

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR GROUPS

Working through a problem with your group

Challenge Based Learning for student leaders





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Challenge Based Learning for student leaders

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Working through a problem with your group

Challenge Based Learning for student leaders

This guide contains the complete reuse-club worked case, guided cases for the other three age bands, six documented CBL projects, and six reusable records. Getting involved and Already leading offer entry points into the shared high-school and college cases.

The worked examples are made for this guide. Named projects describe work reported by the people or organizations involved; their sources are included.

The focus is the work a student leader has to do: choose a manageable problem, ask questions that might change the plan, try an action with the right permission, check what happened, and leave the next person a useful record. A design tool can help with a communication task. It does not decide what the problem is or whether the result worked.

A sample communication for Adobe Express is included in the worked case. A separate native Express template is not included in this packet.



Start with something your group is stuck on

A meeting keeps ending without a decision. The same people do the work. New members sign up, then disappear. Someone has suggested a fix, but nobody has checked whether it would solve the problem.

These are good reasons to pause before making another poster or adding another event. You need to understand enough of the situation to choose a sensible next move. You also need to work with the people who will live with that choice.

Challenge Based Learning gives that work a structure. You start with an issue that matters to the group, investigate questions that could change your plan, and carry out an action you can evaluate. It asks for learning and action together. A well-researched proposal is useful, but you have not tested it until someone has actually used it.

The framework in plain language

Engage: Begin with a broad concern, called a big idea. Ask an essential question that connects it to your situation, then agree on an actionable challenge. In the reuse-club case, belonging becomes a question about fitting a useful contribution into students' lives. The challenge is to test a manageable way for newcomers to contribute.

Investigate: Work out what you need to know before choosing a solution. These are your guiding questions. Find reliable information, talk to people with relevant experience, observe the situation where appropriate, and compare what you learn. Explain which answers changed your thinking.

Act: Develop a proposal from that evidence, get the necessary approval, try it with the people it is meant to serve, and evaluate the result. Testing can send you back to an earlier question. Keep documenting, reflecting and sharing appropriate learning throughout all three phases.

Framework source: Challenge Based Learning, "Framework."

<https://www.challengebasedlearning.org/framework/>

What to have beside you

Use a notebook or a shared document your group already has permission to use. Write down the question, the evidence, the decision and what happened. The blank records later in this packet can help, but you do not have to complete every field if it adds nothing to the decision.

Choose a problem small enough to investigate and act on within the time you actually have. "Make everyone feel included" could mean almost anything. "Help a newcomer find and finish a first task in our next two sessions" gives the group something it can try. That narrower action will not resolve every question about inclusion, and the record should say so.

Start with authority, too. You might be able to rewrite your club's task instructions but not change room access, school transport or the publication policy. Find the person responsible before promising a change. A smaller action within your authority can still teach you something useful.

If your group already has a solution in mind, write it down as a proposal. Do not let it become the answer before you have asked the questions. If the investigation suggests that the problem is elsewhere, changing the proposal is progress.



How to use the examples

The reuse club is the full worked case. Follow the evidence and the awkward choices, including the first trial that takes too much officer time. Then use the guided case closest to your setting or choose your own problem. The real projects show what other groups reported doing with CBL. Their results are not a forecast for your group.

You do not need an elected role to start. For Onward and Assembly, use the entry point that fits the work in front of you. Getting involved helps you find a useful part in a group and investigate an access problem. Already leading starts with responsibility for a team, a decision or a result. You can move between them, and both use the same records.

Framework credit

CBL emerged from Apple's Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow - Today work and was developed and tested with educators. This packet applies the framework to student leadership. It is an independent Next of Us resource; Apple, Adobe and The Challenge Institute have not endorsed it.

<https://www.challengebasedlearning.org/about/>



Helping more students take part in the campus reuse club

A worked Challenge Based Learning case for student leaders

Choose your entry point

Getting involved

You might be one of the 58 interested students, without a committee role or much knowledge of the club. Read the case from that position. What would you need to know before giving up a lunch break? With the committee's agreement, try following its joining instructions and offer one concrete improvement. You can help investigate a barrier or prepare a trial without becoming responsible for the whole club. Do not access its contact list or change its arrangements on your own.

Already leading

Read as one of the four officers who has to make this work. You need to weigh a better opening for newcomers against the time of existing members, including those who cannot attend lunch. Pay particular attention to the rejected options, the first trial's workload, and the conditions attached to continuing. A larger attendance count does not settle those decisions for you.

Use either route for the same case and records. If your responsibility changes, change your entry point; there is no separate version of the book to finish first.

Scenario

The campus reuse club collects spare stationery and puts usable supplies on a free shelf. Four officers do most of the sorting. They are tired, and they want other students to have a genuine part in the club.

There are 58 non-officer students on the opt-in interest list. At the three recent Wednesday sessions, five, four, and six non-officers attended. Those 15 visits came from nine different people. Three were joining the club for the first time.

Maya, the chair, wants to spend the remaining \$30 on posters. Jo, who makes the club's graphics, isn't convinced: "The last post got plenty of likes. I still spent Wednesday sorting pens with the same people." Neither knows whether the problem is the invitation, the timing, the activity, or something else.

They have four weeks before assessment deadlines. Nobody agrees to build a new programme for next term. Their job is to investigate one participation problem, run a manageable trial, and leave a useful decision for the next committee.

Engage

Starting with a big idea

The group chooses belonging. Here, that means being able to turn up, understand what is happening, and do something that matters. A student can support the reuse shelf without wanting a committee position or a weekly social group.



At their first 25-minute meeting, the officers put these questions on the table:

- Who finds it easy to join this club already?
- What are we asking someone to give up to attend?
- Can somebody contribute once without explaining why they won't come every week?
- Does attending a meeting actually give someone a useful job?
- Whose idea of a successful club are we using?

They settle on an essential question: "How can students fit a useful part in this club into the lives they already have?"

Their first proposed challenge is "Get 20 people to the next meeting." Dev points out that they could achieve that with free food and still have the same four people doing the work. They rewrite it together.

Completed challenge record

Challenge: Over four weeks, help students who are new to the reuse club complete a useful task, and test whether the club can offer that opportunity within the officers' available time.

Boundary: One club, its existing interest list, and two trial sessions. No campus-wide recruitment campaign, new software, or extra weekly event.

Provisional success measures: At least six first-time participants complete a useful task across the two trials. At least four of those completers say the format would fit their life again. The four officers' combined project work stays within six hours in each trial week.

Resources: Existing donated stationery, a bookable campus room, and four officers. Each officer can give no more than two hours in a week; the six-hour team limit still applies.

Sample budget in USD: \$30 available.

Decision rights: Students choose the question, examine the evidence, and select a proposal. Their staff adviser checks room use, accessibility, spending, and permission to change the advertised sessions. Approval to investigate does not approve every possible intervention.

Unsettled point: What counts as a useful task? The team must define it before the trial rather than counting anyone who walks past the table.

Investigate

Questions that can change the decision

The team gives itself a week. Dev stops them adding "find out everything students want from clubs" to the plan. They need answers that could change these two sessions.

Completed evidence plan

1. Is the invitation reaching interested students?

Maya checks the existing interest-list count and delivery records. The short questionnaire asks whether respondents saw the last invitation. A delivered message does not prove it was read.



2. What stopped students from attending?

Dev sends a five-question form to all 58 non-officers through the club's usual channel. It stays open for four days, with one reminder. They specifically want absent students' answers, not only friends at the next meeting.

3. What happens when somebody does arrive?

Ellis observes the last of the three baseline sessions. They record arrival time, time to the first task, and where somebody needs help. They ask permission before making notes about a person's experience.

4. Which alternative is actually possible?

Jo checks room availability and asks about a lunchtime option. The adviser checks the route, room access, and whether the supplies can stay nearby. Availability in a survey is only a reason to test a time.

5. How much work do the officers have capacity to do?

Everyone logs their minutes for one ordinary week. They include messages, carrying boxes, and tidying up, which usually disappear from meeting minutes.

The form asks: Did you attend any of the last three sessions? Did you see the latest invitation? If you didn't attend, what was the main reason? Which listed times could sometimes work? What would you need to know before trying one session?

Answers are optional. The form does not ask for timetable screenshots, disability information, employers, or an explanation of personal circumstances. Interview volunteers contact Dev separately, so the questionnaire can remain anonymous. Raw responses stay with the officers and adviser; the handover contains grouped findings.

Sample data record

Invitation audit: The latest email was delivered to 57 of the 58 listed addresses; one bounced. In the questionnaire, 23 of 29 respondents recall seeing it, four do not, and two are unsure. Delivery and remembered exposure are different measures.

Questionnaire: 29 of 58 invited students respond, a 50% response rate. Seven respondents attended a baseline session; 22 did not. The two attendees who did not respond and the 27 other nonrespondents may see things differently.

Main reason among the 22 non-attending respondents, one answer each:

- Class, work, or journey home conflicts with the time: 10 of 22
- Unsure what they would be doing: 5 of 22
- Assumed joining meant a regular commitment: 4 of 22
- Did not see the invitation: 2 of 22
- No longer interested: 1 of 22

Possible times among all 29 respondents, with multiple selections allowed:

- Tuesday lunchtime: 16 of 29
- Wednesday evening: 11 of 29
- A weekend session: 8 of 29



These totals overlap. They are not bookings, and they do not establish what all 58 students prefer.

Observation: Three first-time students arrive at the observed baseline session. Their waits for a first task are nine, eleven, and fourteen minutes. Two say they do not know whether they can leave before the end. Three observations are enough to spot something worth fixing, but too few to describe every newcomer's experience.

Six short interviews: Four volunteers had missed all three baseline sessions; two were first-time attendees. One says, "I can do half an hour between classes. I can't wait around until six." Another says, "I thought I had to know where everything went." All six volunteered for a conversation, so quieter or disengaged students remain underrepresented.

Work log: The ordinary week takes 6 hours 20 minutes across the four officers. Carrying supplies and answering individual messages account for 85 minutes. Even the current arrangement exceeds their proposed limit.

What the team learns

Their starting assumption was that interested students needed a more attractive invitation. The evidence points to several obstacles: the evening time excludes some respondents, the task is unclear, and turning up can mean waiting for an officer to give instructions.

Awareness still matters. Two absent respondents never saw the invitation, and the team does not know why 29 people did not answer. It would be too strong to say publicity is irrelevant. It would also be a poor use of their \$30 to print more of an invitation that leaves the time commitment vague.

The revised working explanation is: some interested students could contribute if the time suited them and the first task was clear. The team can test that locally. They cannot claim to have diagnosed low participation across the college.

Decision note, end of week two: Keep the six-newcomer target. Define a completed contribution as sorting one tray of 12 donated items against the condition guide, recording the keep/recycle counts, and getting the tray checked. A person may leave sooner; their visit is welcome but will not be counted as a completed contribution.

Act

Two proposals and an uncomfortable choice

Option A: Keep Wednesday at 6 p.m., reduce the session to 45 minutes, and introduce prepared starter trays. This protects the time that works for existing members and needs little extra coordination. It does little for the ten respondents whose main barrier is the evening schedule.

Option B: Replace two Wednesday sessions with Tuesday sessions from 12:15 to 12:50, using the same starter trays. This gives the most frequently selected alternative time a proper test. It also inconveniences members who can only attend in the evening, including Jo. Moving boxes may create extra work.

Running both sounds kinder. The work log rules it out. Keeping every option open would mean quietly asking the same volunteers to work more hours.

The team chooses B for two weeks. Two regular members say they cannot attend at lunchtime. Maya records that objection rather than describing the decision as unanimous. Jo agrees to prepare the invitation and condition guide outside the session, but says they do not want that to become a permanent behind-the-scenes role.



Completed trial approval record

Approved proposal: Two replacement sessions, Tuesday 20 and 27 October, 12:15-12:50, Student Union room 2.14, booked at no charge.

Approved by: Staff adviser and room coordinator, following the student team's proposal.

Conditions: Keep the accessible route clear; use tables that can be reached while seated; provide seated sorting places; keep supplies out of the corridor. Use existing stock. Spend no more than \$12 on labels and printing. Tell the usual members that the Wednesday sessions are being replaced. Do not photograph participants without permission.

Stop or change the trial if: The room is unavailable, safe access cannot be maintained, or an officer reaches their two-hour limit. If team time exceeds six hours in the first week, simplify before the second session. Do not recruit extra unpaid labour merely to make the reported workload look smaller.

Trial preparation and responsibilities

Maya has 75 planned minutes for approval, scheduling, and the team check-in. Dev has 80 for the tally sheet, anonymous exit cards, session support, and counting. Ellis has 115 for supplies, the condition guide, and both setup and close-down duties in the trial week. Jo has 60 for the invitation, accessible text version, and a final copy check. Total planned time: 5 hours 30 minutes, leaving 30 minutes for problems.

Their five-minute table test reveals a weakness: "good condition" means different things to each officer. They add examples to the guide: keep a notebook with at least ten clean unused pages; recycle loose sheets with personal writing; test a pen on scrap paper before placing it in the usable tray. They remove names and personal information from any donated material before reuse.

The supplies are ready in numbered trays. At the door, an officer says, "You can take one tray and start here. The guide is on the table. You can leave whenever you need to." Nobody has to introduce themselves to the whole room.

Sample communication for Adobe Express

Sort spare supplies for the free campus shelf

Got 20 minutes between classes?

Tuesday 20 or 27 October

Drop in between 12:15 and 12:30. We finish at 12:50.

Student Union, room 2.14

We'll show you how to check one tray of donated stationery. No experience, equipment, or weekly commitment needed. Come alone or with a friend. Seated tasks are available.

No sign-up needed. Questions about the room or the activity? Reply to the reuse club's message.

Production brief: Make one square post and one A4 notice from this copy. Give the task, time, and room the largest text after the title. Use a photograph of the supplies, not students' faces. Put the full wording in the message alongside the image so the details are available without reading the graphic. Two students check whether they can explain the task and time after seeing the draft. The invitation is revised before it is shared.



How the trial is measured

Dev uses a paper tally, with officers excluded from all participant counts. The optional arrival questions are “Is this your first time with the club?” and, in week two, “Did you come last Tuesday?” Everyone answers in this example. No names are recorded. A checked tray establishes task completion; being in the room does not.

The exit card asks: “Could this format fit your life again? Yes / No / Unsure. What made joining easy or awkward?” Each newcomer is offered one card after their first completed tray; returning participants are not offered another. Leaving a card is optional. The team also logs all preparation and cleanup time, plus any point when instructions or room access fail.

Completed evaluation record

Trial one: 13 non-officers arrive, including nine first-time participants. Eleven people complete a tray, including seven of the nine newcomers. One newcomer leaves for class after ten minutes; another spends most of the session waiting for a check. Officer time reaches 6 hours 40 minutes. Carrying boxes from another building takes longer than planned.

Change before trial two: The room coordinator approves storage in a nearby cupboard. Ellis caps preparation at the agreed time. Maya handles a second checking point during the busiest ten minutes. The invitation's core wording and the activity stay the same.

Trial two: Eight non-officers arrive. Three are first-time participants; five came to trial one. Seven complete a tray, including two of the three newcomers. Officer time is 5 hours 25 minutes. Nobody reaches the individual two-hour limit in either trial week.

Across both trials: 21 visits, 16 different participants, 12 newcomers, and nine newcomers who complete a task. Eighteen trays are completed across all visits, covering 216 donated items. These are items checked, not a measure of supplies subsequently taken from the shelf. Spending is \$9.60 on labels and printing, leaving \$20.40 of the original \$30.

Exit feedback: Seven of the nine unique newcomer completers leave a card, counted once each. Six say the format could fit their life again; one is unsure. The two missing cards must remain missing. Three of the nine newcomers from trial one return the next week. That is an early sign of repeat participation, not evidence of term-long retention.

Decision: The participation and feedback targets are met. The workload target is missed in week one and met in week two. The team recommends one further lunchtime session only if nearby storage and two checking positions are available. It does not recommend replacing evening sessions for the entire term yet.

The results cannot tell them how much the time change, clearer invitation, starter trays, or novelty contributed separately. The baseline also covered three sessions while the trial covered two. They report both sets of counts and their different time periods rather than presenting a clean percentage improvement.

Reflection and documentation throughout

Each officer adds a three-line entry after a working session: What happened? What did it change? What should the next person know? They keep the rejected option and the original invitation as well as the improved version.



The team shares the grouped findings with the interest list before the trial. Afterwards, it sends the results and proposed next step, including the missed workload target and the loss of an evening option. Students can point out what the committee has missed. Raw responses and identifiable comments stay out of those updates.

Sample entries:

Maya, after investigation: "I treated a list of interested people as a list of people available on Wednesday. Those are different. I still want more members, but our first job is to make joining possible."

Ellis, after trial one: "The tray instructions helped people begin. Checking became the new queue. I nearly fixed it by staying late, which would hide the workload problem."

Jo, after evaluation: "The lunchtime trial brought in new students. I couldn't be there. Before we call this more inclusive, we need to say who lost an opportunity too."

Usable handover

Maya hands the incoming coordinator one folder containing the challenge record, grouped survey counts, observation sheet, approval record, editable invitation, condition guide, trial tallies, time logs, and this decision note. No respondent identities or individual timetable details are included. The raw survey responses are scheduled for deletion after the agreed 30-day review period.

Next owner: Incoming coordinator, Sam. First decision due: Before advertising November sessions.

Keep: A clear finish time, starter trays, seated work, and permission to contribute once.

Check before booking: Is nearby storage still approved? Can two people check trays during the first 20 minutes? Which existing members would lose access if all sessions moved?

Still unanswered: Can a shorter evening session reach a different group? Will first-time participants return after the novelty wears off? Does the free shelf need this amount of sorting every week?

Next test: Compare one shorter evening session with the same task setup. Do not call the comparison controlled; the students and dates will differ. Record who can take part and the work required.

If nobody has capacity: Pause the extra trial and keep the instructions for the next term. A handover that admits its limit is more useful than a promise the outgoing committee cannot keep.



Adaptations for other settings

Helping someone join a lunchtime game

Middle school example

Scenario

The lunchtime board-game group has spare chairs, but new students still hover by the door. Its student leaders want to put up a brighter sign. The supervising teacher asks them to watch what happens after someone comes in.

Engage

Big idea: Belonging means having a reasonable way into an activity, even when you don't already know the people or the rules. The students ask, "How can somebody join a game that has already started?" They also ask whether making room always means interrupting somebody else's game.

Their challenge: Across two supervised lunch sessions, help at least four newcomers start a game within five minutes, without asking the teacher to arrange every place. Keep the student welcome role within 20 minutes per session in total.

Investigate

The teacher agrees to an anonymous arrival tally. Two student observers count waits without recording names, photographing classmates, or guessing why someone is alone. They ask six willing students who have never joined, "If you wanted to try this, what would you need to know?" They don't ask classmates to identify who is lonely.

Filled mini-record

Baseline: Across two sessions, seven newcomers arrive; two of seven start playing within five minutes. Spare chairs exist, but several games cannot accept another player halfway through.

Short conversations: Of six volunteers, three are unsure whether they can interrupt; two don't know the games' rules; one isn't interested. These are six volunteers' views, not a survey of the school.

Changed assumption: A sign might help students find the room. It would not create an opening in a game already underway.

Act

The students compare two options. A permanent beginner table offers certainty but removes one of the four tables from regular players. A student host can start short games with newcomers, but the host gives up some of their own lunch.

They choose a host role for the first 20 minutes, split between two volunteers. The teacher approves two short games, checks that their instructions are accurate, and keeps responsibility for supervision and behaviour. The leaders prepare a small "Next game starts at 12:25" card in Adobe Express. The useful change is the scheduled opening and available host.



Sample outcome: Six newcomers attend the two trials; five of six start within five minutes. The sixth wants a longer game that is already underway. The first session uses 24 host-minutes because the handover runs late; the second uses 20. Two regular players dislike restarting short games, and one host says they barely had time to play anything themselves.

Leadership decision

The arrival target is met, but the leaders cannot make the same two students permanent hosts. They recommend one advertised start time and a voluntary rota that allows hosts to skip a week. If nobody volunteers, the group keeps its ordinary supervised session without promising a welcome service it cannot provide.

Reflection and handover

The teacher keeps the anonymous tally. Students pass on the two game instructions, start-time card, role timings, and complaints as well as the positive feedback. Their reflection prompt is, "Who gained time to play, and who gave up time?"

Your turn

Choose one change for the next session: _____.

The observation supporting it is: _____.

The student doing the extra work is: _____.

The adult who must approve it is: _____.

We will count _____ out of _____.

We will change or pause the plan if: _____.



Making the student media team easier to join

High school example

Choose your entry point

Getting involved

You do not need to call yourself a journalist or run for editor to try a first contribution. Read the brief as a prospective contributor. Can you find a manageable assignment, a deadline, equipment and a person who can explain the permissions? Ask to work on one approved item or help test the instructions. You are entitled to ask what a role involves before agreeing to it.

Already leading

Read as the editor who wants more voices but cannot keep absorbing every unfinished task. Your decision is how much support the team can honestly offer, what counts as a ready draft, and who has final publication responsibility. The sample result misses both the completion target and the editing-time limit. Use that result to revise the intake rather than quietly doing everybody else's reporting.

Both routes meet in the same work: a clear first assignment, realistic support and a checked result. Move between them as your role changes.

Scenario

A school media team has 42 names on its interest list, but most published pieces come from the same four students. Its editor suggests a recruitment video. Another student asks whether a new contributor would actually know how to get a story accepted.

Engage

Big idea: Voice includes having a fair chance to contribute, understand feedback, and shape a publication. Students ask, "What does somebody need between saying they are interested and finishing their first report?" They also ask how much unpaid editing their current members can reasonably absorb.

Their challenge: Within three weeks, help six new contributors complete an item that meets the school's publication requirements, without requiring an after-school meeting. Keep the student editor's additional work within 90 minutes a week. Actual publication remains subject to the school's approval and permissions.

Investigate

The team surveys the interest list, reviews the existing submission instructions, and watches two volunteers try to find a first assignment. They check school laptop availability rather than assuming every student can work on a phone at home.

Filled mini-record

Questionnaire: 16 of 42 students reply. Six have contributed before; ten have not.

Main barrier among those ten: Four cannot stay after school because of transport; three don't know what to submit; two lack suitable equipment outside school; one is unsure about interview and photograph permissions. Only these ten respondents' answers support those counts.



Instruction check: Both volunteers find the submission address. Neither finds a word limit, an example, or an explanation of what happens after submission.

Changed assumption: The team needs to make the first assignment and its support realistic before recruiting more people into the same unclear process.

Act

Option A is an open lunchtime editing desk. It allows flexible help but makes demand unpredictable.

Option B is a capped first-assignment group with a shared briefing and scheduled school-laptop access. It offers less choice but makes the support commitment visible.

The students choose B. The adviser approves eight places, two lunchtime work sessions, equipment access, and the reporting brief. Each student prepares a 100-word report about an approved school activity. The brief requires a checked date, accurate description, and one quote used with permission. The adviser explains how permissions are recorded; students do not post drafts publicly or gather unnecessary personal details.

The editor first checks facts and consent, then structure and wording. Adobe Express is used to show how accepted copy could sit on the publication page after those checks. A polished layout does not make an unverified quote publishable.

Sample outcome: Eight newcomers accept places; six submit drafts; four meet the agreed requirements by the deadline. Two need further reporting. Two submit nothing, and the team does not invent reasons for their silence. Editing takes 125 minutes in the busiest week, exceeding the 90-minute limit. The six-item target is missed.

Leadership decision

The editor declines to rush the remaining pieces into publication. The team recommends four places next time, a shared fact-checking demonstration, and a clearly stated revision deadline. It asks the two unfinished writers whether they want another opportunity, without promising that the editor can provide unlimited help.

Reflection and handover

Keep the brief, anonymised draft-and-feedback example, acceptance criteria, equipment arrangements, and actual editing minutes. Ask, "Which instruction would have prevented the most repeated feedback?" Record the equipment barrier as still open for students who cannot attend the available laptop sessions.

Your turn

Our next intake will have _____ places because: _____.

Before accepting those places, we must confirm: _____.

A completed item must meet these three checks: _____.

The person with final publication responsibility is: _____.

If editing exceeds _____ minutes, we will: _____.



Offering a manageable first garden task

Community example

Scenario

A neighbourhood garden wants more residents to help. Saturday workdays already depend on two experienced volunteers, who are wary of advertising more widely and becoming responsible for a much larger group. New volunteers say they would like to help but cannot commit to a whole morning.

Engage

Big idea: Shared space raises questions about who can contribute and who carries the responsibility. Residents ask, "How can someone do a useful garden task without gardening experience or a free Saturday morning?" They also ask who will open the gate, explain tasks, and handle problems.

Their challenge: Over one month, help five first-time adult volunteers complete an approved task within 30 minutes. Keep the coordinator's additional work within two hours in each trial week. This project does not change the garden's access or safety rules.

Investigate

The coordinator invites feedback through the garden's contact list. Volunteers inspect the task area together, checking routes, table height, materials, and supervision. They ask what arrangements people need rather than collecting health histories. They check which tasks genuinely need doing this month.

Filled mini-record

Feedback: Fourteen of 30 contacts respond. Seven already attend; seven would like to start.

Main barrier among the seven prospective volunteers: Four cannot attend Saturday mornings; two are unsure about using unfamiliar tools; one assumes the commitment is every week. These responses do not establish the needs of residents outside the list.

Available work: Enough plant labels and seed envelopes for two small sessions. No volunteers are needed for digging this month.

Local approval condition: Two experienced volunteers must be present whenever the trial operates. This is the garden's condition for this scenario, not a rule assumed for every garden.

Changed assumption: More publicity could produce more arrivals than the group can supervise or give useful work to.

Act

The group compares a short Saturday welcome session with two Wednesday early-evening sessions. Saturday would be easier for the existing team but leaves the most frequently reported timing barrier untouched. Wednesdays need a different supervision rota and a clear cancellation plan.

The garden committee approves two Wednesday sessions, each with six newcomer places, existing supplies, and two named experienced volunteers. Tasks are sorting labels and filling seed envelopes at reachable tables. Nobody is assigned unfamiliar powered equipment. One person checks bookings;



another prepares the task instructions. The coordinator approves an Adobe Express notice only after the rota and task materials are confirmed.

Sample outcome: One experienced volunteer becomes unavailable before the first session. No approved substitute can attend, so the coordinator cancels and tells the booked participants through the usual contact channel. They do not run the session alone to protect the attendance target.

Six newcomers attend the second session. Four complete an approved task within 30 minutes. One leaves early; one cannot comfortably reach the arranged supplies and stops. That setup problem is recorded without requesting a medical explanation. The coordinator spends 140 minutes in the cancellation week and 110 minutes in the second week. Both the participation target and one weekly workload limit are missed.

Leadership decision

The committee postpones another invitation until it can confirm two supervisors and test the table setup. It avoids promising additional places just because there is interest. The four completed contributions are useful, but they do not justify calling the offer accessible or sustainable yet.

Reflection and handover

Pass on the approved task cards, stock count, booking limit, cancellation wording, and unresolved access issue. Ask, "What must be ready before we invite someone to spend time travelling here?" The next coordinator checks these arrangements afresh rather than treating last month's approval as permanent.

Your turn

The useful task our group actually needs is: _____.

We can safely support _____ newcomers with _____ supervisors.

The person authorised to approve this is: _____.

Before invitations go out, we will test: _____.

Our cancellation trigger and message owner are: _____.

Framework references

Challenge Based Learning Framework: the original description of the process used in this case.

<https://www.challengebasedlearning.org/framework/>

Apple's introduction emphasises learners co-owning and co-authoring their learning. In this case, students choose the challenge and proposal while the relevant adults approve matters within their responsibility.

https://education.apple.com/learning-center/R006554-en_US



What real groups did

These six projects were identified as CBL by their schools, teachers or the Challenge Based Learning project collection. Some have a detailed account of the work; others have only a short report. That difference matters. Where a source reports an activity but not its later results, the account below stops there.

The connection to student leadership is our application of the case. It is not a claim that every group used our records, asked the same questions or achieved a measurable improvement in leadership.



A windmill for Yolanda

Universidad Nacional de Río Negro, Argentina

About 30 first-year Industrial Maintenance students worked on a problem with an identifiable recipient. Yolanda was pumping water by hand. Mathematics teacher Pablo Fabián Carranza proposed a university extension project to build a wind-powered system. The accounts do not establish that the students chose the original issue themselves.

They had to learn about the place before settling the design. Carranza describes site measurements, analysis of more than 200,000 regional wind-speed records, and GeoGebra models for forces and rotor area. Those activities answered practical questions about what the structure would need to withstand and how the rotor might work. The teacher reports that the students built and installed a Savonius windmill over one semester. Half its parts were reused. They borrowed tools and worked in home courtyards because they lacked a workshop.

The published account, dated 13 May 2019, describes installation and links project models and videos. It does not provide a later repair history, independent performance measurements or a before-and-after record of Yolanda's time. The pumped water served irrigation, hygiene and animals; drinking water arrived separately by truck.

For our own groups

Before proposing a community project, meet the people expected to use the result. What local fact could make your first idea unsuitable? An unfamiliar opening time, a storage restriction or the cost of replacement supplies can matter as much as the design. Ask who will maintain the result after your team leaves. Write the answer before treating installation as the end of the work.

Sources: Carranza's firsthand teacher account and the official CBL project page.

<https://observatorio.tec.mx/edu-bits/agua-para-yolanda-aprendiendo-desde-la-practica/>

<https://www.challengebasedlearning.org/project/a-windmill-for-yolanda/>



Ask what help is wanted

Ringwood North Primary, Australia, 2011

After disasters in Australia and overseas, Ringwood North students worked with the broad idea of resilience. The 2011 implementation report describes 138 students in grades five and six, aged ten to twelve, taking on the challenge of helping a community recover from a disaster.

Concern did not immediately become a collection drive. According to the CBL account, students contacted organisations in Queensland and interviewed them about what was needed. Teams organised ideas, assigned jobs and checked progress against their plans. Reported actions included collecting library books, gathering food and supplies for the RSPCA, planting trees and holding a fundraising concert.

The implementation report also describes students using video and soundtracks to reflect on the work. Educators reported greater confidence, independence and teamwork. Those are their observations, not evidence from a controlled study showing that CBL caused those changes. The sources do not give a recipient-verified total for the donations or establish the projects' long-term contribution to recovery.

For our own groups

A team can put considerable effort into collecting things an organisation cannot use. Before asking classmates to give money or supplies, ask the recipient what is wanted, in what condition, by when, and who can receive it. Bring that answer back to the group. If it changes your plan, record the change rather than hiding it from the final presentation.

For a middle-school project, an adult should arrange the external contact and supervise the activity. Students can still compare possible contributions, divide the work and explain why they chose one. They do not need to take on unsafe travel or emergency-response responsibilities to make a useful contribution.

Sources: official CBL project account and the original 2011 implementation report, printed pages 20-21.

<https://www.challengebasedlearning.org/project/ringwood-north-primary/>

https://www.challengebasedlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CBL_implementation_report.pdf



The work continues after the launch

Clarksville Academy, Tennessee

Clarksville Academy's students worked on several CBL projects involving public recreation. Two related efforts are useful here: outdoor fitness equipment and a bicycle-sharing service. They were separate projects, with separate funding.

The school's September 2015 report describes twenty students, aged fourteen to eighteen, working over three years on the fitness project. After equipment was installed, students observed what people used and when, across different days and times. Their investigation informed further work. The report records a \$51,790 grant for fitness equipment at the Greenway and Rotary Park; that is not the bicycle project's budget.

For bicycle sharing, a school announcement describes a year spent researching providers, a student grant proposal and work with the city on locations. A 2017 expansion announcement describes community feedback informing station choices. These reports show students undertaking research, funding and coordination work with a real operator. A launch announcement's plan to monitor use should not be treated as proof that every planned monitoring activity happened.

There is also a later chapter. In March 2024, the City of Clarksville announced that BCycle would close on 31 March after eight years of operation. The city cited aging equipment, unsustainable ridership and replacement bicycle and kiosk parts that were no longer manufactured. It did not describe a permanent service that could carry on unchanged.

For our own groups

Use this case when your committee is excited about buying or launching something. Who takes responsibility for operation? What will you count after the opening? Where will repairs, replacements and recurring costs come from? Put a review date and a possible stopping decision in the proposal. Closing or replacing a service may eventually be the responsible choice, even when its launch was worthwhile.

The reports establish implementation, student investigation and the later closure. They do not establish a population-health improvement caused by either project.

Sources: Clarksville Academy's project reports and the city's service-closure notice.

<https://clarksvilleacademy.com/press/clarksville-academy-students-improve-the-health-and-fitness-of-clarksville/>

<https://clarksvilleacademy.com/press/b-cycle-is-coming-to-clarksville/>

<https://clarksvilleacademy.com/press/clarksville-bcycle-to-grow/>

<https://clarksvilletn.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2583&ARC=3506>



Students take responsibility for a public event

Susquenita High School, Pennsylvania, 2024

History and civics teacher Terrance Shepler published a CBL plan about voter registration and participation in July 2024, then an account of the students' work that October. The later account is the evidence of implementation; the earlier plan alone would not show that its suggested activities took place.

Shepler reports that students analysed local voting and registration statistics using Freeform and Numbers. They created publicity and polling-location guides, invited officials, prepared displays, presented research and iMovie commercials, and led a public evening. The work combined investigation with the responsibilities of hosting people and presenting usable information.

The teacher reports that people registered and officials attended. He also says the county requested the students' maps and intended to publish them. The inspected account supplies no attendance or registration total, and later publication of the maps was not verified. A Keynote with student audio reflections is attached to the account; the audio itself was not reviewed for this guide. There is no evidence here of a measured change in voter turnout.

For our own groups

There is a useful distinction between making a public-information event happen and proving a larger social result. For a school or campus service event, check the facts with the responsible office, test whether a newcomer can use the instructions, and assign someone to update them. Count what you can actually observe. A clear event record is more credible than attributing a later outcome to your publicity without evidence.

If your project concerns civic information, keep participation voluntary and the guidance neutral. Do not collect registration credentials or classmates' political preferences. Work with the responsible public-service staff on accuracy and handling personal information.

Sources: the teacher's plan and subsequent implementation account in the Apple Education Community.

<https://education.apple.com/resource/250012996>

<https://education.apple.com/story/250013958>



Keep the first failed attempt

Windward School, Los Angeles, 2016

Three seventh-grade students developed an inhaler-cap prototype through a CBL project. Their own journal is useful because it preserves problems that a polished final presentation could leave out. A 12 May entry describes a first print that was too small, followed by resizing and further prototypes. The team also dropped a planned fundraiser when donated paper removed the brochure expense. A later entry describes a public forum and reflections on teamwork.

The journal reports a fit test by a team member and positive feedback. That is not medical validation, independent safety testing or evidence of clinical benefit. The prototype should not be treated as approved medical equipment.

For our own groups

Borrow the habit of recording a failed attempt, not the medical application. Test a low-risk improvement such as a shared-materials organiser or a clearer submission process. Keep the first version and explain why it changed. If the cost disappears, cancel the fundraising plan instead of continuing it because it is already on the calendar. A useful project record includes decisions the team stopped pursuing.

Sources: the official CBL project page and the students' dated project journal.

<https://www.challengebasedlearning.org/project/windward-school-the-ernie-cap/>

<https://nidisease4c.weebly.com/blog.html>



Ask the people already doing the work

Carroll Leadership in Technology Magnet Middle School, North Carolina

A short account in the CBL project collection describes students investigating school waste. Conversations with custodians and cafeteria workers revealed an unused compost bin. Students raised awareness and collected food waste weekly for composting.

That is the extent of the documented result in the inspected text. It does not give a measured waste reduction, a project year or a record of how long the routine continued. The case is worth reading for the connection between a staff conversation and a practical action, rather than as proof of a quantified environmental impact.

For our own groups

Before buying equipment or designing a campaign, ask the people who operate the space what already exists and why it is unused. You may discover a useful resource, or a good reason it stopped being used. Check the local rules and workload before restarting anything. For your own trial, record a baseline and a simple result so the next team has more than a description of the activity.

Source: official CBL project account.

<https://www.challengebasedlearning.org/project/carroll-middle-school-reduce-waste/>



Reusable records for your own challenge

Use these six records when you need to make a decision, remember what happened, or pass work to somebody else. Copy them into whatever your group can use together. Add rows or space where you need them. A short answer you can act on is usually enough. Keep earlier versions when your thinking changes; they explain why the project took a different direction.

For high school and college, Getting involved and Already leading use the same records. You might start by observing one session, then help choose the trial. An experienced editor might need support with their first survey. Move between the routes as the work changes; neither route gives someone automatic authority over other students.

Framework credit: These records apply Challenge Based Learning to the student-leadership situations in this guide. The opening section links to the original framework.



1 Challenge brief

Engage

Before planning an event, agree what you are trying to change. “Make a poster” settles on a solution too early. A challenge should leave room to discover that a different change would help more.

Blank record

Group, date, and people shaping this brief: _____

Big idea: What larger issue matters here, such as belonging, voice, or shared responsibility?

Essential question: What open question do we want to explore? _____

Our actionable challenge: By _____, we will help _____ do _____ in _____, while staying within _____.

What we have already noticed, and where: _____

The people affected who still need a say: _____

Our boundary: We can change _____. We are leaving _____ outside this project.

First signs of success: A participant could _____. The team could sustain _____.

What “completed” will mean, or the question we must resolve before counting it: _____

What students decide and what needs someone else's approval: _____

Next check-in and the assumption we will revisit: _____

Completed reuse-club example

Big idea: Belonging. Essential question: How can students fit a useful part in this club into the lives they already have? Challenge: Over four weeks, help newcomers complete a useful task within the officers' available time. Boundary: One club and two trials. Provisional targets: Six newcomer completers, four saying the format could fit again, and at most six officer-hours per trial week. Students choose the proposal; the adviser checks room use, access, spending, and session changes.



2 Questions and evidence plan

Investigate

Choose questions whose answers could change your plan. You don't need to survey a whole school to learn whether somebody can find the first instruction. Sometimes trying the instructions with two willing people tells you what to fix next.

Blank record

Decision we need to make, and by when: _____

Guiding question: _____

If the answer is different from what we expect, we might change: _____

Activity or resource that could answer it: _____

People invited or situations observed: _____

Who this approach might miss: _____

Exact question or thing to count: _____

Who will collect it, when, and for how long: _____

Permission needed before starting, and who checks it: _____

What participants will be told about the purpose and their choice to decline: _____

Data needed and details we will not collect: _____

Who can see the raw material, where it is kept, and its agreed deletion date: _____

Afterwards: Our best supported answer is _____. We are still unsure about _____. This changes our next step by _____.

Repeat the question section for each question you actually need. Delete a question if you cannot explain how its answer will help.

Completed reuse-club example

Question: Which part of the current offer prevents interested students from joining? Dev invites all 58 non-officers to an optional questionnaire, open four days with one reminder. Twenty-nine reply; 22 have not attended. Ten of those 22 select a timing conflict. The team will investigate a lunchtime trial. Half the list did not respond, so it cannot call lunchtime everyone's preference. No names or personal schedules are requested; raw answers stay with the officers and adviser.



3 Observation and interpretation notes

Investigate, then reuse during Act

Write what you saw before explaining it. “Three people left before starting” is an observation. “They weren't committed” adds a story you haven't checked. Record the setting too: a delayed start or a locked door could matter more than your first explanation.

Blank record

Date, place, activity, and length of observation: _____

Observer and agreed permission: _____

What we said we would watch or count: _____

What actually happened, in order: _____

Count or timing, including who or what it covers: _____

Exact words, only if permission covers recording and using them: _____

Our possible interpretation: _____

Another plausible explanation: _____

What we could check next without asking for private information: _____

Something that does not fit our explanation: _____

Limits: What this observation cannot tell us: _____

One change to the plan, or reason to keep investigating: _____

Leave out names and recognisable descriptions unless there is an agreed, necessary reason to keep them. If nothing was observed, write “not observed”; an empty space can later look like a zero.

Completed reuse-club example

Observation: At one baseline session, three newcomers wait nine, eleven, and fourteen minutes for a first task. Two say they do not know whether they can leave early. Interpretation: Starting and leaving may feel unclear. Another possibility: This session was unusually busy. Next check: Test a prepared starter tray and a clear finish-time message. Limit: Three arrivals do not describe every newcomer's experience.



4 Options, permissions, and capacity

Act, informed by Investigate

Put two feasible options next to each other before voting. Include the people who would lose an opportunity, and the work that happens after everyone else goes home. A room booking doesn't answer whether someone can carry the boxes every week.

Blank record

Option A and the evidence supporting it: _____

Option B and the evidence supporting it: _____

For each: Who benefits? Who might lose access or do extra work? _____

Preferred option and our reason: _____

Objection we need to preserve in the record: _____

Useful task and available materials: _____

For each job: task _____; willing owner _____; planned minutes _____; personal limit _____.

Team time limit, including preparation, messages, travel, and cleanup: _____

Available budget, trial spending ceiling, and approver: _____

Access check: route, seating, instructions, equipment, timing, and a way to ask about arrangements: _____

Approval status: proposed, approved with conditions, or not approved.

Approver, date, exact activity approved, and conditions: _____

Still unconfirmed before we invite anyone: _____

If capacity or permission falls through, who changes or cancels the plan and tells participants? _____

Completed reuse-club example

A: A shorter Wednesday session with starter trays. B: Two replacement Tuesday lunchtime sessions with those trays. The team chooses B to test the timing barrier, recording that two regular members cannot attend. The adviser and room coordinator approve the sessions, seated sorting, clear access, and up to \$12 spending. Planned officer time is 5 hours 30 minutes, with a six-hour team limit and a two-hour limit per officer.



5 Trial and evaluation record

Act

Set the counting rules before the trial. Otherwise, a busy room can start looking like success even when newcomers still cannot get a task checked. Keep missed targets visible. They tell the next team what the offer really costs.

Blank record

Trial date, place, and version of the plan: _____

Change being tested and what is staying the same: _____

Completed contribution means: _____

People included in and excluded from participant counts: _____

Target and deadline: _____

For each measure, write: _____ out of _____, over _____.

If repeated visits matter, how will we distinguish visits from different people without unnecessary identifiers? _____

Optional feedback question and who receives it: _____

Recorder and collection method: _____

Stop immediately if _____; responsible person: _____.

Change before the next trial if _____; person deciding: _____.

Actual result: _____ out of _____. Missing or unknown: _____.

Visits _____; different participants, if known _____; completed tasks _____.

Feedback: _____ answers from _____ eligible people; _____ unanswered.

Actual team time _____; any individual limit exceeded _____; spending _____.

Unexpected problem or person disadvantaged: _____

Decision: continue, change, investigate again, or pause. Evidence and conditions: _____

What we still cannot claim: _____

Completed reuse-club example

Completion means sorting and recording a 12-item tray, then getting it checked. Across two trials, nine of 12 newcomers complete a task. Seven of those nine leave feedback; six say the format could fit again, one is unsure, and two cards are missing. Officer time is 6 hours 40 minutes, then 5 hours 25 minutes. Exceeding six hours triggers simplification; approved nearby storage and a second checking point help the next session. Unsafe access would stop a session.



6 Handover and reflection record

Used throughout; brought together during Act

Someone should be able to pick up the work without reconstructing it from a group chat. Keep decisions with their reasons. Your own reflection can stay private; share the practical learning your next team needs.

Blank record

After a working session: What happened? _____ What did it change? _____ What should the next person know? _____

For the handover:

Current decision and evidence supporting it: _____

Keep these instructions or arrangements: _____

Change or stop these parts: _____

Unanswered question worth returning to: _____

Next willing owner and first decision date: _____

Permissions and resources that must be checked again: _____

Where the editable materials and grouped results are stored: _____

Raw information to delete or retain under the agreed plan, and responsible person: _____

Who needs the result, what they should receive, and who will share it: _____

What happens if nobody has capacity: _____

Optional private reflection: What did I assume? Whose contribution changed my mind? What would I do differently? _____

Completed reuse-club example

Sam receives the editable invitation, condition guide, grouped findings, time logs, and decision before November sessions are advertised. Keep starter trays and a clear finish time. Recheck storage and two checking positions before another lunchtime session. A shorter evening trial remains worth considering. Delete raw survey responses after the agreed 30-day review period. If nobody has capacity, pause the extra trial. One reflection to carry forward: moving the time helped some students and excluded others.



Short notes for advisors

Across settings

Ask students to explain the decision they are facing before suggesting your preferred solution. Let them choose the challenge, compare evidence, disagree, and revise a manageable trial. Make your decision rights clear at the start: safety, permissions, spending, publication, and access may remain with a responsible adult or organisation.

Check that participation and feedback are genuinely optional. Don't ask students to collect health information or classmates' personal stories. Use questions about the activity and its arrangements. Offer accessible formats, ways to contribute without speaking publicly, and realistic equipment access. Explain who can see notes and when they will be deleted. Private reflections should support the student; do not require personal disclosure or assess how emotionally revealing it is.

Intervene when safety, safeguarding, consent, data boundaries, or agreed workload limits are at risk. Stop the affected activity, explain the reason, and help students find a safe next step. Follow the setting's safeguarding procedure if a concern arises; do not turn it into research evidence. A missed participation target usually calls for discussion and revision, rather than taking the project away from students.

Middle school

Keep the trial small and supervised. Read the observation prompts together; check that students count waits without labelling classmates as lonely or unpopular. Retain responsibility for supervision and behaviour. In the game-group example, review the host's lunch time as carefully as newcomer waiting time. Let students explain their decision aloud or through a simple drawing if writing the whole record gets in the way.

High school

Getting involved might mean testing a submission brief; Already leading might mean organising the editing rota. Students can move between both. For media work, confirm consent, equipment access, fact-checking, and publication responsibility before collecting material. Protect the editor's time. If the queue grows, help the team reduce places or revise deadlines rather than quietly completing the reporting yourself.

College

Use Getting involved and Already leading flexibly here too. A new volunteer can spot a problem an officer has stopped noticing. Ask who controls room bookings, storage, student data, and spending, then let students handle the decisions within their authority. Check commuter timing and access to materials. Include coordination and cleanup in workload discussions, even when committed officers say they can "just stay a bit longer."

Community

Agree responsibilities with the organisation and volunteers before advertising. Confirm supervision, task suitability, access, and a cancellation contact. The garden example's two-supervisor condition belongs to that particular trial; check the actual local requirement. A student leader cannot promise capacity on another volunteer's behalf. If support disappears, help them cancel clearly and preserve the useful work for a later attempt.