



Workplace Challenge Guide

Workplace Challenge Fact Sheet

A fact sheet that provides a definition and learning objectives for the activity.

WBL Connector Checklist

A checklist of steps to guide WBL Connectors in creating successful workplace challenges for all parties.

Student/Learner Checklist

A checklist for students/learners participating in workplace challenges that facilitates deeper learning from the work-based learning experience.

Teacher/Faculty Tip Sheet

Tips for teachers/faculty that encourages ways to connect workplace challenges to the larger curriculum.

Employer Tip Sheet

Tips for employee volunteers participating in a workplace challenge to support their engagement.

Employer Fact Sheet

Facts about workplace challenges to help employers decide whether their company or organization can participate.

Implementation Tools

Workplace Challenge Preparation Activity

A worksheet to support student/learner research in preparation for a workplace challenge.

Workplace Challenge Student/Learner Reflection

A worksheet and discussion guide that supports student/learner reflection after the workplace challenge.



Workplace Challenge Fact Sheet

Workplace Challenge

A Workplace Challenge is a Career Preparation activity where small groups of students/learners (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 connector and a classroom teacher or faculty member. 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/Learners 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 objectives, workplace challenges are educationally rich, are tied to the curriculum, and help students/learners connect what they're learning in school with the workplace.

Workplace challenges are one activity in the continuum of authentic work-based experiences provided to all students/learners engaged in career-related programs or course of study in the Earn & Learn community.

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/learners make the connection between school and the workplace.
- Inform career planning.

Workplace Challenges are structured to:

- Offer students/learners the opportunity to explore and practice in a field of interest.
- Give students/learners 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/learner's next steps.



Go Deeper

- Have several teams of students/learners 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/learners so the experiences build on one another.
- Model aspects of the challenge after reality TV shows such as “Shark Tank” (with the students/learners pitching their solutions to a group of employers).
- Have the challenge flow into an internship for successful students/learners.

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/learners 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/learners might define over a single two- or three-hour session.

Workplace Challenge Support Materials

Checklists, Tip Sheets and Fact Sheets:

- WBL Connector Workplace Challenge Checklist
- Student/Learner Workplace Challenge Checklist
- Teacher/Faculty Workplace Challenge Tip Sheet
- Employer Workplace Challenge Tip Sheet
- Employer Workplace Challenge Fact Sheet

Implementation Tools:

- Workplace Challenge Research Activity
- Workplace Challenge Student/Learner Reflection

Tips for Success **Work-Based Learning Essential Elements**

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.

- ✓ Conduct Effective Planning
- ✓ Prepare for Success
- ✓ Identify Learning Objectives
- ✓ Create Authentic and Engaging Experiences
- ✓ Connect to Careers
- ✓ Support Student/Learner Growth
- ✓ Ensure Activities are Safe and Legal
- ✓ Provide Ongoing Support
- ✓ Provide for Reflection, Presentation and Feedback
- ✓ Connect to the Student/Learner Next Step
- ✓ Assess and Document the Experience

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 their needs and support their participation.

Work-Based Learning Connector Workplace Challenge Checklist

Quick tips for Work-Based Learning Connectors¹ to ensure a successful workplace challenge.

Before the Workplace Challenge

- Identify all interested teachers, help them plan their challenges. Share the Teacher/Faculty Tip Sheet.
- Work with the teacher/faculty to recruit and team students, create learning objectives and work with students/learners to prepare for the challenge.
- Design the challenge with the employer and teacher, making sure that it's one the students/learners can potentially address, and that teachers/faculty can support. Typically, the employer presents a number of possible problems or issues that might constitute the challenge and you can help select and develop one that's a good fit with the current focus in the classroom. Selection should also reflect the interests of participating students/learners and the availability of resources to support addressing the challenge.
- Encourage the employer to identify a real-world problem or issue—one that the industry is facing today. Make it real.
- Develop a timeline for the challenge. Include when and where it will be issued, the time set aside in the regular schedule for students/learners to address the challenge, scheduled "touch" points with the challenge host, and when and where the solution presentation will take place.
- Distribute and collect appropriate forms.
- Address any additional logistical issues such as transportation, safety gear or access to equipment and tools.
- Determine the employer's preferred form and frequency of contact and define an ongoing communication strategy and feedback protocols for the challenge.

During the Workplace Challenge

- Observe and meet with students/learners as they address the challenge. Make sure they're engaged in the challenge and interacting with the employer as appropriate.
- Share the Work-Readiness Competencies with the workplace challenge hosts.
- Support the challenge host in preparing to receive the presentation on the solution(s) to the challenge.

After the Workplace Challenge

- Document the workplace challenge. Review feedback from employers, teachers/faculty and students/learners and summarize results. Make recommendations for improvements.
- Help students/learners update their career development plan and think about any next steps they would like to take to further their career goals.

Sample Workplace Challenge Timeline

Beginning of the school year: Identify interested teachers/faculty and brainstorm business partners who could participate.

One month in advance: Invite business partners to participate. Design the challenge with employer and teacher.

One week in advance: Send employers logistics and address any questions.

During challenge: Observe the presentation and the challenge process in the classroom. Help teachers/faculty and employers support the activity.

At end of challenge: Observe the solution presentation ((ideally at worksite), engage in dialogue and receive feedback on the approach.

Note: While it's desirable to bookend the challenge with visits to the company, take care to minimize the impact on small- to medium-sized organizations.

¹ This includes Earn & Learn work-based learning connectors and others who facilitate, arrange and support work-based learning activities for students/learners.



EARN&LEARN
Dream Big. Climb Higher.

Work-Based Learning Toolset Workplace Challenge Guide

- Work with teachers/faculty to coordinate “go deeper” activities to connect the workplace challenge to the classroom.
- Send thank-you notes to employers and identify possible next steps with the employer.
- Take pictures from the workplace challenge and provide them to the companies for their websites or newsletters. Ensure you have signed releases for all photos.
- Publicize the workplace challenge and the businesses that participated by placing a story in the local newspaper or posting on the school or agency webpage.
- Consider other potential public relations benefits and opportunities.

Student/Learner Workplace Challenge Checklist

A workplace challenge is a unique way of getting involved in helping solve a problem that would happen in a real-world professional setting. This is an opportunity for you to be innovative and creative with a group of classmates. When you finish your project, you'll deliver a presentation to the employer or organization, showing them how you solved their problem!

Participating in a workplace challenge can be difficult if you're not prepared. Below is a checklist of what you can expect to learn. Read through the list and check off what interests you and the goals that are most important to you. Your interests don't have to be prioritized. If you would like to learn something that's not listed here, just add it.

Have you done all you can to prepare?

- Participate in pre-workplace challenge opportunities in your class.
- Research the company that is presenting the workplace challenge.
- Write down at least four questions you would like answered about the challenge. You might ask what resources are available, for instance, or how to get more information.
- Know who your teammates are and what your role is on the team.

Have you thought about what you can do to make the workplace challenge a big success?

- Pay attention to the challenge that's being presented and take notes so you can think about it.
- Be engaged. You want to get as much information as possible.
- Keep in constant communication and meet regularly with your teammates so that you can all brainstorm together.
- Figure out how you'll solve the workplace challenge.
- Present your solution to the person or company that issued the challenge.

When the workplace challenge is over, how will you keep moving your career forward?

- Reflect on your experience and participate in self-evaluation activities. (Would you have done anything differently?)
- Share with others what you enjoyed about the experience and participate in classroom activities that help you think about the value of the challenge.
- Complete any required paperwork, including candid feedback on the workplace challenge. What did you enjoy most or least about it? Be honest when rating your teammates and yourself on your performance. That will help make future workplace challenges more meaningful.
- Update your career development plan and consider next steps in moving your career forward.
- Send an email thanking the employer for his or her time. If you're interested in working there or learning more, say so and ask for next steps.
- Share your experience with your peers on social media. Perhaps a blog post about the event?

Are you Ready for the Challenge?

Have you...

- Completed any required paperwork?
- Researched the partner company?
- Crafted your questions?
- Met with your teammates to clarify your role and get ready for the challenge?
- Thought about how you'll share your experience on social media?

Teacher/Faculty Workplace Challenge Tip Sheet

Note: If you're coordinating a workplace challenge, have a look at the Connector Workplace Challenge Checklist.

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/learners make the connection between school and the workplace.
- Inform career planning.

Before the Workplace Challenge

- Review the Workplace Challenge Fact Sheet and this tip sheet.
- Assess how the challenge can support classroom activities and help meet curriculum goals.
- Identify desired student/learner learning objectives. Build excitement for the challenge and talk to students/learners about what they can expect to learn.
- Work with the connector and employer to make sure the challenge is one that students/learners can potentially address and that you can support.
- Recruit students/learners and form small teams of four to six participants to work together on addressing the challenge. Student/Learner Workplace Challenge Tip Sheet.
- Have students/learners research the employer's company.
- Schedule regular time for the students/learners to work on the challenge.
- Organize the resources needed to support students/learners as they address the challenge.
- If students/learners will be at worksite, find out if certain dress or safety gear is required.
- Collect required forms.

During the Workplace Challenge

- Meet with students/learners regularly as they address the challenge and monitor their progress.
- Design and coordinate concurrent learning activities in the classroom.
- Provide opportunities for students/learners to reflect on the challenge.
- Support students/learners in practicing skills that are relevant to the challenge.
- Distribute and collect feedback forms from students/learners.

After the Workplace Challenge

- Have students/learners discuss what they learned and what else they'd like to learn.
- Provide reflection activities for students/learners and help them make the connection between classroom topics and the challenge.
- Help students/learners update their career development plan and think about any next steps they would like to take to further their career goals.
- Have students/learners write thank-you notes to the employer partners.
- Assess the impact and value of the workplace challenge with the connector and utilize employer and student/learner feedback to improve future workplace challenges.
- Document and archive information about the workplace challenge.

The Classroom Connection: Preparation and Reflection

Before the Workplace Challenge

Set students/learners up for success by having them.

- Research the partner companies.
- Discuss how the challenge can help them meet learning objectives.

After the Workplace Challenge

- Spark student/learner reflection with an activity.
- Ask, "What new things did you learn about this industry?"
- See if they want to find out more or further explore careers in the employer partner's industry.

Employer Workplace Challenge Tip Sheet

Thanks for agreeing to participate in a workplace challenge. As you think about how to best prepare for the challenge, keep the following success factors in mind.

Before the Workplace Challenge

- Identify a few issues or problems your company or industry is facing that might be a good focus for a team of students/learners to work on together. Keep in mind that authentic issues work much better than hypotheticals.
- Work with a connector or teacher/faculty who will help you select and develop a challenge that is a good fit with the current focus in the classroom, student/learner interests and available resources.
- Present the challenge to the participating students/learners. Workplace challenges work best when the challenge is issued at the workplace, where students/learners can actually “see” the problem.
- Provide teacher/faculty with website link(s) about your company and industry to help students/learners prepare for the challenge.
- If students/learners are visiting the workplace, let them know where to enter the building and whether identification is needed. If safety equipment is required, have it ready for the students/learners.

During the Workplace Challenge

- Touch base with the connector or teacher/faculty during the challenge period of six to eight weeks to answer questions or clarify anything.
- If you have the time, you may want to schedule a visit to the classroom to observe and engage with the students/learners during the process.
- Arrange for you and others at your company to view the solution presentation provided by the students/learners and provide feedback. Again, this works best if conducted at the workplace.

After the Workplace Challenge

- Participate in an evaluation and assessment of the students' performance and the workplace challenge itself.
- Consider how you might use the workplace challenge to promote your company's visibility in the community.

Go Deeper

- Talk to the connector about being a guest speaker, conducting a mock interview, or hosting students/learners for job shadows or internships.

Workplace Challenge Timeline

Before the challenge:

- Identify a few issues or problems at your company or industry and discuss challenge options with connector and/or teacher.
- Present the challenge to students/learners.
- Provide teacher/faculty with company/industry website links.

During the challenge:

- Answer any questions that arise.
- Consider visiting the classroom to observe challenge in process.
- View the solution with coworkers and offer feedback.

After the challenge:

- Evaluate students' performance and the challenge itself.
- Think about best ways to publicize your company's involvement.
- Consider your next steps in applying the approach or solution presented by the students/learners.



Employer Workplace Challenge Fact Sheet

In a workplace challenge, small groups of students/learners (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 connector 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.

Program Level: All Grades.
Employer/Student/Learner Ratio: 1-2 employees to 4-6 students/learners.
Duration: 6-8 weeks (periodic contact)
Frequency: One time
Location: School/Workplace
Costs: Staff time
Special Considerations: Employee selection. Company volunteer policies and practices.

Students/Learners 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/learners connect what they're learning in school with the workplace.

Why are workplace challenges important for students?

- Provide exposure to potential careers and jobs.
- Help develop problem solving and research skills.
- Help develop teamwork and presentation skills.
- Provide a context for learning and foster an understanding of how academic concepts are applied in a real-world setting.
- Inform career planning.

What are the benefits to my company?

- Exposes potential future workers to your company and shows them some of the required skills and education needed for success in your industry.
- The solution uncovers fresh approaches and potential solutions to a problem or issue you are facing.
- Introduces students/learners to one or more of your employees.
- Helps your employees understand how to communicate with the next generation of workers.
- Provides an efficient way to introduce and engage multiple employees with your commitment to education and connect your company with the community.

What do I need to do next?

- Determine who will participate in the workplace challenge and have them connect with the work-based learning connector to address scheduling, planning and logistics.
- Distribute the Employer Workplace Challenge Tip Sheet to interested employees.
- Consider any impacts on company policy.

Resources

- Review the Employer Participation Options Fact Sheet to learn more about how to get the most out of your partnership with Earn & Learn.

Workplace Challenge Research Activity

Complete the following research assignment as part of your preparation for the upcoming workplace challenge. This research will be the basis for in-class discussion and presentations prior to the day

Student/Learner name:
Workplace challenge company:
Company's web address:
Company's physical address:
Company's mission statement:
What is the company's primary business?
What departments exist within the company?
What companies do you think are in competition with the workplace challenge company?
After researching the company, what are some questions that you will ask to address the challenge?
Based on your research, what do you think you will like most about the workplace challenge?
Based on your research, what is your biggest concern about the workplace challenge?
If you could come away from the workplace challenge having learned one thing, what would that be?
Anything else you learned while doing your research that you'd like to share with your teacher/faculty or the class?

Adapted from original material created by NAF. Used with permission.

Workplace Challenge Student/Learner Reflection

Now that the workplace challenge is over, take some time reflect on what you learned and how the experience might inform your college and career plans in the future.

Student/Learner Name:

School:

Challenge Company:

Challenge Date Range:

What aspects of the workplace challenge were interesting? Which were not? Why?

What did you like about the workplace challenge? What would you change?

Would you consider a career in the challenge host's field? Why or why not?

What was the most memorable aspect of the workplace challenge? Why?

What did you learn about the challenge host's company and its employees? Please explain.

What knowledge and skills are you learning in school that are likely to be used at the host company's workplace? Please explain.

What knowledge or skills do you need to strengthen to be successful at a workplace like the challenge host's? Please explain.

Would you recommend that other students/learners take part in a workplace challenge? Explain.

Anything else you'd like to say about the workplace challenge?

Adapted from original material created by NAF. Used with permission.