

What is a 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 problem or a challenge issued by an NYS P-TECH employer in consultation with a P-TECH classroom teacher.

How is it structured?

As a Workplace Challenge host, the employer partner presents an authentic problem or issue faced by the sponsoring company or industry. Response to the challenge is based upon effective project-based learning approaches, enhanced by a focus on the targeted Career Pathway and the real-world problem presented. The students are engaged in career-focused learning and work as a team over time to identify possible solutions. They then create and deliver a presentation on their solution to the employer.

What's my commitment?

As a Workplace Challenge host, you (and any team members working on the challenge with you) will be asked to:

- Identify a few issues or problems your company or industry is facing that might be a good focus for a team of students to work on together. Keep in mind that authentic issues work much better than hypotheticals.
- Work with a P-TECH teacher who will help you select and develop a challenge that is a good fit with the current focus in the classroom, student interests and available resources.
- Present the challenge to the P-TECH students. Workplace Challenges work best when the challenge is issued at the workplace, where students can actually “see” the problem.
- Touch base with the P-TECH coordinator during the challenge period of six to eight weeks to answer any questions or offer clarification. You may also want to set up a time to visit the schools and observe and engage with the students during the process.
- Arrange for you and others at your company to view the solution presentation provided by the students and provide feedback. Again, this works best if conducted at the workplace.
- Participate in an evaluation and assessment of the students’ performance and the Workplace Challenge itself.

How can I make it a good experience for the students?

- Make sure you are asking the students to address a real issue or problem.
- Consider providing a Workplace Tour prior to the challenge to acquaint students and teachers with your company. (Your P-TECH coordinator can help set this up.)
- Make the presentation of the challenge engaging. Use multiple forms of media. Use props. Engage the students in a dialogue to discover the issue and its impacts. Let them know why developing a viable solution is important to you, your company and your industry.
- Check in with your P-TECH contact regularly to respond to requests for information or to clarify something. Consider scheduling a time to visit the classroom during the challenge.
- Make the presentation of the solution a formal event. Whether structured as a pitch in the boardroom or a visit to the “Shark Tank,” it’s important that you and others you have gathered to hear the solution take the presentation seriously.
- Provide honest and productive feedback on the solution to the students.

Why is this important for the students?

- Research shows effective project-based learning activities like those conducted in a Workplace Challenge help students learn new concepts more easily and engage more deeply.
- A Workplace Challenge offers the opportunity to develop, practice and demonstrate many of the academic, technical and professional skills needed for success in the workplace.
- It allows students to experience what it might be like to work and practice in a field of interest.
- It enhances the relevance of academic instruction through the application of applied knowledge to a real-world problem or issue.

What will I get out of it?

- Your company may offer incentives for volunteering to be a Workplace Challenge host.
- You will learn how to interact with the next generation, some of whom you may be working with and/or supervising soon.
- You and your team members at work will gain a fresh perspective on an issue or problem.
- You may even uncover a viable solution.

What if I have a question, a concern or need some help?

- Your P-TECH coordinator is there to help you with any question or concern, no matter how great or small.
- For a list of Workplace Challenge topics and ideas, please visit www.ptech.org.

Go Deeper

- Actually put the solution, or elements of the solution, into practice.
- Have one or more of the students shadow you at work for a day.
- Arrange an Internship at your company for one of the students on the solution team. Check in regularly around their progress.