1. I'm a student from an eligible campus, but I will be graduating in the spring and will no longer be a student by the time funds are disbursed. Am I eligible for the contest?

As long as at least one team member is a matriculated student at the time of the Pre-Proposal application deadline, your team is eligible. Note that UC Extension students are not matriculated UC students and are therefore not eligible. However, a UC Extension student may participate on a team that includes at least one eligible student.

2. I'm a student from an eligible campus, but my teammates are not. Are we eligible for the contest?

Yes. Only one team member is required to be a matriculated UC student from an eligible campus.
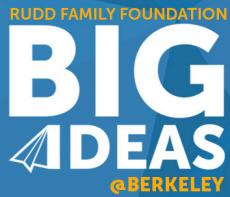
3. Is there a minimum or maximum team size?

Students can work alone on a project, and there is no maximum team size. However, judges will consider whether your team has the necessary leadership and team composition to successfully launch the project. Therefore, multidisciplinary teams are strongly encouraged. The typical team has between 3 and 5 students.We also understand that team compositions are dynamic and can shift throughout the contest. If your pre-proposal application is selected to continue on in the final round, you may add or drop team members when you submit your full proposal.

4. What should I do if I haven't solidified my team by the time the pre-proposal is due?

As noted above, we understand that team building is a primary challenge teams face during the pre-proposal round. If you know that you want to add an additional team member, but have not yet identified a person to fill that role, it is okay to note that in your pre-proposal.   It is better to say "we are looking for a programmer with X, Y, and Z skills," than to present information on an incomplete team and lead the judges to believe that your team doesn't does not recognize that you will need additional help to put your idea into action. Also, we encourage you to attend the Big Ideas information sessions and other events where you can meet potential student collaborators who are interested in innovation and social ventures.

5. Do references count toward the page limit?

References and citations are permitted in the pre-proposal round and are not included in the 3-page pre-proposal limit. Appendices are not allowed in the pre-proposal round, but will be permitted in the final round if your team is selected to participate.

6. Are appendices allowed in the Pre-Proposal round?

No. Appendices will be allowed in the final-round proposals, however.

7. How strict are the section divisions and order of sections? Can I add an additional section or rearrange sections?

You may rearrange the sections as it makes sense for your proposal, and you can add an additional section if you think it will enhance your proposal. That said, make sure that you include a section (and the appropriate section heading) for each of the sections described on the pre-proposal application requirements, as the judging criteria focus on the information provided in each of those sections.

8. Are there any restrictions on what kinds of expenses can be covered with Big Ideas funds?

There are no restrictions on what expenses can be covered with Big Ideas funds. The Big Ideas prize is explicitly not a grant meant to carry out the implementation of applicants' project plans, but a monetary prize for articulating a creative, impactful idea. Most Big Ideas winners, however, decide to utilize the award towards implementing their innovation after the contest is over.

9. Typically, how large are Big Ideas awards?

The average award size is $5,000, but awards can range from $1,000 to $10,000 based on the quality of the proposal, as evaluated by judges, and project need. Successful proposals typically assume that a Big Ideas award can cover $5,000 of their project expenses and typically do not request more than $10,000 from Big Ideas.

10. My project has a definite end date. How should I address this in my proposal?

The pre-proposal asks you to provide a brief description of how your project will look in its first year of implementation. If your project is expected to last less than one year for any reason, address this in the description of your innovation, and provide the reasons why you anticipate your plan will last less than one year in duration.

11. Must I use a particular writing style to format my references?

No. As long as you are consistent, you can format your references any way you choose.

12. Can I include photos or graphs in my final proposal, or must the proposal contain only written information?

Yes! You can include figures in your proposal to help explain your project, but they will count toward the page limit. Any image not created by your team should be properly cited.

13. I am concerned about someone stealing my idea. Are proposals kept confidential?

Applicants are required to complete a webform with information about their team and a brief description of their project. Applicants will then attach their proposal and budget (preferably as one PDF document). The Big Ideas Contest reserves the right to use the brief description of the project in the webform publicly. However, you can indicate in the webform that you would like the attached (longer) proposal to be kept confidential. If you are concerned about protecting your idea, do not put any protected information in the webform, then check the webform box to indicate you would like the attached proposal kept confidential.

14. Who are the pre-proposal judges? May I contact the judges at any point during the contest?

The judges are industry leaders with content expertise in your category area. However, many projects focus in a specific area within the broad Big Ideas categories, so when writing your pre-proposal, assume that your reader has some general knowledge of the field (e.g., energy efficient technologies or global poverty), but no specialized knowledge in your particular project area. Be sure not to use jargon and explain technical terms. Judges' identities will remain anonymous throughout the contest. You will receive written feedback from the judges, but you will not be given access to the names or contact information of the judges.