



# ISTEP Resource Guide

July 2025

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# Iowa Students for Tobacco Education and Prevention (ISTEP)

## Youth Tobacco Prevention

Youth are a target when it comes to tobacco and nicotine use, including vaping. There are tobacco industry documents that discuss intentionally targeting youth with their advertising. These are the same tobacco companies that for years claimed they do not market to youth. The tobacco companies insisted that nicotine is not addictive, and that secondhand smoke is not harmful. After further research, we know nicotine has been found even more addictive than heroin and secondhand smoke can cause cancer, respiratory illnesses and many other health complications.

Youth ISTEP members know the true unfiltered facts of tobacco and nicotine use. In turn, they aim to stay informed about new forms of tobacco and nicotine products, like vapes, nicotine pouches, etc., so they can make informed decisions themselves and share these facts with their peers, community leaders and loved ones through everyday conversations, street marketing events and the annual ISTEP Summit.

Iowa teens have an active role in changing the general social attitude toward tobacco and nicotine use, and as adults supporting youth ISTEP members, we can provide leadership development opportunities to set them up for success in making a difference as leaders among their peers. We draw attention to the importance and value of their youth voice and use our expertise to provide them a platform to express their passions and concerns. We are investing in our future generation to eliminate tobacco and nicotine use among young Iowans.

## About ISTEP

Led by students and supported by adults, ISTEP is a statewide movement made up of young people in grades 7 through 12 who want to step up and take action against tobacco and nicotine, including vapes. Not only is ISTEP the only statewide youth-led organization focused on ending tobacco in Iowa – it's also a lot of fun for young people. ISTEP encourages youth to make friends, make a difference and become leaders.

ISTEP educates other students, community leaders and loved ones by bringing light to the true unfiltered facts on the dangers of tobacco and nicotine. ISTEP organizes fun events like street marketing activities to get their community's attention.

## **ISTEP Mission**

- Change the social attitude toward all tobacco and nicotine use.
- Raise awareness of the harms of tobacco and nicotine use through education.
- Inspire and support cessation among people who use tobacco and nicotine.
- Expand leadership skills to positively impact peers in making healthy lifestyle choices, such as being tobacco and nicotine free.
- Address mental health concerns in relation to tobacco and nicotine use.

## **Leadership Opportunities**

ISTEP has many leadership opportunities; at the state level by joining the ISTEP Executive Council and at the local level through chapters.

### **State Leadership**

The ISTEP Executive Council is what truly keeps the program youth led. The Council consists of 9th through 12th grade youth across Iowa who serve as leaders of the Program. It's approximately made up of 10-15 members, one in which is elected as the ISTEP President, which is a one-year term. The Council plans annual street marketing events and activity kits, plans and leads the annual ISTEP Summit and makes big campaign decisions. This group is supported by Jill Wright the ISTEP Coordinator with Iowa HHS in the Behavioral Health Division.

The Council meets virtually on a regular basis on ISTEP initiatives such as upcoming street marketing events, presentation opportunities and summit planning. However, about three times a year the Council meets in person in the Des Moines area for Council Retreats and the annual ISTEP Summit. Council Retreats focus on development leadership skills, as well as team building to increase rapport and engagement among the group.

To serve on the Council, youth must:

- Be in grades 9 through 12.
- Be tobacco and nicotine free, including vaping.
- Act as a leader and spokesperson for the ISTEP program.
- Attend and participate in Council activities and meetings regularly.
- Attend and lead the annual ISTEP Summit alongside other Council members with the help from the ISTEP Coordinator.
- Be in regular communication regarding Council initiatives with the ISTEP Coordinator.
- Be active in their local chapter, if applicable.

## Local Leadership

It's pretty amazing when like-minded young people come together for a good cause. And that's exactly what happens in every ISTEP Chapter in our state. ISTEP Chapters consist of one adult chapter advisor and a minimum of 3 young people in grades 7 through 12. Chapters focus on raising awareness and educating their peers and community members about the harms of tobacco and vaping through street marketing events.

For reference, the 2023-2024 school year ended with 66 chapters registered throughout 35 counties. So far for the 2024-2025 school year, there are 61 chapters registered.

To be an ISTEP Chapter member, youth must:

- Be in grades 7 through 12.
- Be tobacco and nicotine free, including vaping.
- Serve as a role model and leader to their peers by making healthy lifestyle choices.
- Attend Chapter meetings and actively participate in planning Chapter activities.
- Participate in the annual street marketing events and activity kits provided by the ISTEP Council.
- Attend the annual ISTEP Summit alongside their other chapter members and the adult chapter advisor, if at all possible.

## Starting an ISTEP Chapter

Chapters can be big or small. Current chapter members range from 3 to 200! But no matter the situation, creating a chapter is simple; one adult chapter advisor and a minimum of three youth members in grades 7 through 12 is needed. Then, the adult chapter advisor registers the chapter on [hhs.iowa.gov/istep](https://hhs.iowa.gov/istep).

ISTEP Chapters can be formed in any setting where 7 through 12 grade youth meet. Chapters are most commonly formed in a school setting, however the ISTEP program has a goal to expand this. Think outside the box; chapters can be made up of members from a church youth group, scout troop, 4-H group, YMCA program, sports team, or any other community setting where 7-12 grade youth meet.

The structure of the chapter is completely up to the local adult chapter advisor. It is recommended to have separate chapters for youth in middle school versus youth in high school, yet collaboration among age levels is encouraged. For example, the high school chapter members can take the lead of an event and model their leadership skills to the younger students, while middle school youth can bring their never-ending energy and excitement.

It is also up to the chapter to decide how they'd like to be structured. It's common to elect a President, Vice President and Secretary. Establishing chapter requirements and



rules, keeping meeting minutes and an attendance log is recommended to have a successful active chapter, however, is not required.

## **How to Register an ISTEP Chapter**

1. Visit [hhs.iowa.gov/istep](https://hhs.iowa.gov/istep).
2. Click “Register your ISTEP Chapter here”. It’s the first bolded bullet.
3. Fill out the form.
  - a. Information needed for the form includes: the chapter name, address, member count, advisor name and advisor email address.
4. Click “submit”.

Once the form is submitted, the Iowa HHS ISTEP Coordinator is notified and will send an introductory email to the chapter advisor listed within the form. This email will include helpful links and resources to support the Chapter’s next steps.

## **Chapter Advisors**

An ISTEP chapter advisor can be a teacher, an adult who works with another youth organization in the community (4-H, FFA, church groups, scout troops, etc.) or the ASO staff. ISTEP takes a youth-led approach to leadership, allowing youth to take the initiative in planning and implementing activities. The role of the adult chapter advisor can include, but isn’t limited to,

- assisting with planning and implementing activities,
- ensuring chapter members follow through with their plans,
- gathering Youth Code of Conduct and Participation consent forms,
- communicating with the youth members’ parents and the Iowa HHS ISTEP Coordinator, and
- helping youth members get to and from activities such as the annual ISTEP Summit.

## **How much time does an ISTEP Chapter require?**

This is completely up to the Chapter. However, ISTEP never has a dull moment and there is always something that can be done. Each chapter is encouraged to participate in the street marketing events and activity kits provided by the Council each year. Additionally, Chapters may choose to put on events unique to their community. It’s up to the Chapter to decide how often they’d like to meet, but it’s recommended to meet once a month or every other month to stay up to date on upcoming activities, newest tobacco prevention ideas, chapter event planning, etc. At the beginning of the school year, it’s recommended Chapter members decide how many activities they’d like to implement during the year. For reference, it’s common to have three meetings per one event. For example:

1. Planning Meeting – determine details of the event.
2. Implementation of Event – hold the event.
3. Follow-up Meeting – discuss how the event went, what could be done differently in the future, then determine the date of the next meeting to plan the next event.

### First Meeting of the Year

The first meeting of the year, also known as the ISTEP chapter orientation meeting, is extremely important. Starting the year with clear expectations is key to having a successful chapter. Below are a few things to think about:

- Establish goals for the year. How many street marketing events will be done? Will the chapter participate in the statewide events planned by the Council?
- Determine chapter structure. Will a President, Vice President and Secretary be elected? How will rules be established? Are there attendance requirements?
- Develop a plan of action. When will meetings be held - every second Thursday of the month after school? When and where will events happen for the year - home sporting events, parent teacher conference night, etc.

### ISTEP Summit

Each fall, youth from all across Iowa get together for the ISTEP Summit. All Iowa youth in grades 7 through 12 are invited to attend, free of cost. The youth Council members plan and lead the entire Summit; it's quite impressive to see young people leading other youth for an entire day. Summit day is unlike any other conference. The agenda typically consists of a high-energy and interactive welcoming session, an engaging educational keynote speaker and hands-on activities. At the 2024 Summit, there was a record-breaking 334 youth and 52 adults.

### Street Marketing Events

Think big, attention grabbing, flashy, fun and impactful! A street marketing event involves a chapter doing an event in public. Street marketing events build chapter awareness; they get a chapter's name, work and mission recognized among peers and throughout the community. These events are also great opportunities to recruit new chapter members.

Each year, the Council plans 3-4 street marketing events and activity kits for the chapters across Iowa to put on at their school or local community. These events come with activity kits that include everything the chapter needs to put on the event. The only requirement to receive these activity kits, is to be a registered chapter on [hhs.iowa.gov/istep](https://hhs.iowa.gov/istep).

As your chapter completes activities, let us know about it by tagging @IowaSTEP on Facebook or Instagram, or by submitting the [ISTEP Outreach Events and Activities form](#).

Chapters aren't limited to the street marketing events and activity kits that are provided by the Council. Chapters are also encouraged to plan and implement their own events to keep their youth chapter members excited and engaged. To ensure an event runs smoothly from start to finish, it is recommended to use the 5 Step Planning Process.

## 5 Step Planning Process

1. Research - What, where and when.
  - What activity/event do you want to do? Will it have a theme?
  - When will it be held? Date, time, etc.
  - Where will the event be held? School, library, YMCA, etc.
  - Will you need to get permission to hold the event here?
2. Plan and Prepare - Plan the details and prepare for the event.
  - What materials will you need in order to do the event?
  - Will you need to meet before the event to put materials together? If so, plan a date to do this.
  - All chapter members should be involved. What role will everyone play?
  - Do you need to practice anything before the event to ensure it goes smoothly? If so, plan a date to do this.
  - How will you announce the event? Social media, newspapers, flyers, intercom announcement, etc.
  - Who will take pictures of the event to show off your hard work?
  - Will you be missing class because of an event? If so, you will need permission from parents or teachers ahead of time.
3. Action - This is the day of the event.
  - Have materials ready to go ahead of time.
  - Hold the event. Everyone already knows their role and is ready ahead of time.
  - Clean up after the event. Leave the location looking in the same condition as you found it, if not better.
  - Determine when the next meeting will be.
4. Discussion - This happens after the event to evaluate how it went.
  - Reflect on the event. What went well and why? What could have gone better? What will you do differently next time?
  - Did you work together as a group? Did everyone feel included? If not, how can you improve this?
  - Would you do this type of event again or would you like to do something different?
  - Determine the next meeting date to plan your chapter's next event.
5. Optimize - Plan the next event.



- Before going through the cycle of planning again by starting back with Step 1 of the process, think about what you could do to make planning the next event even better. Evaluate your strengths as a group and reflect on lessons learned in the process.

## Social Media

Chapters can share pictures from their recent activities by emailing them to the Iowa HHS ISTEP Coordinator ([jill.wright@hhs.iowa.gov](mailto:jill.wright@hhs.iowa.gov)) to post on the ISTEP social media accounts or tagging @IowaSTEP on Instagram and Facebook.

- Facebook: [www.facebook.com/IowaSTEP](https://www.facebook.com/IowaSTEP)
- Instagram: [www.instagram.com/IowaSTEP](https://www.instagram.com/IowaSTEP)

As a reminder, each young person needs to complete the ISTEP Chapter Youth Code of Conduct and Participation form in order for media such as pictures and/or videos to be shared publicly. It's the chapter advisor's responsibility for collecting and filing these.

## My Life My Quit

My Life My Quit (MLMQ) is a free youth tobacco and nicotine cessation program made especially for teens (ages 13-17 years old). Encourage young people to get the truth about vaping, smoking and other tobacco products so they are not left in the dark when it comes to their future. When a young person decides to quit, MLMQ will give them the tools they need to do it successfully. Coaches are available by phone, by text message (text 'START' to 36072) or by online chat for five, one-on-one coaching sessions. Sessions are usually scheduled every 7-10 days. Coaching helps teens develop a quit plan, identify triggers, practice refusal skills and receive ongoing support for changing behaviors. MLMQ is 100% free, confidential and made just for teens ages 13-17. Find out more about MLMQ [here](#).

### Participants Receive:

- Free and confidential cessation support
- 5 coaching sessions by phone, live texting, or online chat
- Dedicated youth coach
- Certificate of Completion

### Alternative to Suspension

My Life My Quit is an option for schools to utilize as an Alternative to Suspension. A number of schools across Iowa have already implemented a policy where students who were found to have tobacco and nicotine products, are referred to MLMQ, and work towards completing the coaching process to help avoid suspension. Reach out to Iowa HHS for additional support and technical assistance to discuss model policies, a MLMQ program overview, and any other potential trainings you may need.

## Resources

- All supporting documents can be found at [hhs.iowa.gov/istep](https://hhs.iowa.gov/istep)
- Marketing Campaigns and materials can also be found at [Your Life Iowa](https://yourlifeiowa.org)

## Recommended Training Topics for Adults

- Youth Mental Health First Aid
- Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation
- Youth-Adult Partnerships
- Authentic Youth Engagement
- Supporting youth in leadership development
- History of tobacco companies targeting youth and how they still do today

## Recommended Training for Youth

- Teen Mental Health First Aid
- History of tobacco companies targeting youth and how they still do today
- [Vaping: Know the Truth](#)
  - This training is free of cost and can be done in a classroom setting or by individuals.
- Leadership development.
  - Topics may vary from public speaking, effective communication, meeting facilitation, decision making, problem solving, relationship building, healthy relationships, speaking with your peers, emotional intelligence, working as a team, etc.

## Supporting Websites

- Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, [tobaccofreekids.org](https://tobaccofreekids.org)
- Healthiest State Initiative, [iowahealthieststate.com](https://iowahealthieststate.com)
- Iowa Students for Tobacco Education and Prevention (ISTEP) website, [hhs.iowa.gov/istep](https://hhs.iowa.gov/istep)
- Iowa HHS model tobacco free and nicotine free policies
- Iowa Smokefree Air Act, [hhs.iowa.gov/smokefreeair](https://hhs.iowa.gov/smokefreeair)
- My Life My Quit, [mylifemyquit.org](https://mylifemyquit.org)
- Smoke Free Housing, [hhs.iowa.gov/smokefreehomes](https://hhs.iowa.gov/smokefreehomes)
- The Real Cost Campaign, [therealcost.betobaccofree.hhs.gov](https://therealcost.betobaccofree.hhs.gov)
- Truth Initiative, [truthinitiative.org](https://truthinitiative.org)
- Your Life Iowa, [yourlifeiowa.org](https://yourlifeiowa.org)
- Youth Engagement Alliance, [youthengagementalliance.org](https://youthengagementalliance.org)
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)

## Questions?

Contact ISTEP Youth Coordinator at [jill.wright@hhs.iowa.gov](mailto:jill.wright@hhs.iowa.gov) or (515)321-7437.