



2020 - 2021

# **BIG IDEAS**

## **Mentorship Handbook**

University of California, Berkeley  
120 Blum Hall, #5570 Berkeley, CA 94720  
[bigideas@berkeley.edu](mailto:bigideas@berkeley.edu)

# With Special Thanks to our Sponsors



Andrew and Virginia  
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This handbook will provide you with key information about the Big Ideas Contest, expectations for mentors and mentees, final round judging criteria, key dates, and FAQs.

In addition to this handbook, mentor resources are available at <https://bigideascontest.org/participate/mentors/>

# 2020-2021 Big Ideas Mentor Handbook

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a mentor for the 2020-2021 Big Ideas Contest!

Big Ideas mentors have the opportunity to preview and provide feedback on students' innovative ideas. By serving as a mentor, you'll have an opportunity to give back while also getting a first-hand look at some of the most creative ideas being developed by graduate and undergraduate students. In addition, mentors will have the opportunity to build their own professional networks by attending Big Ideas events where they can meet other mentors, contest judges, faculty, and students.

On behalf of the finalists and the Big Ideas Contest, we thank you for your commitment to fostering student-led innovation. Your support is an invaluable resource that helps transform student ideas into real-world impact.

## 2020-2021 Big Ideas Contest Statistics

- >350 Pre-Proposals Submitted
- ~900 Student Participants
- 26 Finalist Teams
- 11 Eligible Universities

The Big Ideas team is always happy to answer any questions you may have.

You can contact Phillip Denny, Director of the Big Ideas Contest at [pdenny@berkeley.edu](mailto:pdenny@berkeley.edu)

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# About the Contest

Big Ideas is an annual, multi-campus, innovation contest aimed at providing funding, support, and recognition to interdisciplinary teams of undergraduate and graduate students who have “big ideas” aimed at addressing pressing social challenges. **Since its founding in 2006, Big Ideas has inspired hundreds of creative and high-impact student projects**, many of which continue long after winning the Contest. By seeking out novel proposals and providing resources and support to help them succeed, Big Ideas has assisted students in making a difference all over the world.

This year the Big Ideas Contest has 10 tracks and is open to innovative student teams from all 11 UC system campuses, including:

- University of California Berkeley
- University of California Davis
- University of California Hastings
- University of California Irvine
- University of California Los Angeles
- University of California Merced
- University of California Riverside
- University of California San Diego
- University of California San Francisco
- University of California Santa Barbara
- University of California Santa Cruz

## Contest Structure

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The Big Ideas Contest is split into a pre-proposal round in the fall and a full proposal round in the spring.

### Round 1: Pre-Proposal

Eligible students submitted their three-page pre-proposals on November 20, 2020. 26 teams were selected as finalists to participate in the full proposal round of the Contest track, based on judges' scores and feedback. All pre-proposal teams received detailed feedback from the judges, regardless of whether or not they were selected as finalists. All pre-proposal applicants were notified in January 2021 regarding their status for the final round.

### Round 2: Full Proposal

Finalist teams will have the opportunity to develop and refine their pre-proposals into eight-page full proposals by April 7th, 2021. In the full proposal round, finalists will expand on the ideas presented in their pre-proposals, edit their proposals based on judges' feedback, and refine their project ideas through collaboration with a Big Ideas mentor (an industry professional matched with the team based on the mentor's subject expertise and areas of strength). From the finalist pool, approximately 15 winners will be selected.

# 2020-2021 Big Ideas Social Impact Tracks

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## Workforce Development

Identify a workforce solution that prepares individuals with the knowledge and skills required to secure employment and advance their careers.

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## Pandemic Response and Recovery

Propose a solution to address the harmful impacts of the current COVID-19 pandemic or to mitigate impacts associated with future pandemics.

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## Global Health

Develop an action-oriented, interdisciplinary project that would alleviate a global health concern among low-resource communities.

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## Food & Agriculture

Envision a solution to improve our agricultural and food systems by enhancing food security, agricultural sustainability, food access and nutrition.

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## Financial Inclusion

Create novel products, services, tools or mechanisms that either address unmet needs of the financially underserved.

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## Energy & Resources

Propose a solution to spur the adoption of energy and resource alternatives that are sustainable and have potential for broad impact.

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## Education & Literacy

Develop a technology, program or policy to promote inclusive and equitable education, improve literacy, or enhance lifelong learning opportunities

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## Data and AI

Design a solution where AI improves, accelerates, and/or streamlines the solutions including but not limited to healthcare, transportation, energy, education, and national security

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## Cities & Communities

Design a novel solution that leverages technology to engage and enhance the well-being of campuses, communities, and cities.

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## Art & Social Change

Create an innovative arts project that meaningfully engages with issues of advocacy, justice, and empowerment.

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## Full Proposal Components

Finalist teams will have the opportunity to develop and refine their pre-proposals into full proposals due on Wednesday, April 7th, 2021.

Finalists are instructed to submit full proposals no more than 8 pages in length, single-spaced (including the required budget and implementation timeline, but not references or appendices). Unlike the pre-proposal application, appendices are permitted in the final round. Below is a list of suggested elements that Big Ideas recommends are included in every application. However, students are allowed to modify the order and presentation of the information as needed to tell their story. The recommended components are as follows:

### **1. Problem Statement**

The problem statement is a clear description and background information on the identified problem. An effective problem statement is thoroughly researched, shows a deep understanding of the issue, and builds a strong case to support why the project is needed. This includes but is not limited to: research/statistics on the problem, and/or research/statistics about the target community or market.

### **2. Existing Solutions**

Tams should include an overview of any existing services, programs, interventions, or products that have been designed or implemented to address this problem. Where applicable, applicants should discuss the limitations of these approaches, the gaps that still exist, and present research on what has been done in the past and where those solutions fell short.

### **3. Proposed Innovation**

The team should provide a summary of the innovative project (e.g. program, service, product, etc.) how it works, and its intended impact. This is the “nuts and bolts” portion of the proposal and focuses on what the project will look like in its 1st year of implementation. It briefly explains any implementation challenges that may arise and how they will be addressed. It may note (but does not focus on) whether the project intends to scale up or expand in future years.

### **4. Implementation Timeline**

The timeline describes the key next steps for implementing the idea over the next year. Big Ideas awards will be disbursed in June/July 2021. Therefore, for the purposes of this Contest, the “next year” is defined as June 2021-June 2022. The majority of the application should focus on this timeframe, however, teams may mention work conducted prior to or following this 1-year timeframe in order to convey the broader context or impact of the project.

### **5. Measuring Success**

Teams should include information about how they will monitor or measure the impact or success of their project throughout the 1st year of implementation (June 2021-June 2022). This does not need to be a formal monitoring and evaluation plan, but can take the form of metrics and methods to make sure they can track their progress.

### **6. Budget**

Includes both expected costs and revenue for the next year of the project (June 2021-June 2022).

\*Note: The funding requested from Big Ideas can be no greater than \$10,000. If anticipated 1st year expenses are greater than \$10,000 total, the team should convey a realistic plan for securing additional funds (e.g., additional grants, fundraising, revenue generation, etc.)



# Full Proposal Judging Criteria

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## **Criteria 1: Innovative solution (30%)**

Is your Big Idea a creative and innovative solution to a significant problem? Include in your proposal how your Big Idea does the following:

- Addresses a major societal problem, and conveys a clear understanding of that problem.
- Approaches the challenge in a new or unique way
- Provides a timely solution that should be implemented now

## **Criteria 2: Effective implementation strategy (40%)**

How would you operationalize your Big Idea over the next year (June 2021-June 2022) to put you on a path for long-term impact? Include in your proposal how your Big Idea implementation plan does the following:

- Assembles a team, including potential partnerships, with the right skills and experience, such as technical, business, field and marketing
- Demonstrates community or market familiarity, including cultural, ethical, and legal implications
- Identifies potential risks or obstacles, and proposes strategies to avoid or minimize those challenges.
- Incorporates a 1-year timeline, metrics for success, and budget\* that convey a clear plan for future growth

## **Criteria 3: Persuasive proposal (30%)**

Can you convince potential partners and supporters to fund or assist your Big Idea? Include in your elevator pitch and proposal clear, concise, and compelling answers to the following:

- What problem do you solve, and why is this project urgent now?
- How does your innovation work?
- What progress will you make over the next year (June 2021-June 2022) , and what will you do with any funds you are awarded?
- How will the world be different in the future with your innovative solution?

\*Note: The funding requested from Big Ideas can be no greater than \$10,000. If anticipated 1st year expenses are greater than \$10,000 total, the team should convey a realistic plan for securing additional funds (e.g., additional grants, fundraising, revenue generation, etc.)

# Mentorship Agreement

## Mentorship Overview

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The Big Ideas mentorship program is designed to support students in critically analyzing the viability of their project ideas before they are asked to submit a full proposal in the final round of the Contest. In the pre-proposal round, judges gave strong consideration to the creativity and innovation of the projects. In the final round, judges will increasingly consider the extent to which their projects are viable in their first year of implementation. **As a result, mentors assist students in thinking through the implementation and design of their project ideas, with an eye toward viability and impact.**

## Mentorship Commitment

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Big Ideas teams and their mentors are expected to work together for approximately **1-2 hours per week** via email, telephone, or in person meetings (to be negotiated with team members) from February 16th to April 7th. During these engagements, mentors assist students in reviewing the feedback teams received from pre-proposal judges, coach teams through implementation plan development, connect teams with relevant members of their network, and provide constructive feedback on the project and final proposal. Mentors are advisors to the project and should not contribute extensive research or writing to the proposal.

## Mentor Expectations

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Big Ideas Mentors are expected to review and adhere to the University of California "[Statement of Ethical Values and Standards of Ethical Conduct](#)" which commits everyone in the UC community to the highest ethical standards in furtherance of the University's mission of teaching, research, and public service. It identifies the University's core ethical values as integrity, excellence, accountability, and respect (<https://ethics.berkeley.edu/code-conduct>).

Additionally, Mentors for the Big Ideas Contest agree to the following obligations:

- Place the interests of the team first
- Develop and maintain the trust of the team
- Serve as a resource to a network of contacts
- Help teams with goal setting and tracking
- Provide motivation and constructive feedback
- Disclose any potential conflicts of interest in a timely manner

## Confidentiality

Many Big Ideas applicants hope to launch ventures following the Contest. Mentors agree to not use information disclosed by the teams except for the sole purpose of advising the teams. Big Ideas Mentors will maintain a strict policy of not disclosing sensitive or proprietary information except as explicitly agreed upon by a team and for the purpose of advancing the interests of the team before, during, and after the mentorship engagement.

## Terms of Engagement

Mentors will be asked to end their engagement if any of the following occur:

- The Mentor is not actively engaged with Big Ideas or their team.
- The Mentor commits a breach of confidentiality.
- The Mentor does not act in accordance with the expectations outlined in this document (above).

## Mentee Expectations

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The expectations for Big Ideas teams in regards to the mentor program are as follows:

1. Establish clear objectives, work goals, and deadlines at the outset of the mentorship and be accountable to those goals.
2. Discuss expectations and boundaries of the mentorship relationship at the 1st meeting. Teams must keep in mind that Big Ideas mentors are volunteering their time and often have challenging schedules. Teams must be as flexible as possible to accommodate these scheduling constraints, and be responsive in their communication with their mentors.
3. Determine the frequency and method of communication. If possible, set up a regular time for meetings each week.
4. Develop an agenda for each meeting and share in advance with your mentor.
5. Be upfront about potential scheduling difficulties that may occur, including travel and work or school deadlines.
6. Review the judging criteria for the final round and the judge's feedback before mentorship begins to determine the areas to focus on with your mentor.
7. Utilize your mentor's expertise, but understand that your mentor's role is to offer guidance and support, not to lead your project or proposal development.

## Additional Resources

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- Seven Habits of Highly Effective Mentors (SSIR):  
[https://ssir.org/articles/entry/seven\\_habits\\_of\\_highly\\_effective\\_mentors](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/seven_habits_of_highly_effective_mentors)
- What it Takes to be a Good Mentee (Fast Company):  
<https://www.fastcompany.com/3043724/what-it-takes-to-be-a-good-mentee>

# Mentorship Agreement Form

By signing this agreement, both mentors and teams acknowledge that they have read and understood the terms of the Big Ideas Mentorship program outlined above.

Mentors will serve in an advisory role and offer 1-2 hours of their time between February 16th and April 7th. Teams will lead the engagement and utilize their mentor's expertise to advance their Big Idea. Both mentors and students agree to respect each other's time and request assistance from Big Ideas staff should an issue arise during the mentorship period.

**Please complete this form and return to the Big Ideas Contest via email ([bigideas@berkeley.edu](mailto:bigideas@berkeley.edu)) by February 23rd, 2021.**

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*Signature of mentor*

*Date*

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*Signature of team leader*

*Date*

# Mentorship FAQs

## Who participates in the Big Ideas Contest?

All students on the 11 eligible campuses are encouraged to participate, regardless of their academic major. In past years, participants were approximately 60% undergraduate and 40% graduate students. The eligibility of each finalist team has already been verified during the pre-proposal round. Students come from a wide range of fields, including scientific and technical studies, liberal arts, law, public health, and business.

## Is Big Ideas a business plan competition?

No. Not all Big Ideas will result in the creation of commercial ventures. Applicants are encouraged to submit project plans with a business model (for-profit, non-profit, hybrid) and a realistic budget that will enable their venture to have the intended social impact.

## Who judges the Big Ideas contest?

Judges hail from a variety of fields and have diverse expertise to assess ideas and provide valuable feedback. Judges are academics, industry experts, social entrepreneurs, and non-profit and creative professionals.

## Do mentors edit or help write proposals?

Mentors are responsible for helping students think through issues of project design and implementation. Mentors are not responsible for idea generation, completing portions of the proposal, or proofreading/editing proposals.

## How are teams paired with mentors?

Big Ideas individually matches student teams with mentors who can provide necessary expertise and the specific skills requested by the finalist teams.

## Is mentorship mandatory?

No. Student teams are not required to work with a mentor, but all finalists were given the opportunity to complete a mentor matching form, signifying their desire and commitment to work with a mentor during this phase of the Contest.

## What should student teams do if the feedback they received from judges is contradictory? Must student teams address all comments made by pre-proposal judges?

Judges reviewed pre-proposals independently, meaning that some judges may disagree on the relative strengths and weaknesses of a proposal. In collaboration with their mentor, student teams can determine to what extent the weaknesses pointed out by pre-proposal judges should be addressed. However, we strongly encourage student teams to consider their pre-proposal feedback as they work to strengthen their proposals for the final round.

## Who do I contact if I have any issues or concerns?

Please email [pdenny@berkeley.edu](mailto:pdenny@berkeley.edu) or call (510) 666-9120. Also, students are welcome to attend drop-in office hours with Big Ideas advisors. Please check the Big Ideas website for the list of our updated hours: <https://bigideascontest.org/advising/>