Oxfam at a glance: CHANGE Initiative

The CHANGE Initiative is a highly competitive national program that trains college students to become actively engaged with Oxfam America’s work. Its goals: to broaden perspectives, inspire action, and shape a new generation of global citizens.

THE POWER OF YOUTH

Youth is a time of transformation, optimism, and energy—and college and university campuses create an environment where young people can learn about, and act on, the issues that are important to them. Since 1974, Oxfam’s Fast for a World Harvest campaign has attracted tens of thousands of students to the cause of fighting hunger and poverty. Inspired by this success, Oxfam developed the CHANGE Initiative in 2000 to harness the power of young people toward promoting global citizenship.

Selecting the best

- Students must be entering their sophomore or junior year at a US-based college or university to be eligible for the CHANGE Initiative. Interested students go through a competitive application and selection process.
- From among these applicants, Oxfam selects 50 students annually who best demonstrate strong ideals and a commitment to positive change. These students, known as CHANGE Leaders, come from diverse backgrounds, as well as a mix of public, private, urban, and rural campuses.
- After the training, CHANGE Leaders return to their campuses energized and ready to work on social justice. Oxfam staff work with them throughout the year, providing ongoing guidance and keeping in touch through a shared online community.

Campaigns on campus

- Each CHANGE Leader implements at least one Oxfam-specific public advocacy campaign on campus. Recent campaigns include promoting fair trade; creating equitable solutions to the climate crisis; and protecting the rights of communities affected by oil, gas, and mining.
- CHANGE Leaders support Oxfam campaigns by building networks, organizing their peers to take political action, and hosting campus events like teach-ins, panel discussions, and speakers’ tours.

Youth should demand change in the world. Youth should not accept the old order if the world is to move on.

—William Allen White, American journalist and author

HOW IT WORKS

Each year, Oxfam’s CHANGE Initiative uses leadership and advocacy training to teach a select group of US college students about the issues behind the global fight against poverty, hunger, and injustice. Students then transform this knowledge into action on campus and in their communities.

Intense training

- Oxfam brings the CHANGE Leaders to Boston for a rigorous week long training that combines group activities, expert panels, and workshops with a multimedia teaching curriculum. The training builds students’ leadership skills, advocacy skills, and familiarity with Oxfam’s mission—and introduces them to sophisticated and powerful models for social change.

A group of 2007 CHANGE Leaders share a fun moment while “tabling” at an Oxfam outreach event.

As part of their training, the CHANGE Leaders learn how to reach out to people by hosting informational tables about Oxfam’s public advocacy campaigns.

Nikki Eads / Oxfam America
In addition, many CHANGE Leaders work on our yearly Fast for a World Harvest campaign, organizing Oxfam America Hunger Banquets, dining hall fasts, benefit concerts, and other events to raise awareness of the inequities of hunger and poverty.

Keeping up the momentum

• CHANGE Leaders’ commitment to social justice goes far beyond the one-year program. CHANGE Leaders have attended meetings of the World Trade Organization and the G8 leaders, spoken at the UN Youth Assembly, and served as keynote speakers at national conferences. They can be found working as journalists in Khartoum, Sudan; taking part in presidential campaigns; designing prosthetic limbs for land mine victims; and working for Fair Trade companies.

• Oxfam CHANGE Leaders have founded two different independent national student organizations: United Students for Fair Trade and the Student Trade Justice Campaign. In both cases, CHANGE Leaders identified the need for a national-level organization to support students’ work on these specific issues.

A model for learning

• Inspired by the success of Oxfam America’s program, affiliate Oxfams have since launched their own CHANGE Initiatives in Canada, Australia, and Britain.

• The CHANGE Initiative collaborates with other organizations, including Amnesty International and Free the Planet!, to share learning and strengthen our youth programs.

• We are always looking for ways to increase impact, conducting periodic assessments of the CHANGE Initiative and adapting the program based on our findings. Future plans include increasing the reach of CHANGE into our regional offices.

Want to learn more about CHANGE?
Know someone who might be interested? Email change@oxfamamerica.org or call (800) 77-OXFAM, ext. 2464.