Challenge DIY

Everything you need to plan and launch a design challenge

1.

What is your objective?

2.

Is a challenge the right approach?

3.

Structuring the challenge

4.

Making it real

5.

Outcomes, Monitoring & Evaluation

- What is the problem you are trying to solve?

- Advantages & disadvantages
- Resource assessment

- Challenge topic
- Management
- Participation guidelines
- Timeline

- Platform
- Templates
- TORs
- Promotion

- Support to winner
- Indicators
- Evaluation
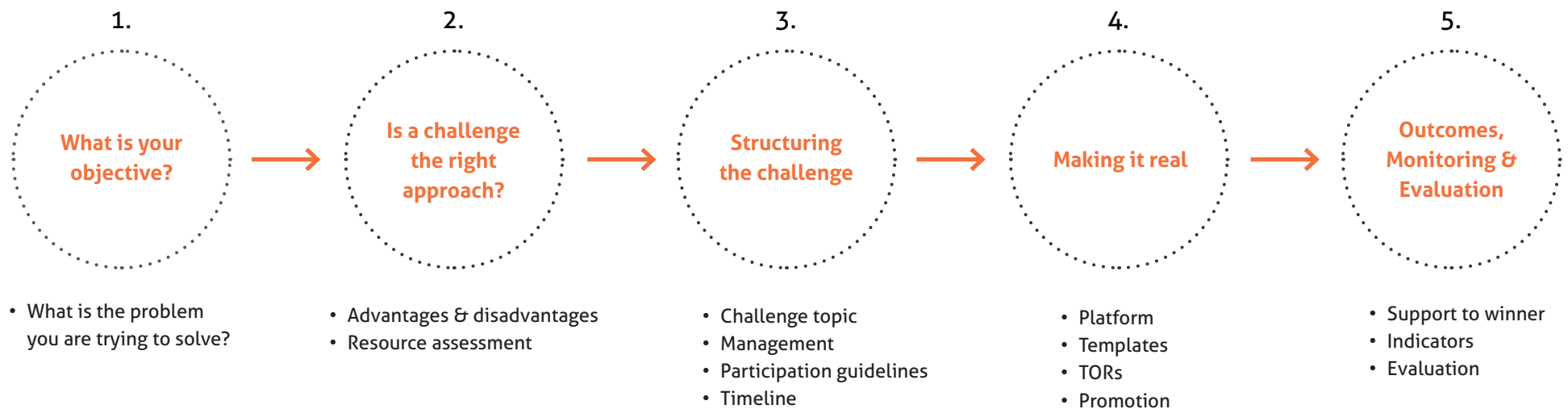
1   *What is your objective, and is a challenge a good approach?*

A design challenge is a great way to engage talent, bring together partners, and generate ideas around a specific problem. However, running a formal Challenge often requires a lot of planning and operational resources.

The UNICEF Innovation Unit has developed this guide to help UNICEF colleagues and partners structure design Challenges that address real problems in humanitarian response and development.

We've learned that a Challenge model can be great for:

- Quickly generating a large number of ideas/ possible solutions around a particular problem
- Introducing human-centered design processes and tools to youth, universities, and colleagues
- Initiating new relationships with academic institutions and other potential partners
- Creating channels for youth-led projects to receive support and guidance locally and globally
- Bringing new ways of thinking and working into UNICEF
- Unifying multiple groups (students, private sector, UNICEF staff) around a common area of focus
- Establishing new networks that can lead to future collaborations

A Challenge is probably _not_ the best approach if a high-quality, implementable output is the only objective.

This guide is focused on large, formal, online challenges, but the materials can also be used for smaller challenges, workshops, or short-term collaborations.

Fill this form:

What are your main objectives with the Challenge?

- ☐ Quickly generating a large number of ideas/ possible solutions around a particular problem
- ☐ Introducing human-centered design processes and tools to youth, universities, and colleagues
- ☐ Initiating new relationships with academic institutions and other potential partners
- ☐ Creating channels for youth-led projects to receive support and guidance locally and globally
- ☐ Bringing new ways of thinking and working into UNICEF
- ☐ Unifying multiple groups (students, private sector, UNICEF staff) around a common area of focus
- ☐ Establishing new networks that can lead to future collaborations

☐ [ ]

☐ [ ]

☐ [ ]

Resource Assessment

Personnel Time:

Project Manager (UNICEF or Partner) for Challenge to give at least 20% time

○ I have this   ○ I need this

Focal point at partnering organization (as relevant, Partner or UNICEF) to give at least 5%

○ I have this   ○ I need this

Funding:

Do you have committed funding for this project?

○ I have this   ○ I need this

Networks:

Are there partners who want to be involved (as funders, project leads, support to winners, etc.)?

○ I have this   ○ I need this

Do you have established outreach networks/channels?

○ I have this   ○ I need this

Timeline:

What is your timeframe? Do you have at least 2-3 months lead time?

○ I have this   ○ I need this

Do you have established outreach networks/channels?

○ I have this   ○ I need this

2 *Structuring the Challenge*

Every Challenge needs certain elements, but there is a lot of flexibility in how it can be structured to match your objectives and available resources. This section provides a fill-in-the-blank checklist to lay out your Challenge structure, with corresponding supplemental guidance for each section.

1. Challenge Topic

A Challenge topic should always reflect a real demand for solutions locally and/or globally, and be framed to meet your Challenge objectives.

If you are looking to engage a diverse group of people and skill sets in collaborative design research, a broad, cross-cutting theme that ties into several UNICEF programme areas can be a good way to familiarize people with on-the-ground challenges, though less-likely to yield implementable outcomes. For example, the topic of Emergency Response could include problems related to WASH, Child Protection, etc. If you want to generate specific products or services around a certain need, a very narrow, technical topic is often better.

Examples of past Challenge topics can be found in the Use Case Archive. A template for completing a Challenge topic use-case can be found in "Making it Real," page 9.

2. Participants

Your audience for the Challenge depends both on what kind of networks do you want to build and what kind of outcomes you expect. Students? Private sector? Local youth? How advanced/developed do you expect the ideas to be? Do you want to accept submissions globally or only from your country or region? Will you require teams or can participants submit as individuals? Can participants form teams with people from other schools/organizations/countries?

3. Challenge Platform

An online challenge lets you reach a much wider audience, but also restricts participation to those with an internet connection. Please email Norah Maki, nmaki@unicef.org, for details and support on selecting an online challenge platform.

Fill this form:

1 (a). Management

UNICEF Focal Point:

Partner Focal Point (if applicable):

1(b). Challenge Topic:

What are the participants being asked to solve for?

2. Participants:

Who is your target audience to submit ideas to the Challenge?
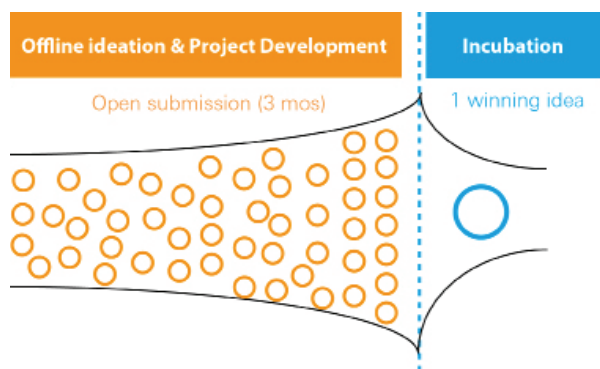
a.

b.

c.

3. Challenge Platform:

How will people participate? Will the challenge be online or in-person?

2 Structuring the Challenge

4. Structure

There are two main options for a Challenge submission structure: a one-time submission and evaluation, or multiple rounds of evaluation.
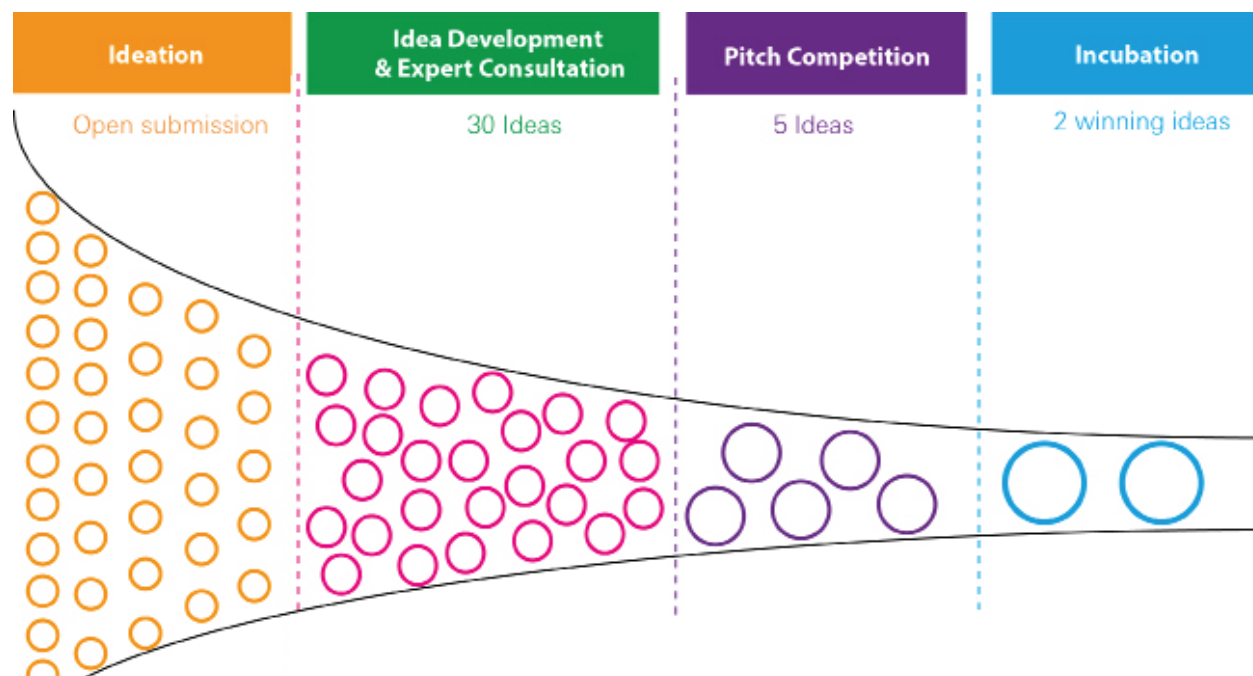
A one-time submission structure can work if you are looking primarily to quickly generate a number of new ideas around a specific problem. Participants develop their ideas independently, and submit completed proposals by a final deadline. The winners are then selected from this large pool.

A multiple-round structure might be best if one of your objectives is educational, or if you plan to have a mentorship component and public participation. In this format, participants submit an initial project brief, and then submit subsequent revisions to their projects as the pool of ideas is winnowed down, leaving just the global winners. If you expect to get hundreds of submissions, it makes sense to narrow that pretty quickly to a smaller group to concentrate mentorship support, public feedback, and management efforts toward the most compelling ideas.

Fill this form:

4. Structure & Timeline
○ One-time submission
○ Multiple Stages
   No. of Stages: [   ]

Start date: [   ]

End date: [   ]

Dates for interim evaluation: [   ]

Timeframe for incubation of winning project: [   ]

For example: 50 ideas > 1 winner

Offline ideation & Project Development — Open submission (3 mos)
Incubation — 1 winning idea

For example, 400 ideas > 30 ideas > 5 ideas > 2 winners

Ideation — Open submission
Idea Development & Expert Consultation — 30 Ideas
Pitch Competition — 5 Ideas
Incubation — 2 winning ideas

2 *Structuring the Challenge*

5. Submission Requirements

The materials participants submit to the challenge will depend on which structure you select (one-time submission or multiple-round). For example, you might want participants to submit a formal proposal detailing research and technical specifications, or if you are running a multi-round contest with young people, you may want to ask them to complete certain activities such as a stakeholder mapping or user journey.

These activities are included in the Challenge curriculum that we have developed over the past several years to align with key stages of the design process. It includes guidelines for everything from short videos to project briefs to full proposals. Templates for each of these can be found in the curriculum document under "Making it Real," page x.

When deciding what you want teams to submit, consider:

1. What information or responses will help us assess this project in line with our objectives?
2. How will this output be judged? (online voting? reading panel and evaluation form? in-person pitch?)
3. What do judges need to know in order to evaluate the project? (technical specs?

Fill this form:

5. Outputs

What do participants have to submit at each stage of the competition?

One-time submission:

or

Stage 1:

Stage 2:

Stage 3:

2 *Structuring the Challenge*

6. Mentorship

Mentorship and online forums are often where the magic happens, on both sides. They enable new networks to form, and promote the active exchange of ideas and quality outcomes that align with needs and principles. Mentorship is also the most effective way to bring new energy, ideas, and new tools into Country Office work.

In an online Challenge, mentorship and public participation can both happen through commenting forums, which allow all participants and the general public to view and contribute to conversations. Two good options for structuring mentorship are:

1. Ongoing mentorshipt throughout, monitored and moderated by the Challenge manager
2. Dedicated 1-2 weeks of feedback and voting after a submission deadline, moderated by the Challenge Manager

When partnering with local organizations or universities, requiring teams to work in person with a faculty mentor can greatly improve the quality of project submissions.

Fill this form:

6. Mentorship

Will there be a Mentorship component?

○ Yes   ○ No

Who will be the Mentors? (i.e., UNICEF colleagues, university faculty, etc.)

a. [ ]

b. [ ]

c. [ ]

Will mentorship be:

○ ongoing   ○ at specific points in the competition

Will it happen:

○ online   ○ in-person

2   *Structuring the Challenge*

7. Judging & Winners

With a Challenge, you never know exactly what you are going to get for ideas, so it can be difficult to plan for effective support of a winning project. One big lesson learned is how important it is to select a winning project that has potential to move forward - even if it isn't necessarily the "best" idea. It is important that the winning project have long-term continuity, especially if the primary challenge objective is to surface new ideas.

Some key questions to answer at this stage are:

- How many winners are there and what do they win? (a cash prize? incubation time with a partner? field-testing with UNICEF?)
- Who provides the prize? (a cash award from a partnering organization or company? opportunity to travel to the field? personnel time from UNICEF?)
- Who will be the judges? (UNICEF colleagues, experts from academia or the private sector, the general public?)
- What are the judging criteria (what are you looking for? creativity? feasibility? which is more important?)

Sample judging forms are linked under "Making it Real," page 9.

Fill this form:

6. Judging and Winners

Who will be judging the projects?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

How many rounds of judging will there be? _____

How many winners will there be? _____

What do they win? Who is providing the prize?

[   ]

How does the judging happen at each stage?

One-time submission: [   ]

or

Stage 1: [   ]

Stage 2: [   ]

Stage 3: [   ]

2 *Structuring the Challenge*

8. Varying the Model

A Challenge can be a very flexible model, and adapted to fit with existing programs and resources. Several possibilities are addressed here.

a) **Integration with existing programs/structures**
Given the investment that goes into coordinating and running a challenge, it is valuable to align with other programs or institutions for successful and sustainable engagement once the contest ends.

Often, there are existing structures that can be leveraged to frame the competition and ensure participation. At a university, these could be specific courses, extra-curriculars, student groups, or institutional programs such as a social entrepreneurship center or honors program.

Outside of a university, they could include youth organizations, community programming, or networks of implementing partners.

b) **Workshops with private-sector partners**
Short challenge-style workshops are a dynamic way to familiarize new or prospective partners with UNICEF's work and Innovation Principles, as well as engage specific technical expertise via a hackathon, etc.

We've found these short events are often more about building up a community of practice than they are about delivering useful outcomes.

The Use Case Archive is a great resource to pull from for these types of events.

c) **Exploratory Models**
What are some different ways to engage UNICEF colleagues? As mentors, as participants themselves?

What are some different ways to engage the private sector? i.e. as participants, as sponsors, as mentors, to incubate winners?

How could we energize the online / offline interface through events, workshops, or webinars?

Could we use U-report or other existing community engagement tools to widen the scope of participation?

3 *Making it Real*

Below is a list of materials you need to launch your challenge - from your problem statement to promotional materials - along with links to corresponding templates. Most materials are also available online at www.unicefstories.org/academic-partnership-resources/. Many of the templates are accessible in several document formats, including Microsoft Office, Adobe PDF, and as design files in Adobe Illustrator and InDesign.

Challenge structure & operations

☐ Challenge structure outline   Pages 3-8 of this document
☐ Timeline   Sample timeline and template
☐ Partner agreement (if applicable)   Sample Letters of Intent (LOIs) - *please email Norah Maki, nmaki@unicef.org*
☐ Partner roles and responsibilities   Sample roles and responsibilities
☐ Online platform   Instructions for www.unicefchallenges.com - *please email nmaki@unicef.org*
     Instructions for CauseTech platform - *please email nmaki@unicef.org*

Content for participants

☐ Challenge topic / use case   Use Case Archive and template
☐ Submission requirements & curriculum   Challenge curriculum & design worksheets
☐ Relevant reference materials   Sample reference materials
☐ Certificate of participation   Certificate template

Judging

☐ Criteria & Evaluation form   Sample judging form

Promotion

☐ Strategy and timeline   Sample strategy document
☐ Promotional materials   Sample posters, emails, etc.
☐ Video   Sample video

Outcomes, Monitoring & Evaluation

How the challenge is assessed will be very closely tied to your particular objectives. If the focus is more on an educational design process, things like online discussion and qualitative evaluations by participants and mentors can be good indicators. If the focus is more on project outcomes, then a more traditional monitoring and evaluation structure might make sense. Three main areas to consider are:

1. Assessment of challenge process for participants:
   What was their experience? Would they participate again?
2. Assessment of challenge process for UNICEF
   What was our experience? Did we meet our objectives?
3. Assessment of winning project after implementation
   Has this project positively contributed to better outcomes for children?