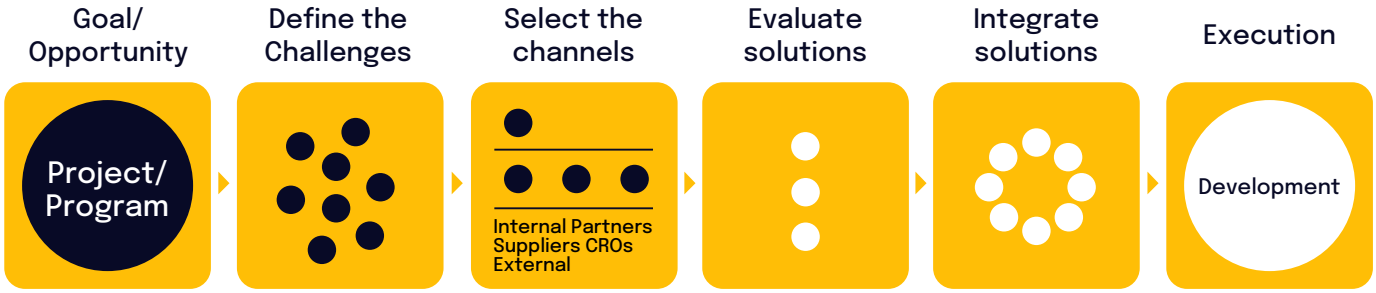
Planning a Challenge – Part One

Underpinning the success of so many innovation programs is an approach that uses Challenges. A technique that brings focus to an element of business which is often open-ended, Challenges help businesses create value through innovation.

By asking participants for solutions to real problems, companies are better positioned to innovate in a continuous, scalable manner. This guide is the first of a three-part mini-series focusing on one of the most vital elements of this Challenge-Driven Methodology: the planning.

In part one, we will discuss how to establish a Challenge background. We'll look at sponsorship and the framing of the Challenge question. We will discuss how to decide the audience for the Challenge and outline how the solving process will work. Finally, we will establish a timeline of events, to ensure that time-sensitive issues don't have a Challenge that misses the deadline.

The Challenge-Driven Methodology: An Overview



Above is the Challenge-Driven Methodology that Wazoku developed for starting an innovation program. It is simple and completely customizable to any business needs. We designed it to be universal, to allow the organizations that we work with – regardless of industry or scope – to move towards scalable, sustainable innovation. With this structure in place, so that people in the organization can see the process in its entirety, it's easier to visualize how Challenges work. This makes buy-in at the start, and the eventual success of the Challenge a lot easier to deliver.

1 Challenge Planning Process: Sponsor

The first thing to establish is executive alignment. By alignment, we mean understanding which executive has an issue or opportunity, and do they have the resources to ensure that the Challenge will be a success. At this stage, it is a good idea to ask some general scoping questions, to ensure that the right information is being gathered. Some examples of scoping questions to do with sponsorship would be:

- Which executives care about this issue and why?
- How does the mission align with the overall business strategy?
- Does the sponsor have resources to take the successful ideas forward for implementation?
- Who will be managing the Challenge on a day-to-day level?
- Are there subject matter experts (SMEs) in mind to assist in evaluating the ideas?

2 Challenge Planning Process: Question

The next stage revolves around the question itself. Getting the question right has a massive positive effect on how successful the Challenge will be. The general rule is that the broader the question, the more ideas are generated. The more focused the question, the less numerous the ideas submitted; however, they are usually more-easily implemented. Some of the scoping questions to ask at this point include:

- What is the problem that needs addressing?
- Is there a strict timeline in which successful ideas need to be implemented?
- What does 'success' look like in the terms of this Challenge?

These examples may seem broad and vague, but they provide good jumping-off points from which follow-up questions can be asked.

3 Challenge Planning Process: Audience

Now that the content of the question is dealt with, the next stage is the Challenge audience. Contemplating this element ensures that crowd participation, and the way it is achieved, isn't an afterthought. The scoping questions that we would recommend asking here include:

- Who is the target audience(s) for this Challenge?
- What's the incentive for participating in this Challenge?
- Regardless of location or type of crowd, how will they access the site?
- Which languages need to be considered for translation of the Challenge copy?

4 Challenge Planning Process: Process

After these first three stages, the Challenge begins to take on a more real-world form. It's now important to answer the question of how the Challenge will run from start to finish. It is vital to establish this, as failure to do so can mean crucial evaluation, feedback, and implementation actions are overlooked. Scoping questions to consider at this point include:

- What will the process for vetting ideas be?
- Will top selected ideas that make it all the way through the process be judged at a final pitching event?
- Who are the people that will be involved in the evaluation and selection process?

5 Challenge Planning Process: Timeline

The final stage of the Challenge background deals with the timeline. The who, what, where, and how have been dealt with. Now it's time for the when. Some of the scoping questions to ask at this point include:

- When is the ideal launch date for the Challenge?
- When do selected ideas need to be identified by?
- Are there any upcoming business-specific events that could impact on the ability of the selected crowd to submit their ideas?
- Are there any known restraints on the timing of idea implementation?

Once these five components are completed, the Challenge has passed the first of three planning stages. Ensuring that time is given to all scoping questions mentioned above, especially when running an innovation Challenge for the first time, is a great way to avoid roadblocks.

In this guide, we have discussed the ways in which successful innovation Challenges should be planned. Using a staged process, we've outlined all the considerations that should feed into this area of Challenge management. In the next guide in this series, we will move on to phase two of the Challenge planning process, where we will discuss the framing of the Challenge.

About Wazoku

Wazoku is a pioneer in open innovation, crowdsourcing, and innovation at scale. For more than two decades, we've been helping our clients deliver sustainable and scalable innovation practices. As both for-profit and for-purpose, our software and expertise have been used to gain competitive advantage and overcome humanitarian crises around the globe, all of which are underpinned by the belief that anyone can be an innovator.