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The Youths' Projects Mahis

Youths' projects

The sense of inclusion created through the projects realized together with the youths is built on a strong base consisting of ideas, planning, and implementation. Projects realized with the support of a safe adult provide the youths pleasant free time activities, important experiences of success, peer support, and the time and presence of a caring adult. By completing projects, the youths also learn skills required in their studies and the working life in an appropriate and motivational manner.

An inclusive and functional project is based on the needs of the youths, and the youths themselves are active participants from the beginning. The youths will see the project as their own thing when they are given a strong role in it and have the opportunity to determine what to do, as well as when and how. The instructor supporting the activities of the youths is a reliable adult who provides assistance where necessary. The project activities are at their most re-warding when each youth is given a mutually agreed task that is worthwhile and appropriate for them. In determining the tasks, it is important to take note of the youth's specific skills and interests.

The project realized by the youths could result in a multitude of things, such as a summer café, demo recording for band, art exhibition, riding camp, moped workshop, social club, trip or recipe book. In addition to unforgettable experiences, it can also provide the youths the opportunity to earn money as well as a springboard to a study place or summer job.

› Projects are characterized by

- Uniqueness
- Specified starting and end dates
- Framework provided for the activities
- Clearly defined objectives
- Agreed methods, division of labor, and direction

Project proceeds in stages

The following is a list of the different stages of a project, which can be used to write down the things agreed together with the group at each stage to create a project plan. The things to be considered in the plan are presented in a dedicated section near the end of the chapter. (7/9)

1. Creating team spirit and rules

2. Setting a goal

3. Producing a project plan

4. Organization and division of labor

5. Realizing the project

6. Final evaluation

7. Concluding the project

8. Evaluating the project (continuous process)

9. Documentation (continuous process)

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Meaning of team spirit

Youths have a strong need to belong to a group. To ensure that the group becomes a community with a comfortable atmosphere, it is important to create opportunities for the creation and maintenance of good team spirit from the very first meeting. Familiarity and a safe atmosphere as well as mutual respect and acceptance are essential for building team spirit. These aspects can be reinforced and maintained during each meeting using various exercises.

> **The following things can be used to build good team spirit:**

- Positive shared humor creates a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.

- Providing supportive and appreciative feedback encourages activity.

- Placing yourself into someone else's position will help you understand different opinions and approaches.

- Learning and maintaining a functional and appreciative culture of discussion will also facilitate dispute resolution in a good atmosphere.

- Each member's behavior and actions have an equal impact on the atmosphere of the group.

It is essential for the creation of good team spirit to agree on common rules right at the beginning. Rules that have been created together will commit the members to the activity and help in the resolution of possible disagreements. The creation of rules will also reinforce the sense that the group and its membership is important to everyone. In addition to the rules, the group should also think of the consequences of someone breaking them in advance. The instructor should ensure that each situation is resolved in a congenial atmosphere.

Exercises that further grouping can be found in the **Exercise bank**.

> **Things to consider:**

- How to reinforce the team spirit through time spent together, exercises, shared experiences and rules?

- How can I ensure that everyone is able to influence the operation of the group?

- What do the youths want from the instructor?

- How can I instruct and encourage the youths to resolve problem situations?

- How do we acknowledge successes and deal with setbacks?

Objectives of the project

When the participants have started to become acquainted with each other and to form a group, you should start thinking about the objectives of your activity. What do you want to do and accomplish together?

The objectives will define what you do in the future and how you are going to do it. When you know what you are working toward, it will also be easier to choose the appropriate practical measures. Mutually agreed objectives are also used to ensure that each member knows what the group is doing and what for?

The instructor should reserve enough time to agree on the objectives and ensure that the objectives are sufficiently motivational without being unattainable. Achieving your objective will become easier if you also specify intermediate goals that support the ultimate objective.

In addition to the shared objectives of the group, each individual member's personal objectives, which the youth should be encouraged to think about, are also important.

› Things to consider:

- Is the main objective of the group realistic and attainable?

- Does the group have intermediate goals?

- How can the project provide experiences of success to the youths?

- What do I hope to gain from the group's operation?

Division of tasks and scheduling

After the objectives and rules have been specified, it is natural to agree on task assignment and scheduling.

Division of labor clarifies the members' roles and ensures that tasks are divided equally. This will also ensure that a suitable task is found for each person. In a group discussion, personal responsibilities are agreed for each member and the less-appealing tasks are also divided equally.

The instructor should make sure that each member has the opportunity to influence their tasks. You should encourage the youths to also take on things they might not be as familiar with and help them see the opportunities for development provided by such tasks. It is also important to point out during the division of labor that everyone is entitled to ask for and receive help where necessary. This will lower the threshold to take on more challenging duties.

The **CARE** mnemonic is useful when carrying out your tasks. You can go through the list with the group and keep it in sight for the duration of the project.

- **C**omplete my tasks on time, preferably as soon as it is possible.

- **A**ssist others and ask for help where necessary.

- **R**ely on the competence of others and provide encouraging feedback.

- **E**xpress my thoughts and explain to the others what I have accomplished.

You should create a schedule for completing the tasks, which will ensure that all the necessary work will be finished on time and in the right order. You should leave enough room in the schedule for any delays that might occur along the way, whether re-sulting from your actions or those of someone else. Right at the beginning, you should discuss how much time the members of the group can spend on the activity and take note of any vacations, trips or other reasons for absence with regard to the scheduling.

Maintaining the schedule will be easier if you arrange joint checkpoints along the way. This will allow you to prepare for congestion or other surprises, and you can even redistribute tasks if necessary.

› **To support scheduling:**

Careful planning

- Produce a plan with enough room
- Think about the things that will take a lot of time
- Agree on the division of tasks together

Organizing the tasks

- Write down each task you need to complete
- Separate larger tasks that take a lot of time from smaller, faster tasks
- Divide the tasks into categories based on their importance and urgency
- Think about the relative order of the tasks

Encouragement

- Remember to compliment yourselves and others
- Acknowledge things you have already accomplished
- Celebrate your achievements

Assistance

- Don't be afraid to provide and ask for help in time
- Ensure that everyone has an appropriate number of tasks

Finances

The subject of money will quite likely be raised as you begin to plan the operation. You should spend some time together to think which of the things you have planned could be done without money, how much money is needed for the rest, and where and how could you raise the necessary funds.

Your income and expenses are compiled into a budget, which should be as realistic as possible. It is advisable to estimate your income to be less than it is and your expenses to be higher than in reality. This will make it more likely that your funds are sufficient.

Smaller budgets can be recorded in any way your group considers appropriate, but for larger projects you can utilize Excel or some other spreadsheet program, for example.

› Expenses:

Write down the things that require money. Estimate each expense individually:

- What would be the cheapest method of implementation?

- Can you receive donations?

- Are discounts available?

- What can you do by yourselves?

- Is there something you don't actually need?

- Add up the expenses.

› Income:

- Write down your sources of income.

- Write down the amounts.

- Add up the income.

Deduct your expenses from your income. If the result is less than zero, consider how you could reduce your expenses or increase your income.

Evaluation

You should monitor and evaluate the operation of the group and the progress of the project both during the activities and at the end. It is important to talk to the youths regularly about how the shared activity feels to them, as well as their thoughts on the project and its progress. These talks will provide everyone the opportunity to consider their role as part of the group as well as the operation of the entire group.

When the activities end, a final evaluation carried out jointly will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to bring up important things they might have on their minds. This provides a controlled conclusion for the operation of the group without leaving anything hanging in mid-air. It also allows the group to celebrate their successes and learn from setbacks.

The instructor should use evaluation methods that encourage the youths to express their views and allow everyone to be heard equally. You should also ensure that the tone of the discussion remains appre-

ciative, provide your perspective as the instructor, and make sure that the activities end on a positive note. As the instructor, you should also talk with each youth individually about the things they have learned and how they could use those things in the future.

For the evaluation, you can use joint discussions, reflection in small groups or pairs, self-reflection, photo collages, blogs or learning diaries, for example. The key here is to provide enough time and space for the youths' personal thoughts and to think of necessary changes for the activity based on discussions.

Included below are some questions you could apply to your evaluations.

› Operation of the group

- Was the group able to follow the shared rules?
- What was the atmosphere like in the group?
- How successful was the division of labor?

- How well did the group consider everyone's opinions?
- How successfully did you help others and ask for help?
- How did you personally participate in the operation of the group and carry out my duties?

› Content of the operation

- How do you feel about the shared activity?
- What have we already accomplished?
- What has been done especially well?
- What should be done differently the next time?
- What am I enthusiastic about in the activities?

› In closing

- What was your favorite part of the project?
- What was your least favorite part of the project?

- How successful was the group during the different stages?
- How were you able to utilize everyone's competence?
- How were you able to resolve potential issues?
- What kind of feedback did your group receive?
- What would you do differently?
- Does the group have future plans?

› Self-evaluation

- How well did I achieve my objectives?
- What did I learn about myself and my operation?
- What did I learn from others and from their operation?
- How will I utilize what I have learned in the future?

Project plan

Your objectives, schedule, division of labor, and budget can be compiled into a written project plan especially with larger projects. The plan will facilitate management of the project.

The plan can be compiled into the agreed format on paper or digitally. You can use various planning tools, one of which is the highly adaptable Road Map where each task is written on a sticky note and placed on a timeline (see the image next page)

The extent and format of a project plan depends on the size of the project, but it should at least include the following things:
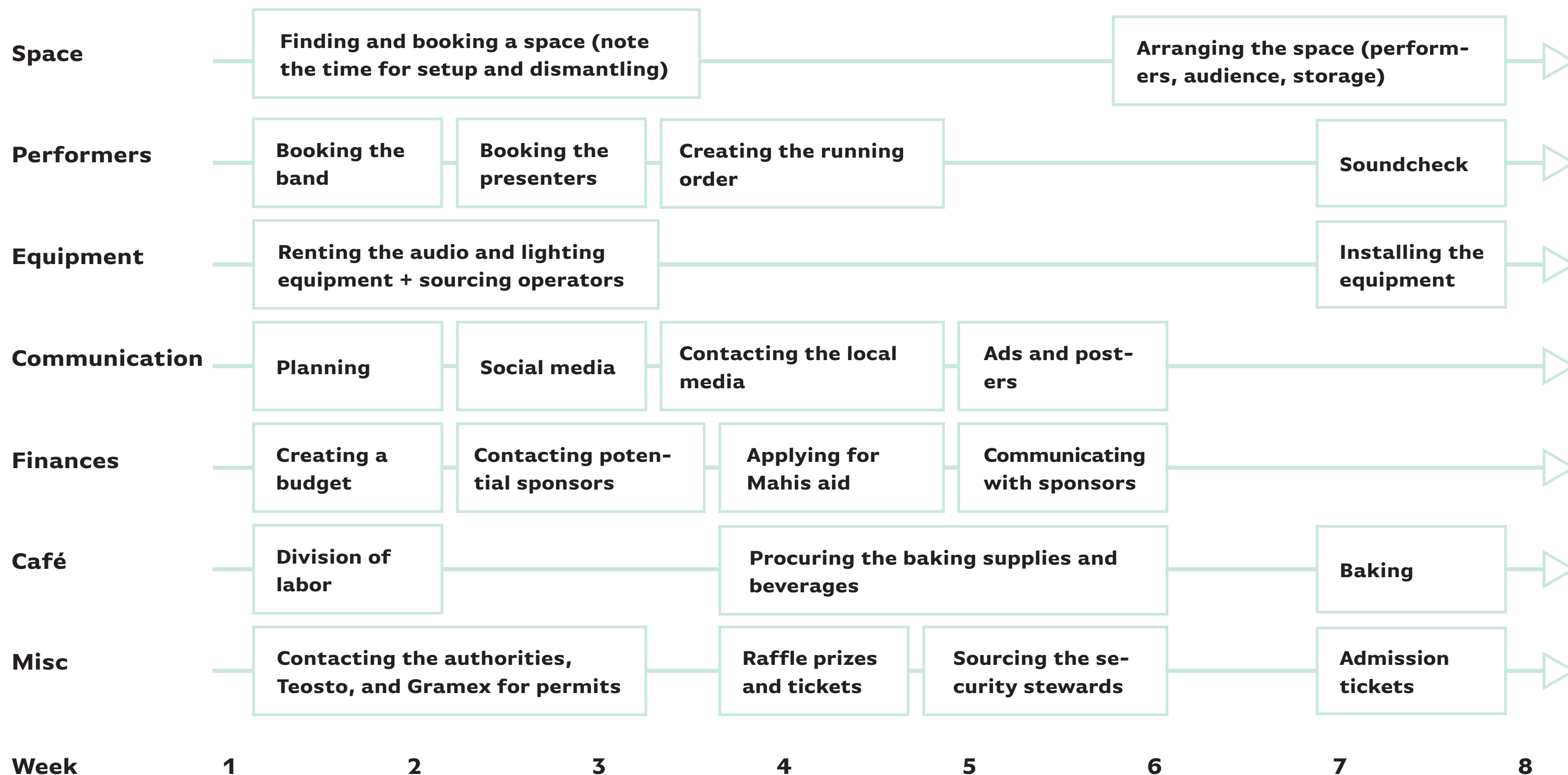
- Name of the project

- Objectives (what do you want to accomplish)

- Target audience (who is the project's activity aimed at)

- Realizers (the members of the group and possible partners)

- Things to do and the schedule for carrying them out (what to do, by who, and when)

- Budget (what do you need money for and how much, where can you raise funds, which things can be done without money)

- Evaluation (how will the progress of the operation and the sentiment of the group be monitored during the activity and at the end)

- Have all the stages of the project been considered?

- Is the schedule realistic and flexible enough?

- Is the budget realistic and do you need to raise funds?

- Have you decided on communication measures?

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TEMPLATE: ROAD MAP FOR A BAND EVENT

Space
Finding and booking a space (note the time for setup and dismantling)

Arranging the space (performers, audience, storage) →

Performers
Booking the band

Booking the presenters

Creating the running order

Soundcheck →

Equipment
Renting the audio and lighting equipment + sourcing operators

Installing the equipment →

Communication
Planning

Social media

Contacting the local media

Ads and posters →

Finances
Creating a budget

Contacting potential sponsors

Applying for Mahis aid

Communicating with sponsors →

Café
Division of labor

Procuring the baking supplies and beverages

Baking →

Misc
Contacting the authorities, Teosto, and Gramex for permits

Raffle prizes and tickets

Sourcing the security stewards

Admission tickets →

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

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Concluding the project

At the conclusion stage of a project, there are still a few things that need be taken care of. You should make sure that all practical matters have been carried out fully, the facilities have been cleaned, loaned items returned, financial matters closed, and partners thanked. Occasionally you may have to compile a final report for sponsors or partners, which can also function as a memento for the group of their accomplishments. In addition to text, you can also include photos taken during the project in the report, or even produce the report as a video or blog. And finally, it is time to celebrate the conclusion of the project with the team!

- What is the mood now that the activity is finished?
- Where did you succeed?
- What should have been done differently?
- When and how does the group want to celebrate completing their project?
- As the instructor, how can I ensure that each member is happy at the end of the project?
- Does the group want to continue together or go their separate ways?

› Checklist for concluding a project

- Make sure that all practical matters have been taken care of.
- Compile a final report for yourselves and your partners.
- Thank everyone involved.
- Reward yourself with a closing celebration.
- Things to consider regarding the final report:
  - Who is the report intended for?
  - Does it include all the essential information?
  - Is the report easy to read?

Instructor's checklist

› Team spirit

- Get everyone properly acquainted and ensure that your spirits remain high throughout the project
- Allow everyone to share their opinions equally
- Celebrate successes and unpack disappointments together

› Division of labor

- Divide tasks equally and based on individual interests
- Encourage trying new things

› Schedule

- Plan a schedule that is sufficiently realistic and flexible together
- React to possible changes in a timely manner

› Finances

- Carefully create a realistic budget
- Regularly monitor that the project remains within budget

› Communication

- Ensure that information reaches everyone and that everyone is equally informed and up to date
- Communicate your activities outside of the group as well

Photos: Mahis-groups & Nuorten Akatemia