



2026-2027 Application Requirements

Application Deadline: Friday, November 6, 2026 at 5:00 P.M.

The Idea

The Pitch is an idea competition where HWS students develop solutions to real problems. Since 2011, this competition, inspired by Shark Tank and other school competitions, has been a signature HWS program. Students are supported throughout the pitch process, including ideation, proposal development, pitching, and the grand finale in the Vandervort Room. The winning idea will receive a **\$10,000 award** to support its development and implementation. This competition is not just for students who want to start businesses. A starting point could be an app, nonprofit, social innovation, arts project, policy idea/campaign, among others, that can be developed into a viable enterprise.

The Support

The *Bozzuto Center for Entrepreneurship* provides coaching and mentorship throughout the competition. Students can participate in the [Michael '59 and Ellen '58 Opell IdeaLab](#), pursue seed funding, and strengthen their pitching skills through the Elevator Pitch Competition. Individual and team coaching are also available prior to proposal submission. Contact Professor Craig Talmage at Talmage@hws.edu to schedule a meeting or learn more.

The Initial Challenge

Submit a proposal of no more than four single-spaced pages that clearly explains the problem, solution, value created, supporting evidence, and path to implementation. Include a cover page with your name and idea name; the cover page does not count toward the four-page limit. The requirements are below.

1. The Problem

Identify the specific problem and who experiences it. Explain its frequency, consequences, and why it remains unresolved. Use relevant evidence to show why addressing it matters. Data or citations of previous attempts to address the problem are a plus.

2. Solution and Value Proposition

Describe your proposed product, service, platform, campaign, project, intervention, or initiative, including what the customer, client, or user receives and how it will be delivered. Explain the intended benefit and how you would measure success.

Example: For [specific customer or beneficiary] who experiences [specific problem], [solution] aims to deliver [specific benefit or measurable change] through [how it works]. Compared to [relevant alternative], it offers [meaningful difference from alternative].

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3. Segmentation

Identify your initial target segment and distinguish between users, beneficiaries, sponsors, and buyers. Who are the best initial targets (i.e., [BCG Growth Share matrix](#))? Summarize what you have learned or will learn through interviews, observations, surveys, tests, or relevant existing research. Explain how these findings shaped or will shape your idea and its further development. How big are the potential user or revenue bases for your idea (i.e., [TAM, SAM, SOM](#))?

4. Landscape

Compare your idea with the alternatives your target audience currently uses to solve the problem. Explain why someone would choose your approach and what might prevent them from switching. Use relevant research or evidence to support your comparison. Feel free to use visuals (i.e., [competitive matrices](#)) to showcase your idea's uniqueness.

5. Implementation Timeline

Present a realistic sequence of milestones for developing and testing your idea. Milestones should be based on Key Performance Indicators ([KPIs](#)) or [SMART](#) goals that will help you measure the successful progress of your idea or evolution of your enterprise. This timeline can be written or visualized. The timeline can concern your idea or enterprise (e.g., business/nonprofit).

6. Social and Environmental Leadership

Explain who could benefit beyond the target segment. How does your idea or enterprise produce benefits for society and/or the environment. Explain how your idea practically addresses relevant societal and/or environmental issues. How is your idea innovative in enriching society or the environment? Why are you the right person to lead this idea and its eventual enterprise forward?

7. Funding the Idea

Explain who or what will be funding your idea and how. Discuss the major initial and ongoing costs that need to be covered.

AI Use and Cited Works

AI-use should be utilized carefully when enhancing proposals to ensure authorship belongs to you. You can use AI for grammar, but the proposal writing must yours/your team. We encourage you to use Library resources for research, but if you use research from AI, you are responsible for verifying the information. Ensure your voice, not AI, comes through to readers. Any use of AI for the proposal (i.e., idea generation, refinement, outlining, evidence gathering, etc.) should be disclosed in a short paragraph (not included in the total page count). All research utilized should be cited with references in the format of your choice (APA, MLA, etc.). Works cited are not included in the total page count. Failure to disclose AI use will result in lower evaluations of the proposal or possible disqualification.

Eligibility Requirements

ALL students can apply to the pitch as individuals or submit as teams. The Pitch should be uniquely written by HWS students (only). Please note: The Pitch is an idea contest; already established enterprises pitched are *not* given greater consideration than ideas not-yet-launched.

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