Greetings!

You are holding in your hands (or reading online) the one curriculum book you need to run an outstanding leadership program for youth. Written for a **middle school or junior high audience**, with a little tweaking, most activities can be used with older elementary school or high school aged youth.

This curriculum was compiled and written by staff at the Metrocenter YMCA in Seattle, Washington, and draws on the best of decades of cumulative YMCA youth worker knowledge and activities, resources from partner organizations, and creative activities designed specifically for this guidebook. While adaptable to a wide range of leadership programs, activities are primarily geared at three premier YMCA of Greater Seattle programs:

- **YMCA Earth Service Corps (YESC)**: a national YMCA core teen program focused on leadership, service, cross-cultural awareness and environmental stewardship;
- **Girls of Promise or YGIRLS**: An out-of-school time program to support and nurture the health and well-being of middle school girls while building their leadership skills and commitment to service.
- **YBOYS or BOLD (Boys Outdoor Leadership Development)**: A club-based out-of-school time program that explores issues that face young men today and provides opportunities for leadership development and life skills.

Many people contributed to the development of this book. Particular recognition goes to AmeriCorps member Hilary Mayhew who masterfully withstood months of edits and formatting suggestions, and poured over the best curriculum resources we could find. Other primary contributors to this resource include current and former Metrocenter YMCA staff members: Alicia Blood, Dawne Wentworth, Colin O’Brien, Jessica Paul Werner, Tina Throm, Andrew Jay, Andrea Ives, and David Kelly-Hedrick.

We hope you enjoy this resource and find it invaluable to your programming!

The Metrocenter YMCA staff team
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**Cross Referenced Index**

This index will help you pick out the activities that make the most sense for your group goals and the space you have available.
HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

Contents are organized so that you can find what you’re looking for by just flipping through the book, or by taking more time to find the right activity for your group depending on what you hope to accomplish with them.

Organized by Chapter - This resource is divided into six chapters based on activity types

- Chapter 1: Bond - Icebreakers, team builders and trust activities that build a group.
- Chapter 2: Explore - Hands on activities – primarily to do outside.
- Chapter 3: Create - Creative activities that tap imagination and engage the left brain.
- Chapter 4: Learn - Activities that expand perspective and deepen learning.
- Chapter 5: Engage - Activities that empower youth to do something and make change.
- Chapter 6: Reflect - "We learn not from doing, but by thinking about what we do.”

Organized by Cross Tabs - Each activity hits on one or more of our core teen leadership program goals

- Leadership: Learn about your own leadership style and gain skills to lead
- Service: Develop an ethic of service and engage in Service Learning
- Cultural: Build skills and awareness about diversity, cultural competency and the world
- Environment: Learn about the environment and become an environmental steward
- Outdoor Ed: Explore nature and gain outdoor education skills
- Wellness: Become healthier in spirit, mind and body

NOTE: Many activities that appear in Bond and Reflect are applicable for any program regardless of goals, and therefore, all tabs are highlighted.

Organized by the activity logistics (gray bar) - Specifics about the time, size, goals, etc. of the activity

- Objective: The purpose or goal of this activity
- Setting: Ideal setting for this activity – inside or outside?
- Supplies: What supplies do you need? Handouts, materials, etc.
- Group Size: How many people can do this activity together?
- Prep Time: Do you need preparation time?
- Activity Time: How long will the activity take?
- Academic Subj: Does the activity relate to a core academic subject?
- Risk Level: For icebreakers (see BOND) and debriefs (see REFLECT), low to high risk

For quick reference, go to page 138 for the Curriculum Index.
FOUNDATIONS OF YMCA LEADERSHIP CLUBS
YMCA Earth Service Corps, YBOYS, YGIRLS, YMAD, YLEAD, Youth & Government, Achievers

YMCA Leadership Clubs are group experiences, guided by a caring adult advisor, which empower youth to develop and practice their leadership abilities. Young people engage in leadership activities and are empowered to become meaningfully involved in their YMCA and in their communities.

All Leadership Clubs are grounded in leadership and service, but the focus of the group may vary from club to club. Some clubs focus on the environment (such as the YMCA Earth Service Corps), while others focus on important youth issues in the community (such as YMAD). Clubs can also be organized around working with a specific population such as boys (YBOYS) or girls (YGIRLS).

Regardless of the club focus (or hook), all YMCA Teen Leadership Clubs:

✓ Have an adult advisor to provide guidance and resources to the students;
✓ Meet regularly (weekly, or at least twice per month over the course of a semester or a year);
✓ Intentionally develop skills and attributes in participants through activities and workshops;
✓ Follow a service learning model of identifying learning objectives, participating in meaningful service, and engaging in active reflection of the experience;
✓ Empower teens to actively practice leadership skills through meaningful involvement in service to the program, the YMCA and/or the community;
✓ Build developmental assets (www.search-institute.org) and YMCA core values (Honesty, Respect, Responsibility, Caring, Faith & Fun) in all participants;
✓ Provide opportunities for advancing responsibilities and recognition.

YMCA Leadership Club program design is aligned with best practice research about what works in out of school time programming. “Meta-analyses conducted by Joe Durlak and Roger Weissberg in 2006 found that, other things being equal, young people participating in high-quality community programs had higher academic and social-emotional skills than did those in a control group. Quality was related not to program content, but to program composition. Successful programs, according to these researchers, are “SAFE” – sequential, active, focused and explicit – about the skills they want to produce.” (Karen Pittman, Forum for Youth Investment, 2008, www.forumforyouthinvestment.org)

Effective programs are “SAFE”
✓ Sequential activities linked over several days, rather than unstructured drop-in opportunities;
✓ Active involvement of youth, rather than passive reception of messages from adults;
✓ Focus on personal or social skills by setting aside time and elements of the program to work on those skills, and are
✓ Explicit in identifying which skills they expect to develop.
GETTING STARTED: STRATEGIES FOR COLLABORATING WITH SCHOOLS

While some YMCA clubs may meet at a YMCA, many successful leadership clubs happen in a school setting – before school, during lunch or during after school hours.

Start with Needs
Nearly every school (and every school district) operates differently. It is important to understand the unique needs, populations, and culture of an individual school before assuming that the YMCA has the right program to meet their needs. Be sure to ask open ended questions to find out what the school needs, and what organizations or programs are already available to students. You may get different answers from different staff. If the programming that you are prepared to offer matches with the school needs then terrific! If it does not match, think creatively about whether there are other ways the YMCA can partner with the school, but also recognize that the YMCA can’t meet EVERY need.

Who should I contact?
Finding the “gatekeeper” within an individual school can be tricky, but there are some key people in most schools that you may want to contact. Be ready to present the mission and goals for your program. Take supporting written information about the YMCA with you. Put your proposal in writing to leave behind. Possible people to contact:

✓ **Administrators (Principals, Vice Principals, Deans)** can help steer you in the right direction. Remember to respect the principal’s time – they are generally very busy and pulled in many directions. You may want to bring your executive director to a meeting at this level.

✓ **Activity coordinators and other club advisors** often know the ropes of when programs are happening, what other organizations may be offering programs within a particular school, and how best to structure a program offering.

✓ **Main Office Staff** often know the entire staff and much of the student body well. They are helpful in knowing the school calendar and the ins and outs of how things really work at their school.

✓ **Teachers and School Counselors** are often the best people to partner with to identify students who may be interested in a particular program. For certain programs such as YMCA Earth Service Corps or Youth and Government, finding a teacher to serve as an advisor to the club or delegation is also important. They may simply allow you to use their room or take a more active role in club support.

✓ **A teacher or volunteer** who helps organize projects for students to earn their service learning hours or help plan community service projects can be helpful to get the word out.

✓ **Custodians**, in some schools, have the most access to the building, so it may be important to include them in your planning if you want to have access to the building during non-school hours.

✓ **Most importantly, find a teacher or other staff member who is passionate about what your group is trying to do and is willing to be invested in the program.** This person can help you:
  - Communicate with other school staff and help recruit volunteers.
  - Recruit students effectively (announcements, posters, bulletins, talking to classes, etc.)
  - Be (or find) a teacher advisor or other supporters within the school
  - Set up a room, time and day for the meetings
  - Contact staff about recommending or nominating students

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Be sure to build the partnership between the school and the YMCA (rather than only between two individuals – this is critical when staff turnover.)
RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS IN SCHOOLS

✓ **Hold orientation sessions at the beginning of the year.** Just before school begins, many sixth and seventh graders (entering middle school or junior high) and ninth or tenth graders (entering high school) receive a full day of orientation. This is a perfect opportunity to remind them about the program and encourage them to sign up immediately.

✓ **Talk to other adults in the school.** Chat with teachers and counselors to see if they know of any youth who may be interested in the club. Formalize the process by taking nominees (see sample recruiting letter).

✓ **Visit classrooms or attend an upcoming assembly. Have youth participants do the talking.** (With permission from the school).

✓ **Visit the school lunchroom.** These visits can be informal chats and sign-ups. In one program, a group of staff skated into the cafeteria on in-line skates – do something fun to grab attention!

✓ **Make school intercom announcements.** With permission from the school, make announcements about the program. This is the best way to make sure your message is heard because the bulletin is where most students get their information and reminders. It may be most effective to have a student read the announcement.

✓ **Make club posters or flyers and post them around the school.** Use bright pictures, colors and graphics. Choose fun fonts and make the flyer eye-catching. Use quotes from youth who have participated in the program.

✓ **Add a tear-off portion to your flyer so you get immediate feedback.** Have students fill it out and give it right back to you – you’ll have an instant mailing list and the option to call students and remind them about meeting times.

✓ **Make follow-up calls to interested participants and their parents.** Call those who filled out the tear-off portion of your flyer to encourage the parents and youth to sign up. Call teens who have been nominated by teachers and counselors (if you use this strategy). This is a great opportunity to answer any more questions they have about the program.

✓ **Create a planning group.** Kids know what draws them and their peers to particular clubs and activities and can help you market the program. Word of mouth is often the best way to assure the success of the club given the importance of peer groups at this age.

✓ **Plan a recruitment party.** Post flyers, make it a potluck and advertise “FREE FOOD!”

✓ **Collaborate with other school clubs.** To get connected with other resources and to spread the word about your own club.

✓ **Challenge club members to bring at least one friend to the next meeting.**

✓ **Make applications available at the main office or activities office.**
STRATEGIES FOR MARKETING PROGRAMS TO PARENTS

Parents are sometimes forgotten as an important partner in providing quality teen leadership programs. Marketing directly to them can help garner buy-in, and ensure that your participants attend the program. They can also act as guest speakers, volunteers, and financial supporters!

✓ Market to fifth or sixth graders at the end of the previous school year. Most middle schools hold an orientation for fifth graders and their parents during the spring as a way to help them learn more about the school. This is a perfect opportunity for parents to find out that one of the benefits of their new school will be a cool after school program.

✓ Add your information to mailings at the beginning of the school year. Many schools send information to students during the latter part of August just before school begins. Find out if they’d be willing to include a short description or even a flyer about your program.

✓ Leave brochures in the front office of the school. These brochures will come in handy in case anyone calls the school asking for information. If you’ve already cultivated a good relationship with administrative staff, they may be willing to have sign-up sheet in the office as well.

✓ Attend the fall open house or back to school night. Your program might be the answer for parents who are beginning to adjust to life with a middle school student.

✓ Present the program at a PTO/PTSA/PTA meeting. As you talk with parents, ask them what they think the pertinent issues are for their kids. If they’re supportive of your program, they can provide great word-of-mouth advertising for you.

✓ Submit the article in the school newsletter. Talk with the principal about how you might submit an article to the school newsletter. Always offer to write it yourself so you’re not adding extra work for the school staff. Get one or two of the kids in your program to take part in the writing.
A SAMPLE RECRUITMENT LETTER TO SEND TO SCHOOL STAFF

Date ____________________

Dear [school name] Teachers and Counselors,

The [branch] YMCA is excited to offer [program name] at your school this year. The program's curriculum focuses on [program focus] and provides resources for the participants to develop the skills they will need to become responsible, compassionate, and strong leaders in their community and among their peers. The group will meet once a week for approximately 12 weeks. During these meetings they will engage in interactive activities and discuss such issues as [communication skills, leadership skills, community service]. We hope to educate participants about critical issues that they face so that they can make decisions that will increase their ability to navigate adolescence in a healthy way and emerge as competent, strong, caring young adults.

We are writing to you, an active member of your school community, to request your nominations of students who you feel would benefit from such a program. We are looking for nominees who:

- Are in [grades]
- Have a positive attitude and willingness to learn
- Show leadership potential
- Express concern for themselves and others

We are excited to continue to build our partnership with your school. Please contact me at [phone / email] at your convenience. I will be on your campus on [date] and look forward to meeting you at that time. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration in giving students a stronger voice within their community.

Sincerely,

[your name]
[title]
HOW TO STRUCTURE CLUB MEETINGS

Whether you are running a YESC, YGIRLS, YBOYS or other type of Club, it is important to have each meeting be consistent. By setting up a consistent meeting structure and adhering to it throughout each meeting, the participants will always know what to expect and what is expected of them. This enables meetings to be more productive, dive deeper into important issues, and maintain a more cohesive group.

Middle School/Jr. High versus High School
Generally, as teens mature from middle school to high school, less structure needs to be provided by the staff member or teacher advisor. Middle School club meetings should be highly structured, with a clear plan for activities that will take up the majority of meeting time. High School club meetings may be run primarily by the youth participants (once the group is well established), but staff should always be ready with a back up plan, quick energizer, or a list of resources to help students if they get stuck.

Suggested One Hour Meeting format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Min</td>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td>Even before the group walks in, set up the room to be inviting: have chairs set up in a circle, have your supplies out and ready, have the Community Agreement posted so everyone can see it, welcome each participant by name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Min</td>
<td>Check-In</td>
<td>Have everyone go around and say their name and share something about themselves (ie: what is your favorite ice cream, what are your plans for the weekend, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Min</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Introduce the theme of the day (ie: Getting to Know Each Other, Climate Change, Communication, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Min</td>
<td>Opening Activity</td>
<td>Do something fun and active that gets the group moving around and getting comfortable with each other. Preferably, activities should be linked to the day’s theme. Check out the BOND chapter for opening activity ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Min</td>
<td>Main Activity</td>
<td>The main activity is connected to your Theme that day. Themes should flow from week to week, and build on the previous week’s lesson or activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Min</td>
<td>Closing Activity or Reflection</td>
<td>Always have a closing activity, even if it is just a quick “one word whip” (ie: one word describing how you feel right now). Check out the REFLECT section for Closing Activity ideas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GROUP FACILITATION POINTERS

Stages of Group Development
High functioning groups probably didn’t start that way. There is a natural progression that groups go through from the initial gathering through long term sustainability. Understanding the stages of group development, and talking through them with young people, provides a common language to identify the stages a group is in as they progress through the year. When things are “stormy” – it is useful for students to be able to recognize that as a natural step in the development of a group.

Following is the natural progression of a group:
✓ FORMING: Getting acquainted
✓ NORMING: Setting goals, rules and expectations
✓ STORMING: Testing each other and the leader
✓ CONFORMING: Reaching a state of trust and openness
✓ PERFORMING: Working all together and being productive
✓ MOURNING: Recognizing that the group’s work or time together is ending. Closure, celebration, and goodbyes.

These stages do not always progress from one stage to the next. Sometimes a “performing” group will regress to a “storming” stage before they again cycle through. Each group has its own unique timetable of stages. Remember, every time someone leaves or joins the group you have a new group.

Building a Group
Building trust and respect between group members helps to form the foundation for a highly functioning group or team. As your group moves through the stages of group development, they are often able to take on activities that require greater levels of trust and challenge than in an initial meeting. Start with ice breakers, and move on to more difficult team/group builders. Be sure to be aware of the dynamics of a group and the willingness of participants to take bigger risks.

Safety & Ground Rules
Participant safety is of the utmost importance and the primary responsibility of the staff member(s) in charge. Very simply, you must be vigilant to ensure that everyone is physically and emotionally safe during any activities with your group. Be ready and willing to step in when a person could get hurt – physically or emotionally. At the very beginning of your club’s development, work with your participants to establish ground rules - some can be non-negotiable because of safety, while others may be unique due to the members of your group. Monitor them and hold the group accountable. Ground rules provide the basic structure and safety framework in which all activities can take place.

Debriefing & Processing
All experiential learning activities (including those in this book) are deepened through guided processing and reflection during, and at the conclusion of, an activity or session. It is critical to allow dedicated time and space for people to respond authentically about their experience. A terrific reflection technique is to ask: “What? So What? Now What?” Many other reflection activities are outlined in the REFLECT chapter of this book, as well as embedded in activities throughout. Make it a practice to check-in regularly with individuals and with your group as a whole on how things are going.

The previous pages (v – x) were adapted from the following YMCA resources: Caring by Design; YMCA Earth Service Corps Administrators Guide and Club Handbook; Girls of Promise Club Curriculum; and Inspired to Action.
YMCA Earth Service Corps Program Overview

Mission: YMCA Earth Service Corps empowers young people to be effective, responsible, global citizens by providing opportunities for environmental education and action, leadership development and cross-cultural awareness.

What is YMCA Earth Service Corps (YESC)?
Founded in 1989, the YMCA Earth Service Corps (YESC) is an innovative youth-led program that empowers students to take a hands-on role in creating a healthier environment in their schools, communities and region while nurturing a respect for diversity within the natural world. YMCA Earth Service Corps works with students and teacher advisors to provide a unique opportunity for students to identify local environmental issues while working collaboratively to engage participants in community action.

YESC 12 Week Curriculum Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Warm Up</th>
<th>Main Activity</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Welcome, Set Expectations</td>
<td>Group Juggle (6)</td>
<td>What is YESC? Community Contracts (2)</td>
<td>Circle of Questions (123) (about the environment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Introduction to the Environment</td>
<td>Break the Ice (4-5)</td>
<td>Ecological Footprint (79)</td>
<td>Lessons from Geese (124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Consumer Choices &amp; Sustainability</td>
<td>Trash Ball (15)</td>
<td>Gross National Happiness (86)</td>
<td>The Objective Object (126)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>What is an Eco-System?</td>
<td>Cycle of Life (11)</td>
<td>Pyramid of Life (51)</td>
<td>Four Square Reflection (125)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>What Needs Doing?</td>
<td>Walk, Freeze, Ooze (34)</td>
<td>Community Needs Assessment (111)</td>
<td>Reflect on favorite service project you have participated in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Project Planning</td>
<td>Helium Stick (31)</td>
<td>Review needs. Pick a “need.” Decide on a project.</td>
<td>You Rock! (135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Project Planning</td>
<td>Blind Square (35)</td>
<td>Invite partner organizations for a panel about the identified need</td>
<td>Circle of Questions (123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Take Action</td>
<td>Break the Ice (4-5)</td>
<td>Do the Project!</td>
<td>Rose and Thorn (121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Take Action</td>
<td>Web of Support (30)</td>
<td>Do the Project!</td>
<td>Ghost Stones (129)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Take Action</td>
<td>Games from Around the World (19)</td>
<td>Do the Project!</td>
<td>One Word Whip (122)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Reflection and future planning</td>
<td>Storytelling (23)</td>
<td>Writing to your Elected Officials (117-118)</td>
<td>You are Like A... (137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Celebration!</td>
<td>Celebration!</td>
<td>Invite families, project partners and school staff. Have food and share the successes of the past 12 weeks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more ideas about running a YMCA Earth Service Corps club and to see what other clubs are working on, go to: [www.ymcaearth.org](http://www.ymcaearth.org)
**Girls of Promise or YGirls Program Overview**

*Mission: to empower girls with the self-confidence to lead, the generosity of spirit to give back to their communities, and the awareness to live healthy and balanced lives.*

**What is Girls of Promise / YGirls?**

YGirls Clubs are out-of-school time programs designed to support and nurture the health and well-being of middle school girls while building their leadership skills and commitment to service. Meeting weekly at schools or YMCAs, girls participate in experiential workshops, discussions, and interaction with women role models around the themes of wellness, service, and leadership. The program reaches girls who are in need of additional social, emotional and wellness support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Warm Up</th>
<th>Main Activity</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Welcome, Set Expectations</td>
<td>Group Juggle (6)</td>
<td>What is YGirls &amp; Brainstorm Topics Community Contracts (2)</td>
<td>Emotional Whip (122)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>We are all unique</td>
<td>Shwing (13)</td>
<td>Identity Posters (57); The Me I'd Like Others to See (8)</td>
<td>The Objective Object (126)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Understanding our own and others' values</td>
<td>Speed ‘Dating’ (10)</td>
<td>Values on the Line (97)</td>
<td>Compliment Circle (136)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Healthy Relationships</td>
<td>Making Soup (22)</td>
<td>GUEST SPEAKER</td>
<td>Rose &amp; Thorn (121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Group Dynamics</td>
<td>Get to Know You Questions (7)</td>
<td>Green, Yellow, Red Light (133)</td>
<td>Four Square Reflection (125)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Leadership 1</td>
<td>Four Corners (101)</td>
<td>Shape of a Leader (102)</td>
<td>Folding Poems (131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Leadership 2</td>
<td>Million Dollar Questions (21)</td>
<td>GUEST PANEL OF WOMEN LEADERS</td>
<td>Personalized Postcard (132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Hoop Pass (24)</td>
<td>Back-to-Back (103)</td>
<td>Million Dollar Questions (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bullying/Gossip</td>
<td>Impulse (14)</td>
<td>Watch Your Back (104)</td>
<td>Compliment Circle (136)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Stress Reduction</td>
<td>Obstacle Course (27)</td>
<td>Push the Panic Button (105)</td>
<td>Rose &amp; Thorn (121)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Express Yourself!</td>
<td>Captain’s on Deck (12)</td>
<td>Folding Poems (131); Bio-Poem (67)</td>
<td>You are Like A...(137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Celebration!</td>
<td>Celebration! Invite families, have food &amp; awards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Use this outline as a rough guide, but allow the girls to also help choose topics that are most important to them, possibly brainstormed on the first day. Additionally, this 12 week plan does not include service learning. You may want to substitute several weeks for planning and carrying out a service project (this may also happen at another time, such as a weekend).