any event, it can be helpful to conduct a technology run-through with your team and the event speakers to ensure that everyone is familiar with the platform.
- Due to online classes, many students may be attending events from different time zones. If possible, plan to run multiple sessions of an event or select a time that works across multiple time zones in order to accommodate as many students as possible.
- Screen fatigue is a key challenge that has emerged during the pandemic. To combat this, plan for wellness breaks during long events to allow attendees the opportunity to step away from their screens. Ideally, events should not be longer than 1 hour without a break.

- Common incentives for in-person events, such as free food and networking opportunities are more limited with virtual events. Some ideas to address this include providing gift cards for food delivery services and building in scheduled time for networking during your virtual event.



 **GET INSPIRED**

University of Calgary: *Our fourth annual SDG Summit was held online for the first time in 2020. Some of the key learnings we took away centered around the unique nature of online spaces and how we can engage participants virtually. One of the greatest opportunities with a virtual event is the ability to attract speakers and facilitators from around the world, whose costs to travel and attend an in-person event might otherwise have been prohibitively expensive. Some of the challenges we experienced were:*

- *Attrition between our registered participants and those who were actually attending the event.*
- *Logistical challenges with setting up breakout rooms on the Zoom platform and allowing for participants to move between breakout rooms. This had to be done manually and was time-consuming if participants wanted to attend other sessions or if they have not pre-selected their sessions.*
- *Instead of a full-day event, we could have hosted multiple, shorter events spread over a week. This would have been beneficial to allow for participants to reflect after each session and avoid the digital fatigue from engaging in a five-hour event.*

University of Waterloo: *This event used social media to produce an educational series on the SDGs, titled [“17 Weeks for 17 Goals”](#).*

University of British Columbia: *For our Tiny Tables events, where we engaged student perspectives on the implementation of the SDGs on campus, we decided to host two times for the same event. This allowed students in Vancouver, as well as those across the globe to add their voices to the conversation.*



APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

APPENDIX B:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & RECONCILIATION

- [Native Land Digital Tool](#)
- [Treaty 7 Indigenous Ally Toolkit, Calgary Foundation](#)
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#)

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE UNITED NATIONS

- [Movement Map, BCCIC](#)
- [SDSN Youth Program, SDSN Canada](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations](#)

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND VALUES

- [Creating Your Theory of Change, NPC](#)
- [Examples of Values, Brené Brown](#)
- [Examples of Values Statement, UCalgary SDGA](#)
- [How to Address Conflict at Work, Forbes](#)
- [Let's Rumble, Brené Brown](#)
- [Organizational Guide, UCalgary SDGA](#)
- [Six Theory of Change Pitfalls to Avoid, Stanford Social Innovation Review](#)
- [SWOT Analysis, Mind Tools](#)
- [Terms of Reference, UWaterloo Impact Alliance](#)
- [The Multi-Inter-Trans \(MIT-\) disciplinary criteria](#)
- [7 Consequences of Blaming Others for How We Manage Anger, Psychology Today](#)
- [Team Contract Template, Reimagine 17](#)

EVENT PLANNING AND ADVOCACY

- [Event Planning Checklist, UCalgary SDGA](#)
- [Examples of Event Concept Note, UWaterloo Impact Alliance](#)
- [Examples of Event Itinerary, UWaterloo Impact Alliance](#)
- [Examples of Events Table, ReImagine17](#)
- [Examples of Social Media Campaigns, UWaterloo Impact Alliance](#)
- [Infiltration Manual Asset Map, Youth Climate Lab](#)
- [Infiltration Manual, Youth Climate Lab](#)

FINANCE AND FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- [Best Practices in Grant Writing, For Youth](#)
- [CASID CCIC Regional Event Call for Proposals](#)
- [Example of Budget Management Spreadsheet, ReImagine17](#)
- [Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goals Funding Program](#)
- [TakingitGlobal #RisingYouth Grants](#)
- [United Nations Associations in Canada](#)
- [Writing Persuasive Proposals, ODU](#)

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- [Program Evaluation Toolkit, University of Calgary](#)

ONLINE TOOLS AND SOFTWARE

Online collaboration: Slack, Asana, Trello

Digital whiteboards: Google Jamboard, MURAL, Miro

Shared file storage: Google Drive, Dropbox, OneDrive

Videoconferencing: Zoom, WebEx, Skype, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet

Other:

- Canva (graphic design)
- HootSuite (social media management)
- Doodle (meeting scheduling)
- When2meet (meeting scheduling)
- Otter.ai (free transcription service)

WEBINARS AND OTHER RESOURCES

Recordings from the [Together | Ensemble 2020](#) conference which featured workshops facilitated by ReImagine17 focused on Event Planning, Advocacy, Partnerships, and Succession Planning.

The recordings from all of these sessions can be found [here](#) and the workshop report can be found [here](#).

