

Workplace Challenge Fact Sheet

Workplace Challenge

A Workplace Challenge is a Career Preparation activity where small groups of students (four to six per team) are engaged in solving a real-world problem or a challenge issued by an employer. The challenge is identified by the employer in consultation with the work-based learning coordinator and a classroom teacher. The structure of the challenge is based upon effective project-based learning approaches, enhanced by a focus on the targeted career pathway and an authentic problem or issue faced by an employer partner.

Students work as a team to identify possible solutions. They then create and deliver a presentation on their solutions to the employer. Designed to meet specific learning outcomes, workplace challenges are educationally rich, are tied to the curriculum, and help students connect what they're learning in school with the workplace.

Workplace Challenges are designed to:

- Provide exposure to potential careers in an industry of interest.
- Develop problem solving and research skills.
- Develop teamwork and presentation skills.
- Help students make the connection between school and the workplace.
- Inform career planning.

Workplace Challenges are structured to:

- Offer students the opportunity to explore and practice in a field of interest.
- Give students the opportunity to enhance the relevance of academic concepts through the application of applied knowledge.
- Build knowledge about the education and training needed for a particular career path and entry into the industry.
- Allow for Teacher/Employer interaction to support the challenge.

Workplace Challenges are supported by:

- Classroom preparation, including research on the industry and participating businesses.
- Employer orientation and support.
- Opportunities to reflect upon the experience verbally and in writing.

Workplace Challenges are connected to:

- Individual career development/training plans.
- Future work-based learning activities.
- Identifiable academic curricular goals
- The student's next steps.

Go Deeper

- Have several teams of students address the same challenge and reward the most innovative solutions through a competition—with the employer or a team of employers serving as the judge(s).

- After the presentation of the solution and critique by the employer partner, have the team(s) revisit their approach, define a new solution and present it to the employer partner(s).
- Sequence a series of challenges for the same team of students so the experiences build on one another.
- Model aspects of the challenge after reality TV shows such as “Shark Tank” (with the students pitching their solutions to a group of employers).
- Have the challenge flow into an internship for successful students.

Workplace Challenge Lite

If the time and intensity of the workplace challenge described here is difficult to apply in your program model, consider a “workplace challenge lite.” Maintain key components of the challenge (employer issues a real-world challenge, students work together to define a solution and present to the employer) but identify a simpler problem with the employer that a small group of students might define over a single two- or three-hour session.

Workplace challenges are one activity in the continuum of authentic work-based experiences provided to all students engaged in career-related programs or course of study in New York City schools.

Workplace Challenge Support Materials

Checklists, Tip Sheets and Fact Sheets:

- Coordinator Workplace Challenge Checklist
- Student Workplace Challenge Checklist
- Teacher Workplace Challenge Tip Sheet
- Employer Workplace Challenge Tip Sheet
- Employer Workplace Challenge Fact Sheet

Required Forms and Documents:

- WBL Travel and Media Consent Form (if part of challenge happens at workplace).
- Employability Skills Profile

Implementation Tools:

- Workplace Challenge Research Activity
- Workplace Challenge Student Reflection

Tips for Success

Effective Workplace Challenges include structured activity before, during and after the experience. Pay attention to these tips to ensure meaningful experiences that result in enriched learning.

- Engage in proper planning and preparation.
- Address logistical details.
- Communicate with all parties.
- Maximize learning potential.
- Focus on career preparation.
- Connect to the classroom.
- Provide support for students and supervisors.
- Promote student reflection.

Sustaining and growing Workplace Challenges and all other work-based learning activities depend on maintaining positive relationships with the participating employers. These employers should be treated as valued customers and partners with frequent check-ins to address participation needs as they arise.