



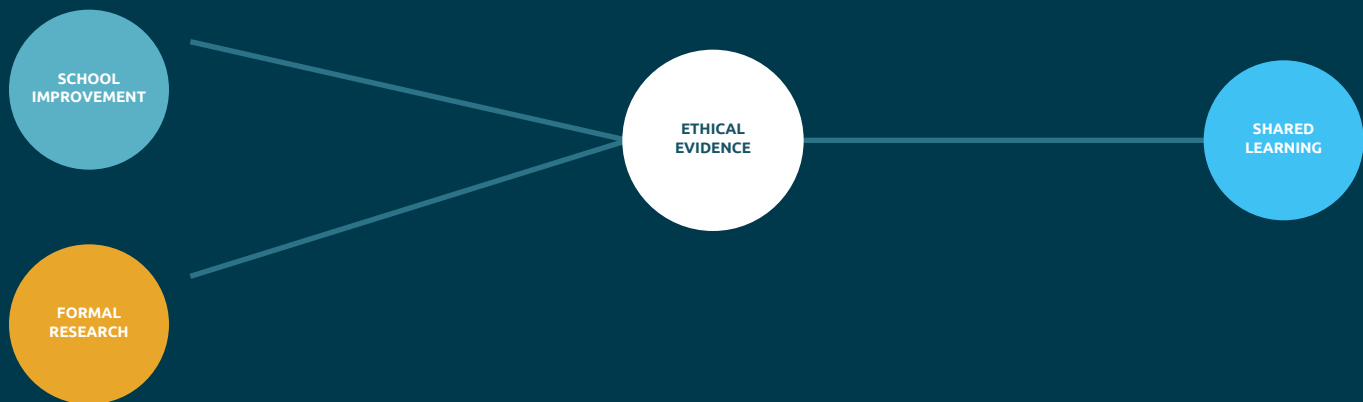
A CHARTER RESEARCH COMPANION

RURAL LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

RESEARCH AND REPORTING SCAFFOLDING

Youth-Led Community-Based Research at Valhalla Community School

Prepared for Valhalla Community School | Discussion Draft | July 2026



TWO PURPOSES • CLEAR PERMISSIONS • ONE LEARNING SYSTEM



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A DECISION-READY STARTING POINT

Executive recommendation

Position Youth-Led Community-Based Research as a school-driven, prospective developmental case study. Use one coherent learning and evidence system while keeping routine improvement and formal research permissions distinct.

Adopt a developmental case study

Use a prospective, mixed-method study that follows the program across at least two implementation cycles and learns from planned adaptations.

Use a dual reporting architecture

Keep routine school-improvement evidence distinct from data used for formal research and external knowledge sharing.

Treat the resource suite as the intervention

Version the curriculum, handbooks, tools, lessons, assessment toolkit and implementation guide so readers can see what was enacted and changed.

Triangulate learning

Combine student artifacts, observation, conversation, self-assessment, peer feedback and partner feedback rather than relying on a single survey or showcase outcome.

Make staff co-researchers

Build teacher capacity to gather, interpret and use evidence while protecting workload and separating instructional judgment from research consent.

Report contribution, not causation

Describe how the model appears to contribute to leadership learning and community relationship, with limitations and alternative explanations visible.

IMMEDIATE LEADERSHIP DECISION

Approve development of a Board-ready research brief, confirm the research and ethics relationship, authorize a small steering group and name the first prospective study cycle. Do not present prior program activity as an already-approved formal research study.

MAKE THE MANDATE VISIBLE IN THE STUDY DESIGN

From innovation to disciplined inquiry

The research obligation is best met through a traceable chain: charter purpose, documented practice, ethical evidence, transparent interpretation, improvement and knowledge sharing.

Provincial purpose

Alberta describes public charter schools as having potential to improve the education system and enhance research and innovation.

Sharing responsibility

Section 13 of the Charter Schools Regulation assigns charter boards responsibility for sharing research, innovations and best practices with educational stakeholders.

VCS Board Policy 20

Research should focus on educational practice, advance charter goals, include staff, build capacity, identify cost and impact, receive Superintendent recommendation and Board approval, and benefit VCS and potentially Alberta students.

Valhalla's mission

VCS aims to prepare rural students for leadership and success in rapidly changing communities while developing ethical, civic and democratic participation.

Current education plan

The 2025-2028 plan identifies Youth-Led Community-Based Research as an innovative initiative connected to leadership, communication, authentic community issues and local impact.

Knowledge mobilization

A credible research system should return findings to students, staff and partners and share useful practices with rural schools, charter schools and the wider education community.

KEY AUTHORITIES

Government of Alberta, Public charter schools: alberta.ca/public-charter-schools • Charter Schools Regulation, Alta Reg 85/2019, s. 13: canlii.org/en/ab/laws/regu/alta-reg-85-2019/latest/ • VCS Board Policy 20, Charter School Research Projects: valhallacommunityschool.ca/1918-2/board-policies/bp-119-charter-school-research-projects/ • VCS Charter and Education Plan 2025-2028.

A BOUNDED STUDY WITH AN IMPROVEMENT PURPOSE

Proposed research frame

The study asks what develops, how it develops and what conditions make the model credible and sustainable. It does not promise to prove that the program alone caused an outcome.

PROPOSED STUDY TITLE

Rural Leadership in Action: A Developmental Study of Youth-Led Community-Based Research at Valhalla Community School

To understand how and under what conditions Valhalla's Youth-Led Community-Based Research model supports students to develop and demonstrate readiness for rural leadership while contributing to reciprocal community learning and action.

Design

A prospective, mixed-method developmental case study with evidence nested at the program, project-team and individual-learner levels.

Bounded case

The bounded case is the VCS Youth-Led Community-Based Research model, including its curriculum, educator practice, student projects, community partnerships, assessment processes and implementation conditions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1

Primary question

How and under what conditions does participation in Valhalla's Youth-Led Community-Based Research model support students to develop and demonstrate readiness for rural leadership?

2

Learner development

How do students demonstrate growth in ethical community understanding, evidence-informed judgment, adaptive project action, collaboration, communication and reflective agency?

3

Learning design

Which features of the curriculum, facilitation, feedback, assessment and project experience appear most important to student learning and meaningful youth influence?

4

Community relationship

How do students, staff and partners experience the value, reciprocity, accessibility and challenges of community-based work?

5

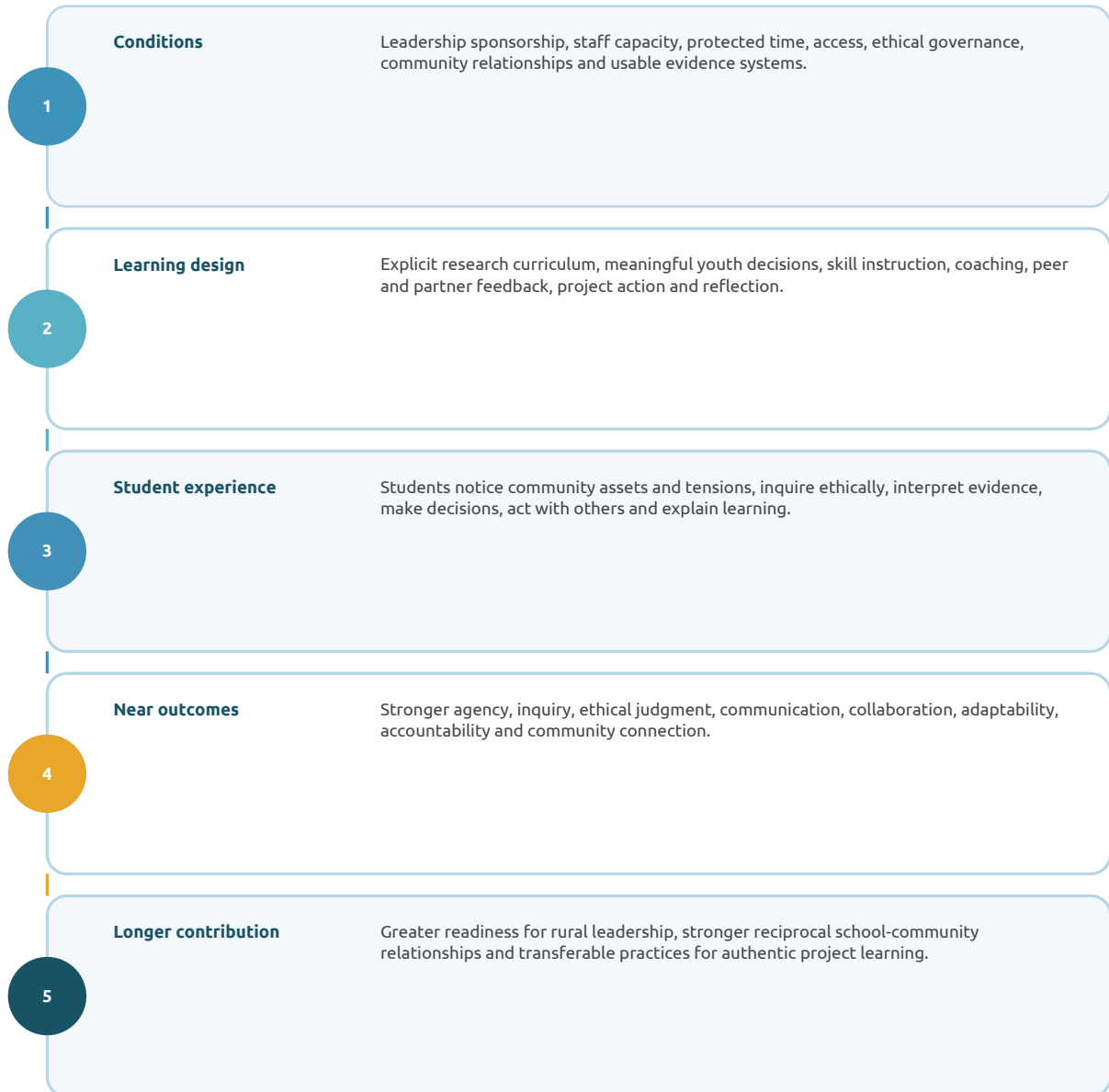
Implementation and transfer

What organizational conditions enable sustainable implementation, and which design principles may be useful to other rural or charter-school contexts?

A THEORY TO TEST AND REFINE

Contribution pathway

The pathway makes the program's working logic explicit. Evidence can then show where the chain is strong, where it breaks and what adaptations appear to matter.



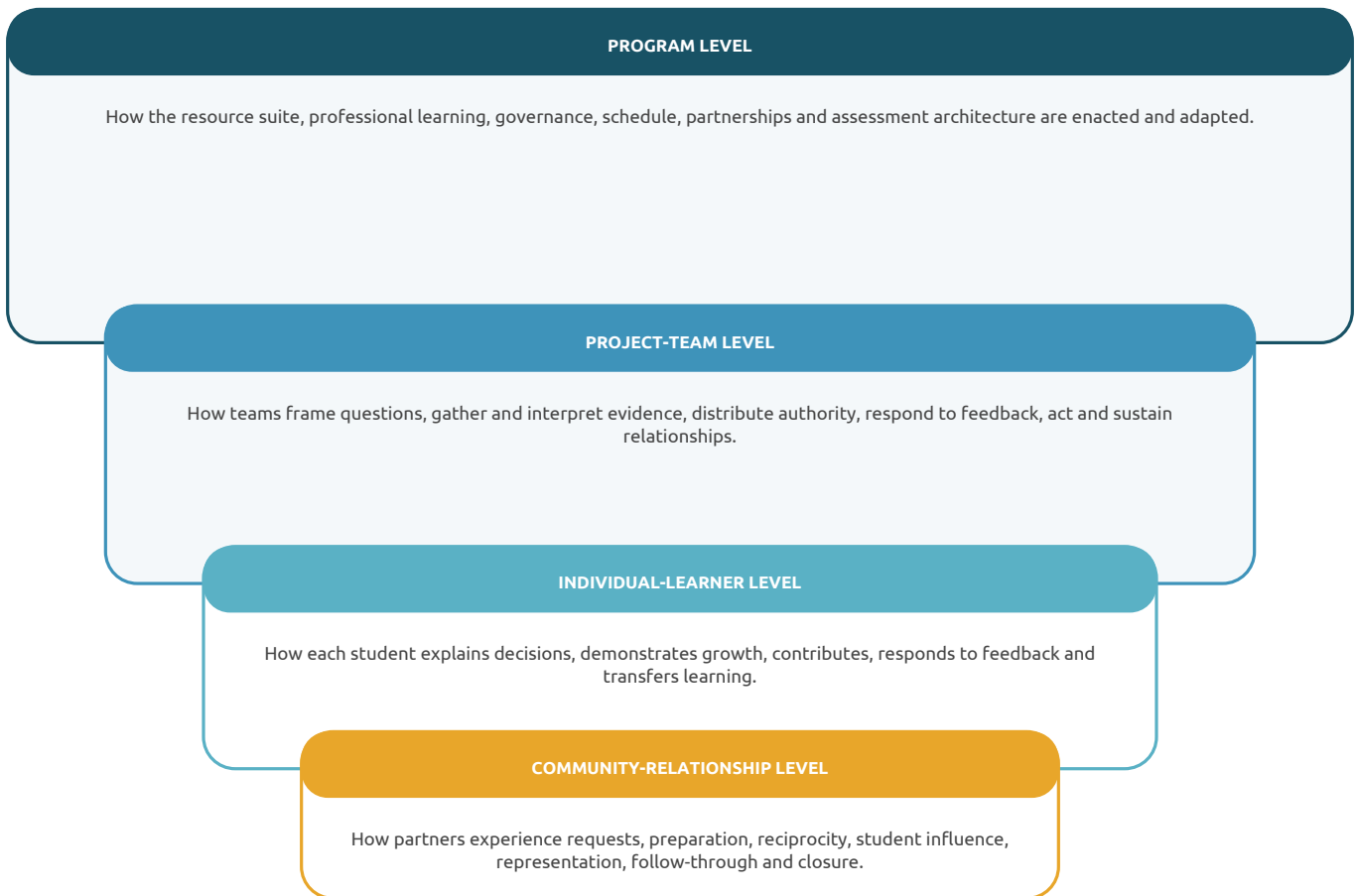
THE MODEL MAY CHANGE WHILE IT IS STUDIED

Developmental rule: adaptations are expected. Version the program and record why a change was made so improvement remains part of the evidence rather than disappearing from the research story.

ONE CASE, SEVERAL CONNECTED LEVELS

A prospective developmental case study

Evidence is nested so the school can distinguish program conditions, team experience, individual learning and community relationship. At least two prospective cycles make adaptation visible.

**APPROPRIATE INFERENCE**

Recommended comparison: compare evidence across program versions, project teams, participant perspectives and implementation cycles. Avoid a control group or causal claim unless a later study is specifically designed and powered for that purpose.



EVERY SOURCE MUST SERVE A QUESTION

Evidence architecture

Use a small, common evidence set. Collect only what the study can analyze, protect, return to participants and use for a decision.

RESEARCH FOCUS	POSSIBLE EVIDENCE	ANALYTIC USE
Learner development	Entry/exit leadership reflection; portfolio artifacts and annotations; rubric profiles; conferences; teacher observations; student interviews or focus groups.	Descriptive change patterns; artifact analysis; thematic analysis; triangulated learner profiles.
Learning design	Curriculum/resource version record; lesson and facilitation notes; student critical-incident reflections; feedback and revision logs.	Cross-case comparison of features associated with strong, uneven or limited learning evidence.
Community relationship	Partner feedback; commitment and return logs; selected interviews; student partnership reflections; representation checks.	Reciprocity and relationship themes; benefits, burdens, missing voices and unresolved commitments.
Implementation	Teacher inquiry logs; staff focus groups; professional-learning artifacts; schedule/resource records; leadership decision and adaptation log.	Implementation-condition analysis; adaptations, workload, access, sustainability and enabling constraints.
Transferability	Design memos; staff and partner sensemaking; cross-cycle comparisons; public resource use or feedback where available.	Transferable design principles with context, boundary conditions and cautions.

EVIDENCE STANDARD

Triangulation is a quality rule: no major finding should rest on one survey, one showcase, one adult judgment or one memorable story. Look across artifacts, observation, conversation, self-assessment, peer feedback and partner feedback.

USE THE EXISTING ASSESSMENT ARCHITECTURE

Six outcome strands

These strands connect the research study to the Assessment Toolkit and to Valhalla's charter language. They organize evidence; they are not six additional grading categories.

OUTCOME STRAND	WHAT EVIDENCE MAY SHOW	CHARTER CONNECTION
Community understanding and ethical research	Understands community context; listens with consent and care; protects privacy; represents people and evidence responsibly.	Ethical, civic and democratic participation; community commitment
Analysis and use of evidence	Uses appropriate methods; organizes and interprets evidence; identifies patterns, limitations and alternative explanations.	Engaged thinking; competence; informed judgment
Project design and adaptive action	Frames worthwhile opportunities; tests feasibility; plans responsibly; adapts to evidence, risk and changing conditions.	Initiative; entrepreneurial spirit; problem-solving
Collaboration, leadership and accountability	Contributes, shares authority, communicates, repairs difficulty, manages responsibility and follows through.	Readiness for leadership; integrity; resilience
Communication and community relationship	Communicates for audience and access; sustains reciprocity; gives credit; responds to feedback and closes commitments.	Excellent communication; rural community connection
Reflection, agency and future action	Uses evidence to explain growth, influence and limits; makes responsible choices; identifies realistic future action.	Self-confidence through competence; adaptability; future readiness

Analyze growth with entry and later evidence, not retrospective impression alone. Preserve the actual work, feedback and student explanation that support each interpretation.

STUDY THE CONDITIONS AS WELL AS THE OUTCOMES

Implementation conditions

If the model works differently across teams or cycles, these conditions help explain why. They should be documented, reviewed and refined rather than treated as background.

Meaningful youth authority

Students influence consequential questions, interpretations and directions within clear adult-held boundaries.

Explicit research learning

Students are taught ethical listening, question-method fit, evidence analysis, feasibility, communication and reflection.

Skilled facilitation

Teachers scaffold without taking over and make individual learning visible within collaborative work.

Actionable feedback

Self, peer and partner feedback is specific, purpose-connected and offered while learners can still respond.

Reciprocal partnerships

Requests are proportionate; participants have choice; community knowledge influences decisions; commitments are returned.

Equitable access

Time, transportation, technology, cost, language and public performance do not determine whose leadership is visible.

Leadership infrastructure

Governance, scheduling, staffing, resourcing, privacy, risk escalation, version control and learning review are usable.

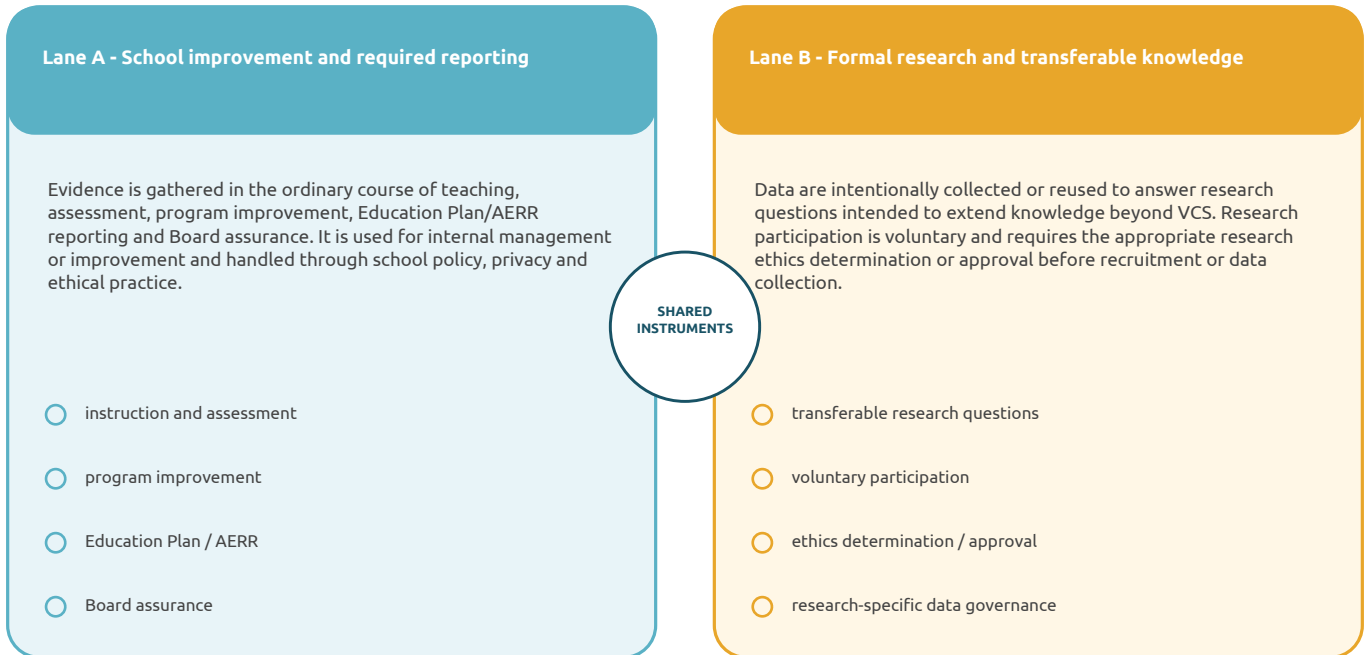
INTERPRET BEFORE JUDGING

Use implementation evidence to make scope and support decisions. Do not attribute weak evidence to student motivation before examining authority, instruction, access, time, feedback, partnership and leadership infrastructure.

ONE LEARNING SYSTEM, TWO PURPOSES

Separate improvement from formal research

The same program can support teaching, improvement and research. The purpose, permissions and data flow must be explicit before information enters a formal research dataset.



THE BRIDGE IS GOVERNED

Shared instruments do not mean shared permission. Create a research-ready copy only for authorized participants and only after the approved process. A student may decline research use and still participate fully in the educational program.

TCPS 2, Article 2.5 distinguishes activities used exclusively for assessment, management or improvement from research intended to extend knowledge. Dual-purpose activity is possible, but it must be declared and governed. Source: ethics.gc.ca/eng/tcps2-eptc2_2022_chapter2-chapitre2.html

CONSENT IS NOT A FORM ATTACHED AT THE END

Ethics, privacy and small-community care

Research design must protect genuine choice, instructional fairness and participant dignity. In a small rural community, technically de-identified information may still be recognizable.



RESOLVE THE RESEARCH RELATIONSHIP

Board Policy 20 expects external researchers to be affiliated with an accredited university and ethics approval to be secured before final Board approval. Confirm in writing how Elk Willow, VCS and any university partner will divide sponsorship, data custody, analysis, publication and participant responsibilities.

CLEAR AUTHORITY PROTECTS INQUIRY

Research governance and roles

Governance should connect school authority, methodological integrity, instructional practice, data stewardship and participant voice without making students or teachers carry institutional ambiguity.

Charter Board

Approves the research project, receives assurance about mandate, cost, benefit, risk and ethics, and monitors knowledge sharing.

Superintendent / sponsor

Recommends the project, confirms policy and ethics requirements, authorizes resources and reporting, and brings decisions to the Board.

Principal / implementation lead

Coordinates school protocols, staff participation, schedules, family communication, access and day-to-day implementation.

Research lead

Develops the protocol, ethics application, instruments, analysis plan and research reports; protects methodological integrity and participant welfare.

Teacher inquiry team

Co-designs usable measures, documents enactment, interprets evidence, tests emerging explanations and uses findings to improve practice.

Data / privacy steward

Controls access, de-identification, secure storage, linkage, retention, deletion and release of research-ready data.

Student advisory voice

Tests clarity, burden, interpretation and representation; helps determine how learning is returned to students.

Community advisory voice

Tests reciprocity, cultural and contextual accuracy, partner burden, public representation and the usefulness of findings.

A WORKABLE STRUCTURE

A small steering group can coordinate the work: Superintendent sponsor • school implementation lead • research lead • teacher representative • data/privacy steward • student and community advisory input at defined points.

PHASE-BASED, NOT CALENDAR-BOUND

A responsible research cycle

The phases can overlap and repeat, but authorization and ethics come before recruitment or formal prospective research collection.



Decision gate: if purpose, participant group, public visibility, data source or intended use changes, pause and determine whether Board, ethics, privacy or consent amendments are required.

MAKE THE REASONING AUDITABLE

Analysis and quality standards

The study should show how interpretations were built and tested. Small cohorts call for rich description, cautious summaries and visible limitations.

Describe before comparing

Report cohort, context, participation, program version, project types and evidence completeness before presenting change.

Use modest quantitative summaries

For small cohorts, emphasize counts, distributions, medians, paired change categories and visual profiles rather than unstable percentages or causal tests.

Code deductively and inductively

Use the six outcome strands and implementation conditions as an initial framework while allowing unanticipated themes and tensions to emerge.

Build case narratives

Create bounded project-team and learner profiles that connect conditions, decisions, feedback, artifacts and reflection over time.

Triangulate and seek disconfirmation

Compare self-report, artifacts, observations, conversations, peer and partner evidence; investigate discrepancies and negative cases.

Protect equity and confidentiality

Examine participation and access patterns without reporting small cells or identity combinations that enable re-identification.

Member-check meaning

Invite students, staff and relevant partners to test accuracy, interpretation, context and proposed public representation.

Make contribution claims

Use language such as 'evidence suggests,' 'participants described' and 'appears to contribute'; state limitations and plausible alternatives.

CLAIM ONLY WHAT THE EVIDENCE CAN CARRY

Use contribution language: evidence suggests • participants described • the pattern was stronger when • the model appears to contribute. State what the design cannot establish.

RETURN LEARNING BEFORE PROMOTING IT

A reporting and knowledge-sharing architecture

Different audiences need different products. Each product should state its evidence base, limits, intended use and relationship to the formal study.

Board research update

A concise assurance report on approvals, implementation status, emerging evidence, risks, adaptations, cost and next decisions.

Annual internal research memo

A fuller account of context, program version, methods, evidence patterns, implementation learning and recommended refinements.

Education Plan / AERR contribution

Aggregate charter-aligned evidence and a short account of research progress, without turning required reporting into the full study.

Participant and community return

Accessible student-facing and partner-facing summaries that show what was heard, learned, changed and carried forward.

Public practice brief

A concise description of the model, enabling conditions, promising practices, cautions and adaptable tools for rural and charter schools.

Full research report

A cross-cycle report containing the research frame, methodology, findings by question, limitations, design principles and implications.

Professional knowledge sharing

Conference presentation, webinar, charter-school network dialogue, practitioner article or university partnership where appropriate.

Open companion resources

A versioned, CC-licensed resource suite with attribution, adaptation notes and boundaries for responsible use.

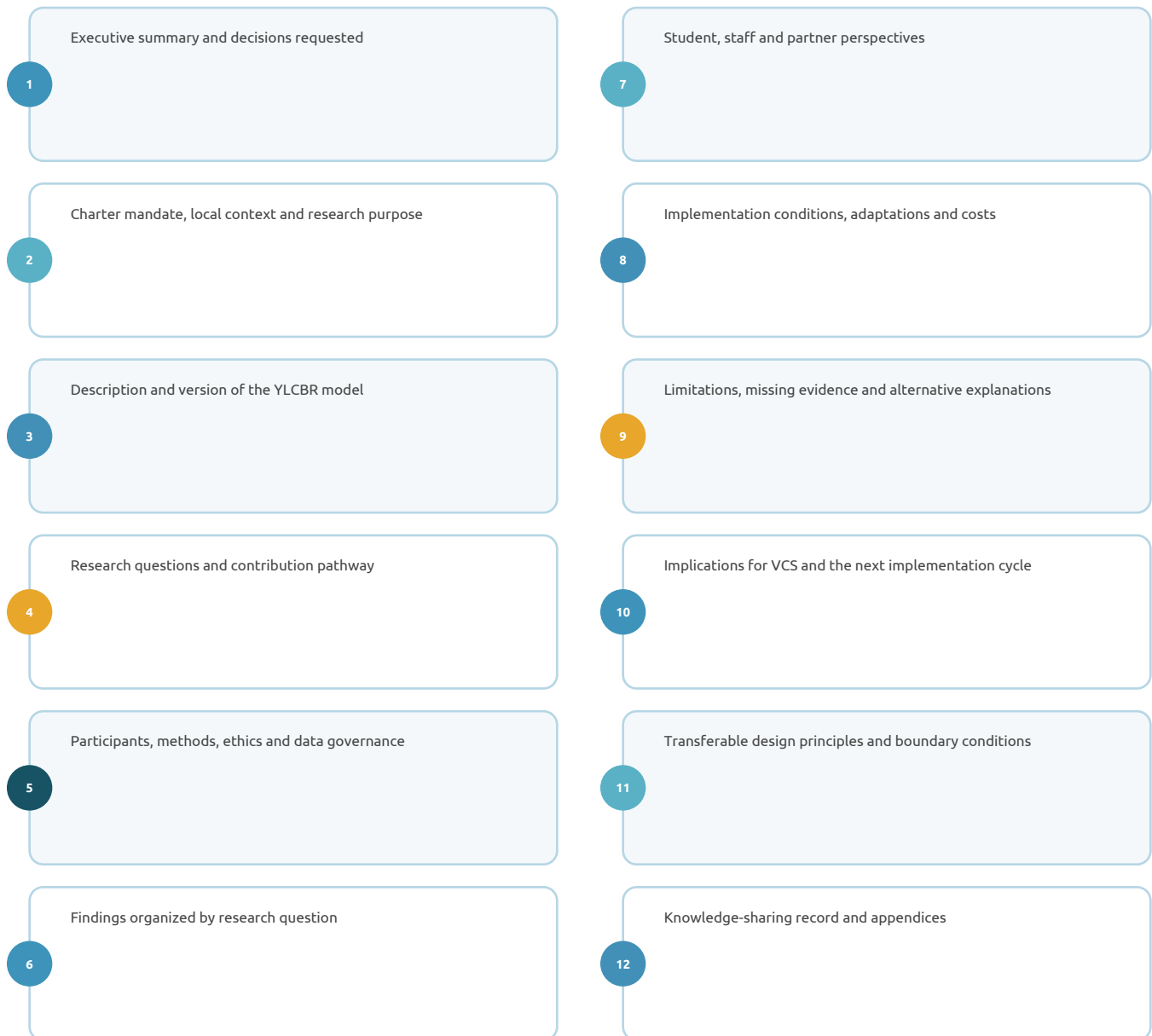
ORDER MATTERS

Recommended annual cadence: participant return first • staff sensemaking • Board assurance update • internal research memo • Education Plan/AERR contribution • public practice brief when evidence and permissions support it.

A TRANSPARENT ACCOUNT, NOT A PROMOTIONAL STORY

Full research report architecture

A credible report connects mandate, model, methods, findings, implementation and knowledge sharing while leaving uncertainty and limitation visible.



Attach the approved protocol, evidence matrix, instruments, consent materials, program version record, analytic codebook and knowledge-sharing log as appendices or controlled companion records.

START WITH THE SMALLEST CREDIBLE SYSTEM

Minimum viable research system

The school does not need a large research office. It does need a complete chain from authorization to evidence, interpretation, improvement and responsible sharing.

1. Board-approved research brief

Purpose, questions, design, benefits, risks, cost, governance, dissemination and decision authority.

2. Written ethics determination / approval

Clear classification of internal evaluation and formal research, including any secondary use of existing data.

3. Versioned intervention record

Named versions of curriculum and companion resources, staff learning, cohort scope and significant local adaptations.

4. Common evidence matrix

A limited set of shared sources connected to research questions, outcome strands, collection points and analysis.

5. Research operations file

Consent/assent, recruitment, participant log, data-management record, implementation log, decision log and deviation record.

6. Collaborative sensemaking routine

Scheduled staff analysis with student and partner interpretation where relevant; discrepancies and negative cases retained.

7. Annual research story

A transparent account of what was tried, what was learned, what changed, what remains uncertain and what will be shared.

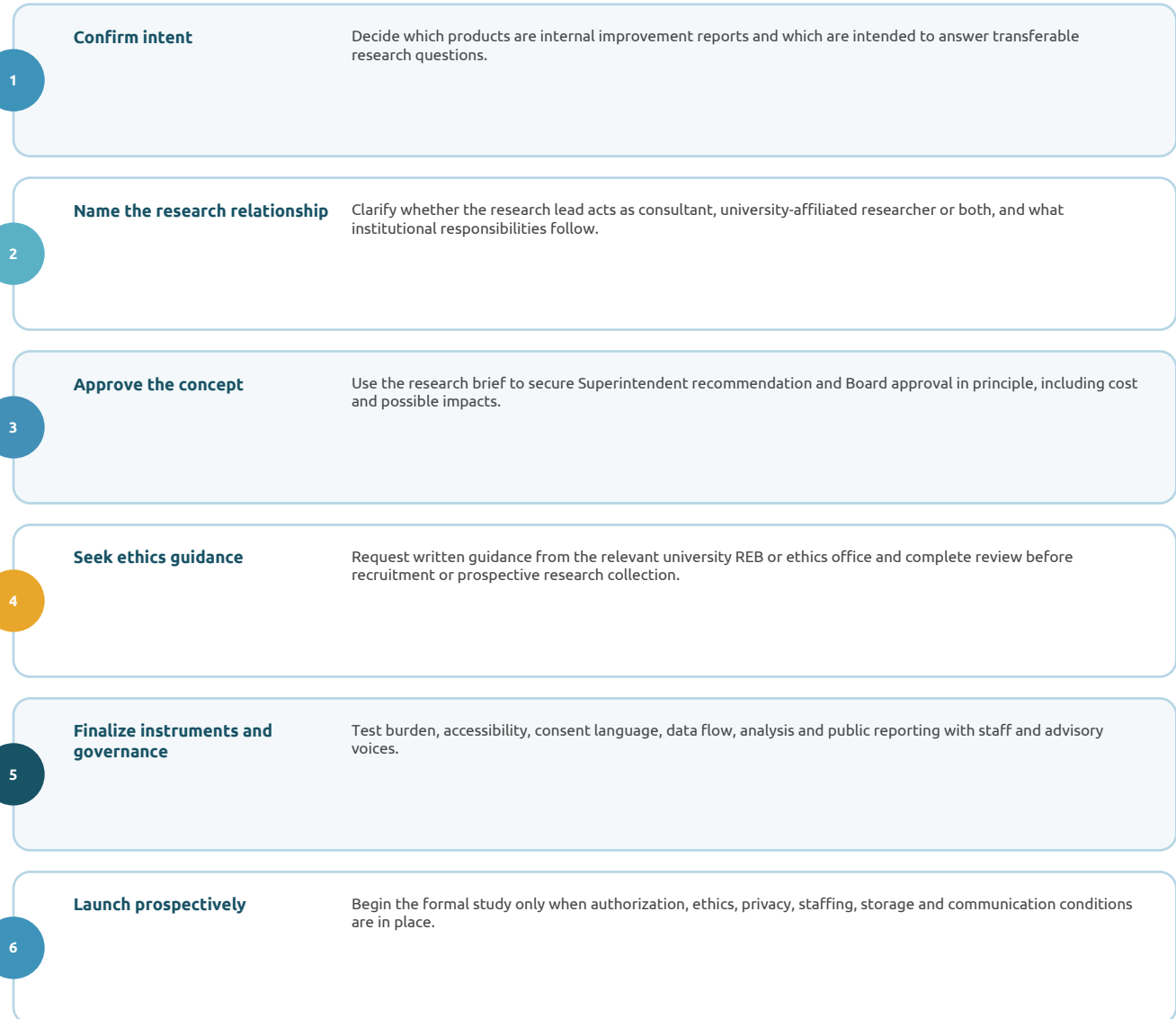
COHERENCE BEFORE VOLUME

If one component is missing, narrow the research promise or delay formal collection. A modest, well-governed study is more useful than an ambitious evidence system that cannot be sustained.

MOVE FROM CONCEPT TO AUTHORIZED STUDY

Approval and launch roadmap

The school can develop the protocol and instruments now. Formal research recruitment and prospective collection begin only after all required approvals are documented.



DECISIONS REQUESTED OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

- ☐ Endorse the proposed research frame in principle
- ☐ Authorize ethics and privacy consultation
- ☐ Authorize development of the costed Board research brief
- ☐ Confirm the external research / university relationship
- ☐ Name the steering group, research lead and data steward
- ☐ Designate the first prospective cohort or implementation cycle

R1

REPRODUCIBLE RESEARCH TOOL

Board-Ready Research Project Brief

Use this one-page scaffold to turn a promising initiative into an approvable research concept before a full protocol is written.

USE WHEN

the Superintendent, Board and research team need a shared description of purpose, value, design, authority, cost, risk and intended knowledge sharing.

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND PRIMARY QUESTION

What will the study help VCS understand?

CHARTER AND EDUCATION-PLAN ALIGNMENT

Which charter commitments and plan priorities are advanced?

BOUNDED CASE AND PROGRAM VERSION

What is included, excluded and enacted?

PARTICIPANTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Who is involved, invited or affected?

DESIGN AND EVIDENCE

What design, sources, collection points and analysis will answer the questions?

BENEFITS, BURDENS AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS

For students, staff, partners, VCS and Alberta education?

ETHICS, PRIVACY AND DATA GOVERNANCE

What approvals, permissions, storage, access, retention and safeguards apply?

ROLES AND DECISION AUTHORITY

Who sponsors, leads, teaches, safeguards, analyzes and approves release?

RESOURCES AND COST

Time, staffing, affiliation, tools, travel, release, analysis and publication.

REPORTING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

What returns to participants, the Board and educational stakeholders?

DECISION / CONDITIONS / OWNER / RECORD OF APPROVAL

R2

Map each question to proportionate evidence, permissions and analysis before collection begins.

the research team is testing whether the evidence system is sufficient, ethical, feasible and useful for interpretation.

Quality test: Is every source necessary? Can participants understand and decline research use? Can the team analyze it? Can it be protected? Will it be returned or used for a decision? What evidence could challenge the expected story?

R3

REPRODUCIBLE RESEARCH TOOL

Annual Research Story

Build a transparent annual account of implementation, evidence, learning, uncertainty, adaptation and next action.

USE WHEN

the research team is preparing a Board update, internal memo or participant return and needs to preserve the full learning story rather than only positive outcomes.

CONTEXT AND PROGRAM VERSION

Who, where, what scope and what version was enacted?

EVIDENCE AND PARTICIPATION

What was collected, from whom, with what completeness and permissions?

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS

Patterns by research question, outcome strand and perspective.

TENSIONS AND CONTRADICTIONARY EVIDENCE

Negative cases, missing voices, alternative explanations and limits.

IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Enabling conditions, constraints, workload, adaptations and resources.

ETHICS, ACCESS AND RELATIONSHIP

Benefits, burdens, incidents, privacy, reciprocity and unresolved commitments.

DECISIONS AND NEXT CYCLE

Continue, adapt, reduce, extend, pause or close - with reasons and owners.

RETURN AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

What was returned, to whom, in what form and with what response?

Finish with one sentence for each audience: What should students know? What should staff change? What should the Board assure? What might another rural or charter school responsibly adapt?



DOCUMENT THE PRACTICE

STUDY THE LEARNING

SHARE WHAT TRAVELS

Credible charter research makes the learning visible: what was designed, what happened, whose evidence informed the interpretation, what changed and what may be useful beyond one school.

