

Student-Led Projects – Ideas & activities



Are your students organising events and activities for Harmony week? Does your student representative council want to pitch their ideas to school council? Would your leadership group like to launch an initiative? Student-led projects are a great way for students to organise their ideas, coordinate a plan, and spring into action. Here are some ideas and 'tried and true' activities that may help you guide your students through the student-led project process!

Phases of Project Management

Video:

The Project Management Process – Creative Classrooms, John Spencer. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7yZutiwRso>



Activity: The Five Stages of Project Management (30 mins)

Purpose:

To introduce participants to the five stages of project management – scoping, planning, promotion, delivery and evaluation.

Instructions:

- 1. Explore with the group what they think the definition of a project is.**
 - A project is a piece of planned work or an activity that is finished over a period of time to achieve a particular purpose. Make note of the word "planned" and that a project has a clear aim.
- 2. Ask the group what they think of when they hear Project Management.**
 - Project management is a set of tools, skills, techniques and knowledge that can be applied to a project in order to achieve its purpose within the available resources and required timeline.

3. Outline the 5 key stages of project management:

- **Scoping:** This is where you and your group find out what you are interested in, what the needs are related to the interest, and come up with brilliant and creative ideas to meet those needs and interests. This is your chance to think big! Once you find out what the group is interested in, you can decide on a final project idea. By the end of this stage, you should have a clear purpose of the project and can outline what you are trying to achieve.
- **Planning:** The preparation stage where you will transform your ideas into action and find out exactly how you will bring your project idea to life. How will the project look? Who are you targeting? What will you do? Who can help? What resources do you have or need to get? What tasks need to be completed? What roles will each group member take on? It's also important to plan how you will evaluate your project. By the end of this stage, you should have an Action Plan outlining all the tasks that need to be done, who will do them and by when.
- **Promotion:** Getting the word out! This is the stage where you make flyers, put a notice in the school newsletter, tell your family and friends about the project or event and advertise to your communities. By the end of this stage, you could have a number of people who want to be part of the project and have ideas about how they can participate.
- **Delivery:** Where you put your plan into action! This is the fun part. Refer to your Action Plan to help you keep track of your tasks and goals. By the end of this stage, you should be feeling great because you've delivered a successful project!
- **Evaluation:** What did you/others think of the event or outcome? Use your evaluation tool to see what was really great about the event and what could have been improved. Make sure that you talk to your group about the evaluation and hear each other's comments about the project. Don't forget to take the time to celebrate the end of your project! By the end of this stage you should be able to write up some key recommendations that worked well and also outline what you might do differently next time.

Working in teams

Activity: Human Rock Papers Scissors (10 mins)

Purpose:

Fun, quick, energising activity for students to explore the roles they take in groups.

Instructions:

1. Split students into two groups.
2. Explain that they are about to play Human Rock Paper Scissors so as a class, they need to decide what symbols will represent Rock, Paper or Scissors (ie. Standing with your arms in a Y shape might represent scissors).
3. Give the groups an opportunity to figure out which symbol they are going to play first.
4. Explain that you will provide a countdown "3-2-1-go!" and on "go" each group must perform their symbol. Rock will beat scissors, scissors will beat paper and paper will beat rock.
5. Play best of three or five rounds and then discuss:
 - How did their group make the decision about their strategy?
 - Was there agreement, or any disagreement?
 - Were there people who naturally took the lead or naturally were happy to follow?

Activity: Sticky Hands¹ (20 mins)

Preparation for the activity facilitator:

As the facilitator, watch this video to view a demonstration of the activity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdkvPd-8KVE>



Instructions:

- 1. Choose a volunteer** to help you demonstrate and explain to the group that they are going to play a game in pairs. Instruct the pairs to stand facing each other (approximately a metre apart), bring hands up to their partner resting palm to palm, feet must be firmly on the ground.
- 2. Explain the rules:**
 - The aim is to encourage your partner to lose their balance enough that they have to reposition their feet, but not so much so that they fall over.
 - Partners are to keep their palms together the whole time, but can move them in a pushing motion towards their partner, a withdrawal motion towards themselves, or in sideways motions.
 - If your partner loses their balance and has to reposition their feet, you win the round.
- 3. Encourage the partners to complete a few rounds** – first to three or best out of three or five – and after everyone has had an opportunity to try a few rounds, come back to the larger group for discussion.
- 4. What did everyone notice?**
 - Who won the most rounds?
 - If someone was particularly successful, what was their strategy?
 - (Note: in this activity, those who try to overpower their partners and push them back tend to overbalance and lose the round, whilst those who are more fluid tend to keep their balance).
- 5. Introduce the concept of Rock and Water**
 - What are the qualities of rock? Answers may include *strong, tough, hard, cold, solid*.
 - What are the qualities of water? Answers may include *fluid/movable, flexible/adaptable, soft or powerful*.
 - If we were to behave like rock or water, what might that look like? Answers may include concepts like *'standing strong' / 'going with the flow'*.²

Debrief:

- In this game, it may seem like behaving like a 'rock' might be the more successful strategy, but in actual fact it is those who were water-like and better able to move with their partners advances, were more successful.
- Whilst our personalities may lean towards being more rock-like or water-like, we all display characteristics of both at different times, and importantly, we all have the capacity to make the choice of whether to be rock-like or water-like at any given time.
- When encountering barriers, obstacles or conflicts it can be very useful to ask yourself whether you are being a rock or water, and whether a change of approach may serve you better.
- You may wish to explore with the group the types of scenarios in which it may be better to be a rock (for example when you need to stand your ground on something important to you) or water (when a situation requires patience or flexibility).

¹ Lighthouse Education. (n.d.). *Rock and Water Program*, Gadaku Institue. Retrieved from: <https://www.rockandwater.com.au/>

² Ibid.

Activity: Never. Eat. Soggy. Weetbix.³ (30-45 mins)

Purpose:

For students to reflect on the role that they take in groups and how their style affects their interactions with others.

Instructions:

- Invite students** to stand in the centre of the room and explain that you will be describing four different roles/styles that people can take when working in groups. Each role style will be labelled with a direction and allocated to a section of the room.

 - North:** People in this role are the do-ers. They like challenges, action and they will get things done by fully participating in conversations and tasks. They are good at motivating others and keeping them on track. However they can sometimes be a bit impatient with others and can also be too quick to act, missing important details.
 - East:** People in this role generate lots of ideas. They like to see the bigger picture of what “could happen” and what “could be done”. They rarely are at a loss for new ideas and they like experimenting. However that can mean that they can become distracted and side-tracked with new possibilities and they may become overwhelmed.
 - South:** People in this role are the relationship people. They are value-driven and use relationships and cooperation to get things done. They are supportive, feelings-based and prioritise the wellbeing of the group above all. They may have trouble saying no to requests and may feel responsible for the group if tasks are not completed on time.
 - West:** People in this role like data and information. They like to see all the facts before making a decision. They are logical, practical and like things done “properly”. They like to focus on detail but can sometimes be slow and become indecisive if they become too focused on getting things right.
- Ask students to move to the position in the room which best reflects their own personal style, observing if there are any clear majorities, gaps or an even spread.**
- In their groups, ask students to reflect on and discuss:**

 - What do you like about your role?
 - What frustrates you about the other roles?
- Ask a spokesperson from each group to provide their responses to the other groups.**

Debrief:

Discuss how the best teams often have a mix of styles as each role has value and strengths. However different styles can also naturally lead to disagreement and frustration. In their style groups, ask the students to brainstorm strategies they can use for collaborating with each of the different styles.



Check out CMY's **Lesson Plan: Student Leadership** for more ideas on how to assist students to identify their strengths

3 Hunter, D. (n.d.). *Training for Change*. Retrieved from: https://www.trainingforchange.org/training_tools/team-types/

Scoping and Planning

Activity: Community Mapping (45 mins)

Purpose:

To raise awareness of the opportunities and challenges that are present in the school/community and identify one that could be addressed through the student-led project.

Summary:

The group creates a map of their local community using the materials supplied. The aim is not for accuracy but to find out what participants know and how they see their own community.

Materials:

- Large sheet of paper (the bigger the better)
- Paper & pens
- Random craft materials
- Post-its, stick-on dots, or other symbol to mark places on the map.

Considerations

The area to be mapped is flexible – it could be adapted to map a particular school, neighbourhood or wider area, eg: a country.

Instructions:

1. Ask the students to split into their project groups.
2. Explain that the task is to create a giant map of the local community using a mix of the materials supplied. They can include geographical features such as buildings, common areas, hills, grass areas, as well as services and facilities the area has. It doesn't have to be accurate. Encourage the group to be creative.
3. Once complete, ask students to stand on a place on the map where they hold strong thoughts or feelings about (either positive or negative) and have each person share this with the group. If it is not possible to create large scale maps, they can use a dot, post-it or other symbol to highlight their selected place.
4. Take photos of the map as a record.
5. Ask students to write down 3 – 5 of the key issues they believe affect the community and place them around the outside of the map.
6. Invite students to view all the issues that have been identified and then choose one that is most significant for them and place it on the inside the map.
7. Invite students to review the issues that have been shortlisted and stand on the issue they most identify with. Go around the group asking each student to share what their issue is and why they have chosen it. This will create a shortlist of issues. The next activity will assist the group in choosing which issue to focus on for their project.

Debrief:

- How did this exercise make people feel?
- Why do some places on the map attract lots of positive/negative comments?
- What would you like people to know about your community?

Activity: Choosing an Issue (45 mins)

Purpose:

To learn more about the issues identified during the mapping activity and practice participatory decision making. The group will decide on an issue they would like to focus on for their project through the process of consensus. This process aims to give ownership of decisions to the whole group by finding effective options everyone is comfortable with. It seeks to avoid any alienation of minorities which a 'majority rules' approach can create, and values everyone's opinions equally.

Materials:

- Paper
- Pens
- Blu Tak
- Stickers

Considerations:

This process can take time and may be frustrating for some students. Provide time out when needed.

Instructions:

1. In project groups, write shortlisted issues on separate pieces of paper. Ask students if there are any that overlap/are similar that could be combined into one issue to reduce the shortlisted number.
2. Discuss each issue including the pros and cons of focusing on that issue, and any project ideas associated with the issue. Are there any ideas that bring together aspects of all the issues? Are there any issues that can be eliminated? Ensure that each student has the opportunity to share their views.
3. Once this can't go any further, provide students with 3 stickers and ask them to vote for their preferences. They could put all their stickers on one issue or divide them between multiple issues.
4. If there is a clear favourite, test for agreement by holding a vote - Thumbs up: Agreement, Thumbs Sideways: Agree but have questions, Thumbs Down: Disagreement.
5. Clarify the questions of the thumbs sideways group.
6. Hear the opinions of the Thumbs Down group - what would it take for you to come along?
7. If there is no clear favourite, continue the discussion with the top issues - what else do we know etc, and try to bring the discussion to a space where the vote can happen.
8. Continue this process until a clear favourite emerges.

Debrief:

- How did students find the process?
- How does it feel to have decided on an issue?

Activity: Problem/Opportunity Tree⁴ (60 Mins)

Purpose:

To identify causes and effects of the key issue of the student project. Students brainstorm the core problems related to their issue and then flip/reframe those problems to identify solutions.

Materials:

- Problem/opportunity tree handouts – [please see Attachment 1.](#)
- Markers

Instructions:

1. Provide a problem/opportunity tree handout to each project group.
2. Start with the key issue or problem and write it into the trunk section on the problem tree.
3. In project groups, brainstorm as many causes of the problem as they can think of, writing them in the roots section of the problem tree. While listing each cause, encourage students to ask “what causes that?” to identify the ‘cause of the cause’.
4. In the branches and leaves section of the problem tree, ask the groups to brainstorm as many impacts and effects of their selected key issue. Again encourage students to ask “what may this effect lead to?” to identify the ‘effects of the effects’.
5. Next, turn the problem tree into an opportunity/solution tree. Recording on the opportunity tree, identify solutions by reversing the issue, the causes and effects/ consequences and rewording them into an objective that will tackle the issue. For example if the problem is “litter in the school yard”, a cause may be lack of bins in busy areas of the school yard. The opportunity might be to “making the school a litter-free zone” and the solution may be to revise current bin location, or make a proposal to the school council to purchase more bins.
6. In this process, strategies are identified for tackling issues, which can then provide a basis for project definition to turn one of the objectives into an achievable action.
7. After the brainstorming is complete, look at the causes and highlight those that could be changed or improved through this project. Discuss with the group which of the opportunities they would like to focus on as the core objective of their student-led project. Have them consider how it affects them as individuals; how it affects others, how urgent it is to act, what will interest them most, and what will be achievable.
8. Once they have narrowed it down to a shortlist, complete the consensus process to finalise their decision.
9. Have students write their final objective in one clear statement: We aim to...

Debrief:

- What was easier or more difficult, presenting the problems or the opportunities?
- How did this activity make you feel?

⁴ UNICEF. (2010). *Advocacy Toolkit - A guide to influencing decisions that improve children's lives* (2nd Ed.). United Nations Children Fund: New York.

Activity: Bridge Model⁵ (60 mins)

Purpose:

To assist the group with planning and problem solving through creating a visual model.

Materials:

- Poster paper
- Pen
- Blu tak / post it notes



Instructions:

1. In their project groups, ask the students to draw an arc on their poster paper to represent a bridge.
2. On the left side of the bridge, ask the students to list where they are in terms of a progress on their project – this can include any barriers, problems or obstacles they are currently facing.
3. On the right side of the bridge, ask students to list where they want to be at a key point in the project, or at the end of the project when they have achieved their goal. Students can use words, symbols, pictures or drawings to represent their achievement goals.
4. A bridge is then constructed between the two situations. The four upright pillars represent key supporting/enabling factors. Post-it notes can be added between each factor to identify ideas that relate to each of the pillars and ‘build the bridge’. The pillars can be represented by:
 - **Strengths:** Positive characteristics and advantages of the issue, situation or people.
 - **Benefits:** What the benefits that encourage participation in the project are.
 - **Opportunities:** What exists in the external environment that will be an advantage for this project.
 - **Resources:** What the group has available to them that will help them achieve the project goals.
5. The water underneath the bridge is infested with crocodiles which represent any weaknesses and threats/dangers the group can identify.
 - **Barriers/limitations:** What are the limiting factors and disadvantages are currently preventing the goals from being achieved?
 - **Threats/Dangers:** What are the things that could stop this positive change from happening?
6. Once the scenario is complete, the group will be able to visually see whether their bridge is providing a solid pathway to their desired outcome or whether there is a chance the crocodiles are able to break through. This gives the group a chance to consider the question “is there anything we need to be able to further stabilise this project?” and can add extra post-its with a list of needs.

⁵ Bradley, D. & Schneider, H. (2004). Participatory approaches: A facilitators guide. Voluntary Services Overseas. Retrieved from: https://www.participatorymethods.org/sites/participatorymethods.org/files/VSO_Facilitator_Guide_to_Participatory_Approaches_Principles.pdf

Need Inspiration? Check out these fantastic examples of student-led projects.

Student Voice Hub Resources (VicSRC)

The Student Voice Hub is a student-led, one-stop-shop for resources, news and opportunities for the whole-of-school community to find out what is happening in schools around Victoria in regards to student voice. It is a wonderful way for students to connect to other students regarding issues they care about and learn about other student-led projects. Enter your school in the Student Voice Awards for an opportunity to win Student-led Project of the Year!

<https://studentvoicehub.org.au/>

Young people exchanging Life Saving Tips and preventing discrimination/injustice

In 2005 Muslim people were the targets of organised racially-based violence in Sydney, during what came to be known as Cronulla Riots. In response, a group of young people from Bankstown Youth Centre collaborated with the Dulwich Centre to create a project which would promote respect, social cohesion and support for young people who are experiencing difficulties in their life. As the Cronulla Riots took place on a beach, they used a 'life saving' theme to promote express their Life Saving Tips to show other young people how they find strength and support in difficult times:

<https://dulwichcentre.com.au/projects/life-saving-tips/>

Two Students leading change in the way that Students talk about Race

Winona Guo and Priya Vulchi, former secondary students from the US, recognised they did not have a meaningful conversation about racism until they were in Year 10. Inspired into action, they set about writing, speaking and touring to challenge schools to re-think how they approach issues of racism and discrimination in their school curriculum.

https://www.ted.com/talks/priya_vulchi_and_winona_guo_what_it_takes_to_be_racially_literate

Teach the Teacher!

Designed by students, the Teach the Teacher program is a student-led, professional development for teachers that enables students to address the issue affecting them.

<http://teachtheteacher.org.au/>

Attachment 1: Handout – The Problem / Opportunity Tree⁶

Problem Tree

Opportunity Tree

3 BRANCHES

- **Consequences** of the problem

2 BRANCHES

- **Benefits** of the opportunity

1 TRUNK

1 TRUNK

CURRENT PROBLEM

OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT
How would you like it to be?

2 ROOTS

- **Root causes/inputs**

3 ROOTS

- **Root causes/inputs**
- **Specifically, what needs to happen to make it so?**

⁶ UNICEF. (2010). *Advocacy Toolkit – A guide to influencing decisions that improve children’s lives* (2nd Ed.). United Nations Children Fund: New York.