Case 4: Who gets a say when a shared room changes?

The Common Room's board is weighing paid rentals on two free evenings, so the crew prepares a comment before the meeting.

On your own Read What happened. Underline who decides and what the board is considering. About 5 minutes.

Your role: You're the one who checks the budget figures before the crew speaks to the board. **New skill:** Weigh the trade-offs of each option.

Mari shows Sami a printed schedule.

What happened

It is the Friday after the crew's first screening, and the board meeting is coming up. A small neighborhood nonprofit runs the Common Room alongside the bookshop. The nonprofit's board is considering paid rentals on two evenings a week to help cover staffing. No vote has happened yet.

Mari, 19, works the bookshop counter and closes the shop. She knows that "just keep it free" does not pay the evening staff. Sami runs a print workshop in the room after her afternoon shift. It is one of the few step-free rooms nearby.

Caio, 24, runs the crew's Tuesday film night. Tuesday is one of the evenings Option B would rent out. Mateo already has a headline for a petition. The crew agrees the room matters, but they do not agree on the best schedule.

Your question: Which option should the crew support, and what should they ask the board?

Key terms

On your own Read each key term and its example. Then write your first guess in the box. About 5 minutes.

Proposal A proposal is a change that someone suggests and that has not been approved yet.

En español: propuesta

In this case: Option B is a proposal on the board's agenda. No vote has been taken, so it is not a decision yet.

Trade-off A trade-off is a choice where getting one benefit means accepting a cost or giving something up.

En español: compensación entre opciones

In this case: Paid rentals help close the $200 weekly gap but take away free evenings Sami and Dec use.

Decision-maker A decision-maker is the person or group with the power to make a particular choice.

En español: quien toma la decisión

In this case: The nonprofit board decides, not a city community board and not the crew.

Who is involved

Mari

Closes the bookshop, then stays for zine night

"I'm the one they pay to lock up, and I'm also one of the people using this room after. I can't pretend either half away."

Sami

Runs a print workshop in the room

"We keep deciding what the evening people need. Has anyone asked them yet?"

Your first guess

Before you look at the evidence, what do you think the crew should ask the board for?

My first guess is ___, because ___.

Notes

Reading passage

Budgets, access and the politics of a shared room

On your own Read the passage. At each Stop and think box, pause and answer the question in your head or with a partner. About 5 minutes.

Words to know

- **Proposal**: A proposal is a change that someone suggests and that has not been approved yet.
- **Trade-off**: A trade-off is a choice where getting one benefit means accepting a cost or giving something up.
- **Decision-maker**: A decision-maker is the person or group with the power to make a particular choice.
- **Framing**: Framing is choosing which parts of a situation a message brings forward.

The story: A small board with a real deficit

The Common Room is a shared space run by a small neighborhood nonprofit alongside a Fort Greene bookshop. Its board is considering paid rentals on two evenings a week to help cover staffing, and it will discuss the idea at a Wednesday 6:30 p.m. meeting. No vote has been taken. The crew, who hold screenings, workshops and film nights there, agree that the room matters. They disagree about the best schedule.

Their positions follow their circumstances. Mateo arrives with a petition headline and, by his own account, no budget. Mari, 19, is paid to close the bookshop and also uses the room afterward, so she sees a cost that nobody has recorded. Rental nights would turn her zine evenings into shifts spent staffing a stranger's event. Sami, who works afternoons and runs a print workshop in one of the few step-free rooms nearby, objects to the process. The crew is deciding what evening users need without consulting them. She also rejects the easy substitute of moving her workshop online, which would require devices, quiet space and supplies that not everyone has. Caio, 24, runs the Tuesday film night that Option B would end.

Stop and think. Sami wants to know what her input can change. How does that question test whether a consultation is real?

The documents and the frame

The agenda offers three **proposals**. A proposal is a change that someone suggests and that has not been approved yet. Option A keeps the free evenings and accepts a continuing funding gap.

The documents and the frame, continued

Option B replaces Tuesday and Thursday evenings with paid rentals. Option C pilots one rental evening for six weeks while the board seeks other funding. The weekly budget note shows $600 in evening staffing and utilities against $400 in grants and donations. Each rental is projected to net $120, so two would close the $200 gap and one would leave $80. The note flags demand as uncertain and does not say whether the $120 figure rests on any past bookings.

A **trade-off** is a choice where getting one benefit means accepting a cost or giving something up. Carol Bacchi's policy-analysis approach asks what a proposed solution assumes the problem is (Carol Bacchi, November 1, 2017). Option B represents the problem as a revenue shortfall, which makes free evenings the natural place to find money. The Case 1 concept of **framing**, choosing which parts of a situation a message brings forward, describes the same move. A different representation, such as unequal access to the few step-free rooms nearby, would make different options look reasonable. Bacchi's method is symmetrical. It applies equally to the petition, which represents the problem as a threat to free space and treats staffing costs as someone else's concern.

The listening notes supply the evidence a representation can hide. Sami works afternoons. Dec rehearses on Thursdays. Mari closes the shop. A nearby resident worries about late noise. The meeting time overlaps several shifts, so the people with the most at stake are the least able to attend.

Stop and think. Propose a different representation of the problem. Which option would it favor, and why?

Participation, authority and professional duty

A **decision-maker** is the person or group with the power to make a particular choice. The board decides its own schedule. Public bodies distribute authority differently. New York's community boards advise rather than decide (NYC.gov, Brooklyn Community Board 13, no date listed). The city's library cuts illustrate the chain. Budget reductions ended Sunday service at every branch that still had it, with Brooklyn's last Sunday on December 17, 2023 (NY1, November 17, 2023). A $58.3 million restoration brought Sundays back from July 14, 2024 (NYC Mayor's Office, July 1, 2024), and Council members credited residents who called and wrote (New York City Council, July 14, 2024).

Some institutions share the decision itself. Researchers at Tufts' CIRCLE found that participatory budgeting in Illinois high schools helped students weigh competing needs (CIRCLE, August 9, 2024). A peer-reviewed study examined how young people take part when communities share decisions about public resources (Farahmandpour and Zrudlo, Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, December 4, 2023).

For administrators, the ASPA code asks them to provide "accurate, honest, comprehensive, and timely information and advice" to governing boards (ASPA Code of Ethics, 2013).

Participation, authority and professional duty, continued

A budget note that projects revenue without stating its basis falls short of that standard. The crew answers in kind: one joint question that leaves room for disagreement, checked figures and an accessible way to send written feedback. Your role is to check the figures before the crew speaks, and to ask the board how certain the $120 projection is.

Stop and think. What would a budget note that met the ASPA standard say about the $120 projection?

Sources

Real source | Carol Bacchi | November 1, 2017
What's the problem represented to be?

Real source | NYC.gov, Brooklyn Community Board 13 | No date listed
About community boards

Real source | NY1 | November 17, 2023
Public libraries over the next two weeks to begin closing on Sundays

Real source | NYC Mayor's Office | July 1, 2024
Mayor Adams Celebrates $58.3 Million Investment in City's Three Library Systems

Real source | New York City Council | July 14, 2024
NYC Council, Library Leaders, and New Yorkers Celebrate Library Budget Restorations to Restore Full Service, as Branches Reopen and Reinstate Services on Sunday for First Time in Months

Real source | CIRCLE (Tufts University) | August 9, 2024
Participatory Budgeting in Schools Helps Build Student Voice and Civic Skills

Real source | Education, Citizenship and Social Justice (Farahmandpour & Zrudlo) | December 4, 2023
Investigating young people's involvement in participatory budgeting

Real source | American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) | 2013
ASPA Code of Ethics

Look at the evidence

On your own Read each document. For each one, write what it shows and what it leaves out. About 10 minutes.

Evidence A | Board agenda, Wednesday 6:30 p.m. meeting

The proposal

Evening rentals, for discussion. Option A: keep the current free evenings; the funding gap remains. Option B: replace Tuesday and Thursday evenings with paid rentals. Option C: pilot one rental evening for six weeks while seeking additional funding. No vote has been taken.

Look closely: Is this a vote or a discussion? Which words tell you?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Evidence B | Weekly budget note for the board

The budget note

Evening staffing and utilities: $600. Current grants and donations: $400. Each paid rental is projected to add $120 after its extra costs. Two bookings would add $240; one would add $120. Demand is uncertain.

Look closely: Which number is a guess, and what could change it?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Look at the evidence, continued

Evidence C | **Listening notes from evening users**

The missing voices

Sami works afternoons. Dec rehearses on Thursdays. Mari closes the shop. A nearby resident worries about late noise. The proposed meeting time overlaps with several shifts.

Look closely: Whose voice is missing from these four notes?

What it shows

What it leaves out

What is still missing from the evidence?

Notes

Key idea: trade-offs

On your own Read the key idea and the code of ethics. Then answer the question in the box. About 10 minutes.

The board is weighing a **proposal** about the free evenings. A proposal is a change that someone suggests and that has not been approved yet. Option B would help close the $200 weekly gap, but it would end the free Tuesday and Thursday evenings. A **trade-off** is a choice where getting one benefit means accepting a cost or giving something up. Every option on the agenda has one, including the one you prefer.

Carol Bacchi's policy-analysis approach asks what a proposed solution assumes the problem is. Option B treats the $200 gap as the problem and two free evenings as the price. That leaves two questions open: who loses those evenings, and what happens if bookings come in lower than projected? Ask the same questions about your own favorite option.

A **decision-maker** is the person or group with the power to make a particular choice. Here, the nonprofit's board controls its own schedule. A community board or a city agency would follow other rules. A strong comment names the proposal, explains one effect with evidence and asks for a decision the board can make. The board can still choose an option the crew did not ask for.

Professional standards

Real source | **American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)**

ASPA Code of Ethics: 5. Fully Inform and Advise

"Provide accurate, honest, comprehensive, and timely information and advice to elected and appointed officials and governing board members"

In plain words: ASPA members agree to give decision-makers, such as board members, accurate and complete information.

Question: The budget note projects $120 more per rental. What should it also tell the board about how certain that is?

Your answer

The note should also state ___, so that ___.

In the news

Real source | Education Week | February 6, 2023

Letting Students Decide Where Money Should Go: How One District Did It

A real district let students propose and vote on how shared school spaces and money would change.

Real source | First Alert 4 (KMOV) | June 4, 2026

St. Louis shuts down streets to cars, hands them over to neighbors

A city pilot that changes a shared space for a trial run, so neighbors can test trade-offs before anything is permanent.

Notes

Sort the evidence

On your own Follow each option to its consequences. Mark the consequences that depend on a projection. About 8 minutes.

Follow each option to its consequences. Which consequences depend on a projection, and who carries the cost if it misses?

Option B: paid rentals replace Tuesday and Thursday evenings

A projected $240 would cover the $200 gap if both evenings book

Who is affected

Check: What happens if bookings fall short of the projection?

Dec loses Thursday rehearsals and Mari's late evenings stop being usable

Who is affected

Option C: one rental evening piloted for six weeks

A projected $80 gap remains while the board seeks funding and reviews the pilot

Who is affected

Check: What happens if bookings fall short of the projection?

Whose perspective is missing?

Whose view is missing from these documents? What would you ask them?

The view that is missing is ___. I would ask ___.

Practice: choose a response

On your own Choose what the crew should ask for first and explain why. Then fix the two marked lines. About 6 minutes.

What should the crew ask the board for first?

- ☐ **A** Post that the board is taking away the free nights.
- ☐ **B** Ask for the budget assumptions, who uses each evening and a way to comment without attending.
- ☐ **C** Support whichever option brings in the most money.

Why I chose it

Improve a draft

A student's first draft

1 The board should not take away our free nights. The Common Room is important to the community and a lot of people use it. I have been coming here for movie nights since it opened and it's one of the only places we can all hang out without paying. Renting it out just shows 2 the board cares more about money than people. Sami and Dec would lose their spot and that is not fair. Please keep it free for everyone. Thank you for listening.

Rewrite each marked phrase so it says only what the evidence supports.

Rewrite phrase 1

Rewrite phrase 2

College

Your task

On your own Read the steps. Fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft. About 12 minutes.

Write a proposal to the nonprofit board for hearing from evening users before it chooses among Options A, B and C. Add a written comment that recommends one option.

Use: Case documents: the board agenda, the weekly budget note, the listening notes and Mari's and Sami's statements. Real sources: the Bacchi summary, ASPA's principle on promoting democratic participation and the first principle of the ALA code.

You'll make: Proposal, 300—400 words, plus a written comment of 150—200 words

Time: 75 minutes

1. Reread Evidence A, B and C. Note who the meeting time leaves out.
2. Plan two ways the board can hear from evening users before it decides.
3. Add a way to hear the nearby resident's concern about noise.
4. Say how the board will report back what it heard.
5. Draft the proposal, 300 to 400 words, on the Your draft page.
6. Write a comment of 150 to 200 words that recommends one option.

Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

Who the meeting time leaves out

Input method 1

Input method 2

Your task, continued

How the board reports back

Notes

Your draft

On your own Write your draft in the boxes. Use your planner from the page before. About 30 minutes.

Your proposal, 300 to 400 words

Your draft, continued

Your written comment, 150 to 200 words

Notes

Check your work

On your own Answer the Check your work questions and mark your level in each rubric row. Then write one change you made. About 8 minutes.

Does your proposal name the board as the decision-maker and say no vote has been taken?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Do you use the figures accurately and call the $120 a projection?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does your plan reach people whose shifts overlap with the meeting?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Do you make one request the board can act on?	☐ Yes	☐ No

How your work is scored

Mark one box in each row.

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Evidence	☐ No figures or perspectives.	☐ Mentions money or people vaguely.	☐ Uses one figure and one affected perspective accurately.	☐ Uses figures conditionally and names an uncertainty.
Reasoning	☐ Assigns bad motives to the board.	☐ States a preference without addressing the gap.	☐ Recommends an option and addresses the gap.	☐ Weighs trade-offs across options and explains the choice.
Audience & purpose	☐ Speaks to the wrong decision -maker.	☐ Addresses the board but asks for nothing specific.	☐ Makes a request the board can act on.	☐ Requests a process that includes people who can't attend.
Revision	☐ No change.	☐ Tone edits only.	☐ Replaces a motive claim with evidence.	☐ Adds a figure, a perspective and a follow-up request.

Check your work, continued

One change I made after feedback

I changed ___ because ___.

Notes

Questions to discuss

On your own Write a short answer to each question. Then finish My take. About 10 minutes.

1. **Option B treats the $200 gap as the problem. What does that way of stating the problem leave out?**

2. **Mari is paid to close the shop and also uses the room at night. How does that shape what she asks for?**

3. **If the board chooses an option the crew did not support, how should the crew tell the group what happened?**

4. **How is the Common Room's board different from the City Council that helped restore library Sundays?**

My take

My claim: ___.

My take, continued

The best evidence is ___, because ___.

Someone who disagrees might say ___.

The limit of the evidence is ___.

I would change my mind if ___.

Notes

Talk about this case at home

Case 4: Who gets a say when a shared room changes?

In this case, a community room's board is weighing whether to rent out two free evenings to cover its costs. Your student used a budget note and notes from evening users to write a comment the board could act on.

See the case online.

Questions to talk about

1. Who decides the hours at a public library or community center?
2. What should a group know before it asks a board for a change?
3. How can people give input if they cannot attend a meeting?

Nobody needs to share personal stories or private information to talk about this case.