

Proof Before You Apply

An activities list says you were there. Proof says what you did, who it helped, and what changed. This guide walks you through nine months of turning the work you already do into application-ready proof, and building one new project that shows the skills colleges and employers actually screen for.

- Connect — take stock of everything you already did. Nothing gets left behind.
- Build — design one real project that helps an organization and creates application proof.
- Grow — turn the work into evidence, a public post, and a named reference.
- Repeat — write the application version and start project two.

A NOTE FOR PARENTS

Most students already have more experience than they realize. The challenge isn't finding more activities. It's helping students recognize what they've already done, communicate its value, and intentionally build one additional piece of proof before application season.

Write it as a STAR story

Every piece of proof in this guide is written the same way. STAR keeps you honest and keeps admissions readers from guessing what you actually contributed.

S — Situation	Where you were and what was going on.
T — Task	What you were responsible for.
A — Action	What you personally did. Use verbs, not roles.
R — Result	What changed. A number, a before and after, or a quote.

Example. The food pantry had no way to reach student volunteers (S). I was asked to raise weekend sign-ups (T). I built a sign-up form, wrote three posts for the school account, and briefed two club presidents in person (A). Weekend volunteers went from 4 to 17 over six weeks, and the pantry kept the form (R).

Proof and People

PROOF	PEOPLE
Evidence that the work happened: photos, numbers, stories, artifacts, and visible outcomes.	Sponsors, references, and adults who saw the work and can vouch for it.

The nine-month plan

One session a month on Zoom, one assignment between sessions, one artifact you keep. Summer drop-in office hours keep the break productive.

MONTH 1 • Why this matters

The evidence gap: an activities list says you were there, proof says what you did. What a personal brand actually is, and why it is not self-promotion. It is what shows up when someone looks you up.

Do this: Inventory every activity, job, service hour, club role, and project from the last two years. Nothing is too small.

You end up with: Experience inventory

MONTH 2 · Connect: take stock

Nothing you already did gets left behind. How to see the real value in work that felt ordinary, and how to describe it without inflating it.

Do this: Write one paragraph of proof language for your three strongest items. What you did, who it helped, what changed.

You end up with: Draft resume block

MONTH 3 · Build: design the project

Choosing a project that creates real evidence, a real story, and a real reference while helping a real organization. Scoping it down to something you will actually finish.

Do this: Write a one-page project brief and get a sponsor at the organization to say yes to it.

You end up with: Signed project brief

MONTH 4 · Run it

Coordination, persuasion, and follow-through are the three skills employers screen for. How to capture evidence of them while you are still working.

Do this: Execute the first stretch of work. Log what you did and what went sideways.

You end up with: Work log

MONTH 5 · Capture

Turning work into evidence: photos, numbers, before and after, quotes from the people you helped.

Do this: Collect three concrete pieces of evidence from the project.

You end up with: Evidence folder

MONTH 6 · Your profile

Now that you have something real to show, build the place that shows it. Age-appropriate LinkedIn: safety and privacy settings first, then headline, About, education, and skills. Clarity of interest beats fake job titles.

Do this: Publish the profile and connect with five adults you actually know. Under 16? Build the same content as a portfolio document and transfer it on your birthday.

You end up with: Live profile or portfolio doc

MONTH 7 · Grow: make it visible

Writing a project post that is not bragging. The structure: the problem, what you did, what changed, what you learned. LinkedIn is a publishing platform, not just a resume site.

Do this: Publish the post and share it with the organization you helped.

You end up with: Public project post

MONTH 8 · The reference

Asking an adult for a reference the right way. The script, the timing, and how to make it easy for them to say yes.

Do this: Send the ask. Get one adult to agree, in writing, to be a reference for you.

You end up with: Named reference

MONTH 9 • Repeat

Reviewing the year's proof, writing the college-application version of it, and designing project two so the habit keeps going.

Do this: Assemble the packet: inventory, project write-up, post, and reference.
You end up with: Application-ready packet

Before you hit submit

- An inventory of every activity from the last two years, each written as a STAR story.
- One finished project with a sponsor who said yes to the brief.
- Three pieces of evidence: photos, numbers, or quotes from the people you helped.
- A profile or portfolio doc that shows the work, built after you had something to show.
- One public project post the organization has seen.
- One adult who agreed in writing to be your reference.

Ready to run it with a group? The GradPlanHQ high school cohort meets monthly on Zoom and follows this exact curriculum. Individual students can join an open cohort. Schools, organizations, and parent-organized groups can start a private cohort with students who already know one another.