



CASE WESTERN RESERVE
UNIVERSITY
The Fowler Center for Business
as an Agent of World Benefit



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UNIVERSITY
Veale Institute for
Entrepreneurship



**Venture
4Impact**

A Social Innovation Pitch Competition

Official Competition Guidelines - 2026



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 top three teams will receive cash prizes, formal recognition, and support toward advancing 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.

FREE TO ENTER No registration fee for any enrolled student	2–4 STUDENTS Undergrad and/or grad, any discipline, age 18+	ENGLISH ONLY All decks, pitches & communications
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GUIDELINES

Team Composition

- Each team must consist of 2 to 4 currently enrolled students.
- All members must be at least 18 years of age.
- Teams can include undergraduate and/or graduate students from any discipline.

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. Adaptations or improvements on existing models are welcome, provided the team can clearly demonstrate how the idea has been reimagined or localized.

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 must participate fully throughout the competition timeline, including qualifying submissions, mentorship sessions (if selected), and final presentations (if advanced). **For finalist teams, every student listed on the team's registration must attend the final round in person.**

COMPETITION STRUCTURE & KEY DATES

Five phases stand between registration and the winners' stage. Mark these dates now.

1	Registration Deadline Register your 2–4 person team.	Thursday, October 1, 2026
2	Submission Deadline Submit a 6-slide pitch deck (PDF) in English.	Tuesday, October 13, 2026
3	Finalist Announcement Registrations and decks received; teams filtered through initial review. Finalist teams selected to advance.	Friday, October 23, 2026
4	Mentorship Phase Finalist teams paired with an alumni/industry mentor. At least one pitch session required with your assigned mentor.	Oct 26 – Nov 9, 2026

5	Final Round — Event Day Live pitch at the Peter B. Lewis Building, followed by reception & winner announcement.	Friday, November 13, 2026
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Qualifying Deck Guidelines

Teams may follow any structure or format, as long as they clearly communicate:

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

Format: A 6-slide pitch deck in English, submitted as a PDF.

Mentorship Phase (Oct 26 – Nov 9, 2026)

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

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

Final Round — Event Day (Friday, November 13, 2026)

Format: 4-minute live pitch + 6-minute Q&A

Venue: Peter B. Lewis Building

Followed by: Reception and Winner announcement

Note: All registered members of each finalist team must be present in person for the final round.

Final Deliverable

A refined pitch deck of a minimum of 6 slides, focused on clarity and impact given the time constraints. Teams may update or reuse their qualifying round deck with added detail. Given the 4-minute format, prioritize the points that matter most to your venture rather than covering all in equal depth. Suggested content:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Summary • Problem Statement • Proposed Solution • Business Model • Impact Strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market Opportunity • Competitive Advantage • Financial Projections • Scalability • Team & Ask |
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PRIZES

Awarded to the top three teams based on judges' evaluations across Team, Idea, Impact, and Business Viability. Winners also receive formal recognition and support applying to the Hult Prize Qualifiers (Stage 1).

SECOND PLACE \$1,000	FIRST PLACE \$2,000 <i>Sponsored by the Veale Institute for Entrepreneurship</i>	THIRD PLACE \$500
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JUDGING CRITERIA

Based on Hult Prize standards. Finalists are evaluated across four dimensions:

1 • IDEA • Problem: Do you clearly understand the problem and who it affects? • Solution: Is it innovative and effective? • Prototyping: Tested with real users, feedback incorporated?	2 • IMPACT • Alignment: Does the venture align with a UN SDG? • Measurement: Clear KPIs for measuring impact? • Incremental Growth: Impact grows as revenue grows?
3 • BUSINESS VIABILITY • Business Model: Clear, comprehensive model? • Profitability: Unit economics & realistic path to profit? • Competitive Advantage: Sustainable edge or disruptive potential?	4 • TEAM • Expertise: Committed, complementary skills? • Structure: Clear roles & responsibilities? • Communication: Work well together; strong pitch & Q&A?

INITIAL REVIEWERS, MENTORS & FINAL JUDGES

Initial Reviewers (Round 1)

A dedicated group of CWRU professors, alumni, and industry experts evaluate qualifying-round submissions using a standardized rubric, solely to shortlist the top teams for the final round.

Mentors

Each finalist team is paired with a mentor — a startup mentor, alumnus, impact professional, social entrepreneur, or business consultant — who guides them in refining their idea and pitch ahead of the final round.

Final Judges

A separate panel — business leaders, social entrepreneurs, and subject-matter experts, distinct from Mentors or Initial Reviewers — evaluates the final round using the same four criteria, with added emphasis on pitch delivery and Q&A.

RESOURCES

- **Hult Prize Official Website:** <https://www.hultprize.org>
- **UN 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/>
- **Pitch Deck Best Practices (Sequoia):** <https://www.slideshare.net/SequoiaCapital/writing-a-business-plan>

Mentorship & office hours are offered after the finalist announcement to support final pitch preparation.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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

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

Q2. Do we need to have a prototype ready?

Not necessarily. A working prototype isn't mandatory, but some form of validation, user feedback, or concept testing will strengthen your submission.

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

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

Q4. What support is available after the competition?

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?

Finalist teams are 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?

No — participation in Venture4Impact is free for all enrolled students.

Q7. Can teams change their members after registration?

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

Q8. What if our team can't attend the final round in person?

All registered members of finalist teams are required to attend the final round in person. If exceptional circumstances arise, contact the organizers as early as possible; any exception is subject to organizer approval.

Q9. How are teams judged?

Teams are judged on team strength, idea innovation, impact alignment with SDGs, and business viability, following Hult Prize scoring criteria.

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

Yes — teams may update and refine their qualifying round deck for the final presentation.

Q11. Will there be any training or workshops offered?

Yes — mentorship sessions and info-session workshops on pitch preparation and social entrepreneurship will be offered during the timeline.

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

Reach out to organizers — some feedback may be provided depending on availability.

CONTACT

For questions or support, reach out to the organizing team:

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Good luck, and welcome to Venture4Impact!