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The Fowler Center for Business
as an Agent of World Benefit



Venture4Impact: 2025 Impact Innovation Challenge

INTRODUCTION/ Welcome to Venture4Impact!

We're glad that you've decided to participate in Venture4Impact, a student-led innovation challenge hosted by the Fowler Center for Business as an Agent of World Benefit at the Weatherhead School of Management, in collaboration with the Veale Institute for Entrepreneurship.

Modeled after the globally recognized Hult Prize, this competition invites you to design scalable, for-profit ventures that tackle the world's most pressing social and environmental issues. Your mission: create entrepreneurial solutions that align with one or more of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and deliver measurable, net-positive impact for people and the planet.

As a participant, you'll gain access to mentorship, networking opportunities, and feedback from experienced professionals. The winning team will receive a cash prize, formal recognition, and a chance to fast-track their idea into the Hult Prize Qualifiers (STAGE 1)*.

Let's build ventures that matter. We can't wait to see what you create.

OBJECTIVE

Participants will develop a **for-profit social venture** that delivers **measurable positive impact** on people and/or the planet. The venture must:

- Address at least **one United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UN SDG)**
- Present a **viable, revenue-generating business model**
- Be designed for **scalability** and long-term sustainability
- Show potential to drive **systems-level change** in the chosen area of impact

The goal is to combine entrepreneurial thinking with social innovation to solve real-world challenges.

GUIDELINES

- **Team Composition:**
 - Each team must consist of **2 to 4 currently enrolled students**.
 - At least 18 years of age
 - Teams can include undergraduate and/or graduate students from any discipline.
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- **Multidisciplinary Participation:**
 - While not mandatory, teams are strongly encouraged to be **cross-functional**, bringing together diverse skill sets and academic backgrounds to foster more innovative and well-rounded solutions.
- **Original & Student-Led Ventures:**
 - All ideas must be **original**, conceptualized and developed by the student team. Projects previously developed for other competitions or courses may be eligible only if the core concept is student-led and not yet commercialized.
- **For-Profit Business Model:**
 - Proposed ventures must pitch a for-profit business that directly supports at least one UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), demonstrating how the business will create measurable positive outcomes for people and/or the planet.
- **Language Requirements:**
 - All **deck submissions, pitches, and communications** must be conducted in **English**.
- **Participation Commitment:**
 - Teams should be prepared to engage fully throughout the competition timeline, including qualifying submissions, mentorship sessions (if selected), and final presentations if advanced.

COMPETITION STRUCTURE

ROUND 1: Qualifying Round

- **Registration Deadline:** October 3, 2025
- **Submission Deadline:** October 13, 2025
- **Submission Format:** A **6-slide pitch deck** in **PDF format**.

Deck Guidelines:

Teams may follow any structures or choose their own format, as long as they effectively communicate the following key components:

- ✓ Problem & Solution
- ✓ Business Model
- ✓ Target Market, Market Strategy & Impact
- ✓ Team Composition & Progress
- ✓ Alignment with UN SDGs

Finalist Announcement: October 23, 2025

Six finalist teams will be selected to move forward to the final round.

MENTORSHIP PHASE Dates: October 27 – November 10, 2025

Each finalist team will be **assigned a mentor** (an alumni or industry expert) to help strengthen their ideas before the final round.

- Teams are **required to conduct at least one pitch session** with their assigned mentor.
- Mentors will provide **feedback, strategic advice, and preparation support**.
- Continued mentorship beyond this timeframe is **optional and at the mentor's discretion**.

FINAL ROUND: November 14, 2025, Friday

Format:

- **Live Pitch:** 4-minute pitch + 4-minute Q&A
- **Number of Teams:** 6 Finalists
- **Venue:** Peter B. Lewis Building
- **Followed by:** Reception and Winner Announcement

Final Deliverables:

A refined **pitch deck** of minimum **6 slides**, focusing on clarity and impact due to time constraints. Teams may choose to update or reuse their qualifying round deck with added detail. Suggested content includes:

- Executive Summary
- Problem Statement
- Proposed Solution
- Business Model
- Impact Strategy
- Market Opportunity
- Competitive Advantage
- Financial Projections
- Scalability
- Team & Ask

PRIZE:

Based on the judges' evaluations of innovation, impact, feasibility, and presentation, the top three teams will be awarded the following cash prizes:

- **First Place:** \$2,000 (*sponsored by the Veale Institute for Entrepreneurship*)
- **Second Place:** \$1,000
- **Third Place:** \$500

In addition to the cash prizes, winners will receive formal recognition and support toward applying to the Hult Prize Qualifiers.

JUDGING CRITERIA (based on Hult Prize standards):

Finalists will be selected based on performance across the following four dimensions:

1. **Team** – Is your team committed, diverse, and organized? Do you know your roles and work well together?
2. **Idea** – Do you deeply understand the problem you're solving? Is your idea practical and well thought-out?
3. **Impact** – Does your startup support at least one UN SDG? Will it create real change by 2030?
4. **Business Viability** – Can your venture earn revenue, grow, and survive long term?

Initial Reviewers:

We will have a dedicated group of Initial Reviewers, comprised of **CWRU professors, alumni, and industry experts**, to evaluate submissions during the qualifying (first) round. Their role is solely to assess all submitted pitch decks and help shortlist the top teams for the final round. Each reviewer will use a standardized rubric to ensure fairness and consistency in evaluations.

Final Judges:

The final round will be evaluated by a **separate panel of judges (not the same as Mentors or Initial Reviewers)**, including business leaders, social entrepreneurs, and subject matter experts. Judges will assess based on the same four criteria as Round 1, but with additional emphasis on pitch delivery and response to questions.

RESOURCES

To support your journey, the following resources are available:

- **Hult Prize Official Website:** <https://www.hultprize.org>
- **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:** <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- **Social Business Model Canvas:** <https://www.socialbusinessmodelcanvas.com/>
- **Lean Startup Methodology:** <https://leanstack.com/>
- **Impact Measurement Frameworks (GIIN):**
<https://thegiin.org/impact-investing/need-to-know/>
- **Mentorship & Office Hours:** Offered after finalist announcement to support final pitch preparation
- **Pitch Deck Best Practices & Tips:**
<https://www.slideshare.net/SequoiaCapital/writing-a-business-plan>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

Q1: Can my team have members from other CWRU schools or programs?

A: Yes, cross-disciplinary and inter-school teams are encouraged to bring diverse perspectives and skills.

Q2: Do we need to have a prototype ready?

A: Not necessarily. While a working prototype is not mandatory, some form of validation, user feedback, or evidence of concept testing will strengthen your submission.

Q3: What if our idea has already been developed elsewhere?

A: Your idea should be original and student-led. Adaptations or improvements on existing models are allowed, provided the team clearly demonstrates how the idea has been reimaged or localized.

Q4: What support is available after the competition?

A: Winning teams may receive mentorship, incubation support, and assistance applying to the Hult Prize Global Accelerator Program.

Q5: How do we get help during the mentorship phase?

A: Finalist teams will be paired with a mentor for at least one pitch and feedback session. Additional office hours with faculty and organizers may also be available.

Q6: Is there a registration fee?

A: No, participation in Venture4Impact is free for all enrolled students.

Q7: Can teams change their members after registration?

A: Minor changes may be allowed with organizer approval, but major changes after submission deadlines are discouraged.

Q8: What if our team is unable to attend the final round in person?

A: The final round is planned as an in-person event. If exceptional circumstances arise, please contact the organizers as early as possible.

Q9: How are the teams judged?

A: Teams are evaluated on Team strength, Idea innovation, Impact alignment with SDGs, and Business Viability, following the Hult Prize scoring criteria.

Q10: Can we reuse or update our qualifying round deck for the final?

A: Yes, teams may choose to update and refine their qualifying round deck for the final presentation.

Q11: Will there be any training or workshops offered?

A: Yes, mentorship sessions and info session workshops on pitch preparation and social entrepreneurship will be offered during the competition timeline.

Q12: How can we get feedback if we don't make it to the finals?

A: We encourage all teams to reach out to organizers; some feedback may be provided depending on availability.

For questions or support, contact:

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Good luck and get ready to Venture4Impact!