



MIT IDEAS Competition

Innovation ▪ Development ▪ Enterprise ▪ Action ▪ Service

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can I enter the competition with a for-profit project?

Yes. In some instances, the best way to get support and raise funds for a community service project is to run it as a for-profit venture. Your application should explain why your project is for-profit, and how it is also addressing community needs.

2. Can I use my project for the IDEAS and the \$50K competitions?

Absolutely! Just make sure that your project and application fill the requirements for each competition. For example, the IDEAS competition requires that you develop something that meets community needs, and the \$50 K requires that you develop a business plan--so if you develop a business plan for a community non-profit organization or for a new volunteer placement web tool, you'll satisfy both. (As a matter of fact, the team that developed Volunteer Solutions, a terrific volunteer placement tool, DID win the \$50K a few years ago, and it's now being used in several states across the US.) Also, check the rules to make sure that the right material gets submitted to each competition. The same project can be used, but the type and amount of material that each competition requires will vary. The IDEAS competition, for example, has a strict page limit, while the 50K competition does not.

3. Can I use a project from a class?

Of course! Class projects are a great way to get inspired and started—and the IDEAS competition is a great way to transform a class project into an actual prototype or service. IDEAS can offer you the inspiration, funding support, and team support to move from a good start to a great product.

4. Am I supposed to come up with a business plan, a design, or a product?

Any or all of these. Your job is to convince us that you have a feasible, innovative, and effective solution to a real community problem or need. If it takes a business plan to do that, then we'd like to see that plan; if building a prototype and presenting user survey results will be most convincing for your type of project, show us those--and add the design plans as well if they'd make your entry more compelling. Working to fill a community need for an innovative math curriculum? Show us curriculum plans and the explanations that help us to see how well they suit the target students. Developing a

*Questions? Check out <http://web.mit.edu/ideas>
or e-mail ideas-admin@mit.edu*

web-based instructional system? Show us your beta site. Designing a bicycle that works in Amazonian villages during the rainy season? Show us your plans and perhaps a prototype of a critical component. (Remember, we have development grants available to enable you to experiment and build prototypes.)

5. How many people can be on a team?

Your team can be as big or small as you like—whatever it takes to get the work done well—but at least one-third of your team must be full-time, registered MIT students. Keep in mind that you'll need partners as well as teammates: every team should work with a person or organization from the target community. For example, if you're designing an unpuncturable wheelchair tire, you may work with a local hospital; if you're designing a cooking tool to be used by someone with a combination of physical challenges, you'd want to work with a person with those challenges; if you're designing a software system for a community in Belize, you'll want to establish communication with people in that community, and you may also want to work with a similar community nearby. You might also want to work with faculty or professional mentors who will guide your work, answer questions, assist your planning, and help you to work safely and productively.

6. How much money can I get for a development grant?

Development grants will vary according to project needs. You should ask for what you really need—and be ready to come up with an alternate approach (or an alternative funding resource) if we are unable to provide you with the full amount requested.

7. What are the benefits of entering the competition?

IDEAS combines competitive excitement with altruistic incentives. Where else will you get the chance to receive \$7,500 to transform a great idea into a community asset? Add to that the experience of teamwork, the opportunity to explore and resolve community issues firsthand, the chance to work with a mentor on an inventive and challenging project, the creative learning, the excitement of innovation, the practical experience...

8. How do I know if my project is eligible?

Ask. We'll be happy to discuss your ideas and to make suggestions.

9. What if I'm not an MIT student?

You can still participate as long as at least a third of your team is full-time registered MIT students. You can come to the IDEAS Generator Dinners to recruit teammates or to join a team. Check out the TIMELINE and GET CONNECTED sections of our website (<http://web.mit.edu/ideas>).

10. Do I have to submit an initial proposal?

No, submitting an initial proposal is optional. However, completing this stage of the competition allows your team to receive detailed feedback from the IDEAS staff on your *Questions? Check out <http://web.mit.edu/ideas> or e-mail ideas-admin@mit.edu*

project and application materials. In addition to giving you written feedback, at the proposal review sessions we will work with you to refine your ideas and to access any extra resources and assistance you might need. Development Grant requests will only be accepted if accompanied by an initial proposal.

11. Does the initial application deadline I choose affect my chances in the competition?

Not at all—but if you turn in your application for the early deadline, you will have a longer time to refine your ideas, incorporate the feedback you receive and use your development grant. All final entries are due at the same time, and the judging will not be influenced by when you filed your initial proposal.

12. If I need advice at another time, who can I ask?

Teams and individuals can contact the IDEAS staff at any time to get feedback on their projects or to request additional support. Email Alison at ideas-admin@mit.edu with your request.