

BIG IDEAS MENTOR FAQs

Who are Big Ideas Mentors?

Mentors are professionals from a variety of fields with one thing in common: a passion for supporting innovative ideas. In order to ensure we provide teams with the best feedback and support possible, and help them to think deeply about their topic and the field it falls into, we build a pool of mentors who have a minimum of 5 years of professional experience and/or skills relevant to the needs of our finalist teams. These skillsets range from business planning, to technical expertise, to grant writing experience, to networking support – depending on what skills are most needed that year!

What do Big Ideas Mentors do?

Mentors work closely with teams who have been invited to compete in the final round. They help to incorporate feedback from the pre-proposal judges, to connect teams to relevant contacts and resources across the industry, and to provide coaching and feedback to improve their proposal and ideas.

How is a Big Ideas Judge different from a Mentor?

Judges help us during our pre-proposal phase (to determine who advances into the final round) and our final round (to determine who receives awards), by reviewing 6-8 proposals in their assigned category, scoring them, and providing detailed feedback on how the student or team could improve upon their idea and/or proposal. All judging is anonymous and completed remotely.

How/when do Mentors participate in Big Ideas?

Mentors participate in the Final Round of the contest, which runs from Jan 25 – Mar 10. The period begins with a Mentorship Kick-Off Meeting on Jan 25, where mentors and their teams meet, get briefed on the final round, and have an opportunity to connect on their goals and working arrangement. The mentorship period ends when Final Proposals are due on Mar 10, though mentors are subsequently invited to participate in all of our awards ceremonies, pitch days, and other exciting events to follow!

What is the time & logistical commitment?

Mentors are asked to commit a minimum of 1-2 hours per week to supporting their teams. The exact logistical arrangements can be agreed upon between mentors and their teams. Some agree to do physical meetings, some do remote ones, and most teams do a mix of the two. The only thing we ask is that both teams and mentors are available for the Mentorship Kick-Off Meeting on January 25.

How am I assigned a team?

Each Mentor is asked to complete an interest form expressing their areas of expertise, their interests, and any preferences or limitations they have in regard to working with teams. When teams are invited to the final round in late December, they are asked to complete a similar form, expressing the types of skills, resources or support they would like to receive from a mentor. We then do our best to match teams and mentors based on their mutual interests and

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needs. If we don't have a good match for a team's needs in our pool, we will do targeted recruitment to find a suitable match.

What if I am not paired with a team?

Because the actual pairing depends highly on what teams advance to the final round and what their exact needs are, we sometimes end up with a pool of Mentors who are not paired with a specific team. This year, we plan to hold several events to leverage these mentors interest in supporting – including open-advising and feedback sessions, where un-matched Mentors can give feedback and advising to teams who would like to leverage their support. Un-matched mentors are also invited to help out as Final Round Judges if they are willing. Either way, you will still be welcome to attend all of our events!

Can I be a Mentor to multiple teams?

Yes! Mentors are welcome to work with multiple teams, so long as they are willing to commit the necessary time to each team. If you are interested or willing to serve multiple teams, please let the Big Ideas team know when you confirm your place in our mentor pool, so we can make note. We also plan opportunities for content experts to offer open-advising at periodic points throughout the contest. If that is of interest to you, please let us know as well.

Can teams have more than 1 Mentor?

We commit to matching each team with 1 formal Big Ideas Mentor for the purposes of the contest. However, teams are encourage to leverage as much as advice and input as possible – and are therefore welcome to work with as many informal mentors, advisors and coaches as they can outside of the formal mentor program.

Can I be involved as a Judge and a Mentor?

Yes! Many of our judges and mentors participate in multiple stages of the contest – sometimes as a judge in both rounds, sometimes as a judge and then a mentor, and sometimes even as all three. It depends entirely on your availability and how much time you are willing to commit.

Can I request a specific team?

Yes! Often our mentors are aware of competing teams through their involvement on campus, or their participation as a judge. If you are particularly excited about a specific team, you are welcome to let us know! We'll be happy to make a note and pay extra consideration to your preference. However, mentor matching is a two-way process, so we can't guarantee a team will request the same skills you are offering – and therefore, can't guarantee a match. However, if you are not matched with a team you are interested in supporting, you are still welcome to reach out to them and offer advice or connections. We simply ask that you do so through us, so we can respect the teams' confidentiality and facilitate the introduction!

APPLY TO BE A MENTOR: If you are interested in applying to become part of our mentor pool, please email us at bigideas@berkeley.edu