



Big Ideas@Berkeley 2011-2012 Evaluation Results

This year, Big Ideas made an effort to quantify its impact on students and evaluate the effectiveness and ease of the judging process, with the goal of understanding how to improve the contest in future years. To accomplish this, Big Ideas surveyed finalists and non-finalist team members after their participation in the 2011-2012 contest. Both non-finalists and finalists were offered incentives for their participation. In the spring, non-finalists were offered a chance to win one of two \$25 Visa gift cards. In the summer, the first 10 non-finalists and 20 finalists to complete the survey were given a \$10 Amazon.com gift card. In all, 57 finalists and 38 non-finalists complete the survey. Given the small number of participants, the survey results are likely not representative. However, the feedback provided by this small sample of entrants does provide us with data on some participants' experiences in the contest.

In addition, Big Ideas surveyed past winners to better understand which resources would be most helpful for winners after they receive their prize money and leave the contest. In all, 66 past winners responded to the survey.

Finally, Big Ideas solicited feedback from pre-proposal and full proposal judges via an online survey form and via in-person or phone conversations with Grand Prize Judges. In total, 13 judges filled out our feedback survey, 6 pre-proposal judges and 7 full-proposal judges.

2011-12 Student Survey Results

Skill Development

Students chosen and finalists in the 2011-12 contest, students not chosen as finalists in the 2011-12 contest, and winners of past Big Ideas contests were asked to report the extent to which they thought their participation in the Big Ideas contest improved their leadership and creative thinking skills in a variety of domains from 1 (*Not at all*) to 3 (*To a great extent*). Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of students' responses to this set of survey items. As we can see from the Table, the majority of students responded positively to all of the skill development statements, believing that the contest was at least somewhat responsible for improvements in their leadership and business development skills. In other words, students who participated in the contest, regardless of the year and whether or not they were selected as finalists, believed that participation in the contest resulted in improved creative thinking, communication, budget, and grant writing skills, among others.

Because this set of survey items was presented to non-finalists, finalists, and past winners we were able to compare differences in skill development between the three groups. To accomplish this, a composite skill development score was created by averaging students' responses to the skill development items. Our analyses revealed that finalists tended to report increased skill development above and beyond skill development reported by both non-finalists ($p < .01$) and past winners ($p < .05$). This finding suggests that 2011-12 finalists may have acquired additional expertise in areas like grant writing and impact measurement thanks to the full proposal round of the contest that was not open to non-finalist nor a component of the contest in previous years.

Table 1

Students' report of improvements to leadership and critical thinking skills

	2011-2012 non-finalists			2011-2012 finalists			Past winners		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I learned effective strategies to form and lead a team.	35	2.00	.59	55	2.31	.57	58	2.24	.60
I improved my communication skills.	38	1.93	.55	43	2.26	.58	65	2.32	.59
I became more creative in thinking about solutions to problems.	38	2.18	.65	55	2.60	.56	64	2.36	.67
I improved my ability to think critically about market or community needs.	38	2.03	.68	55	2.60	.53	65	2.41	.58
I better understand how to draft a project budget.	38	2.18	.65	54	2.61	.49	58	2.26	.74
I am better able to think critically about how to measure the impact of a project or product.	38	1.87	.70	55	2.53	.60	61	2.36	.63
I improved my professional grant or proposal writing skills.	37	2.05	.70	55	2.72	.49	59	2.40	.66

Effectiveness of Resources

In the survey, we also asked non-finalists and finalists from the 2011-12 contest to report the extent to which they agreed that resources provided during this year's competition were helpful on a Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly agree*). Table 2 presents the results from this section of the survey. Overwhelmingly, both non-finalists and finalists reported that the resources provided were clear and helpful.

Again, we ran comparisons between non-finalist and finalist responses and found that finalists believed more than non-finalists that the pre-proposal guidelines were clear, the budget template was easy to understand, and that they had access to sufficient resources. These findings provide some evidence that students who better understood the application requirements fared better in the contest, and underscore the importance of ensuring that entrants have a clear understanding of expectations and access to adequate resources when writing pre-proposals.

Table 2

Non-finalists and finalists reports of the effectiveness of resources offered during the 2011-12 contest

	Non-finalists			Finalists		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The pre-proposal guidelines were straightforward and clear.	38	3.00	.66	55	3.43	.60
The full proposal guidelines were straightforward and clear.				44	3.34	.65
The budget template was easy to understand.	38	2.79	.87	54	3.33	.70
The pre-proposal writing workshop made the pre-proposal process seem less intimidating.	14	3.29	.61	38	3.42	.64
Learning about past winners' projects at the Big Ideas Panel & Mixer Event was inspiring.	21	3.38	.59	40	3.38	.63
The Graduate Student Assistants were approachable and helpful during office hours.	13	3.38	.65	30	3.60	.62
In general, I felt I had sufficient resources to support the development of my proposal.	33	3.12	.65	56	3.56	.57

In addition, this year Big Ideas introduced a mentorship component for finalists, where finalist teams had the option to be paired with a community professional with content expertise in their project area. The finalist survey thus included a section designed to measure whether or not students thought the mentorship component was useful. The results from this section are provided in Table 3.

As we can see from the table, finalists generally thought their mentors reviewed their proposals carefully and thoughtfully, gave constructive feedback on their project ideas, and helped improve the quality of the team's final submission. These data provide strong evidence that professional mentorship is an invaluable resource that should continue to be offered to student teams.

When asked in an open-response question what challenges they faced with working with a mentor, finalists overwhelmingly indicated that mentors were busy, which made coordinating times to meet and discuss their projects exceedingly difficult. Finalists also overwhelmingly reported that they wished they had more time to work with their

mentors, and asked that Big Ideas administrators are clear with mentors about the time commitment required of them.

Table 3

Percentage of students who believed mentorship was productive and helpful

	<i>n</i>	Strongly agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Strongly disagree
My mentor reviewed my project carefully, thoughtfully, and constructively with me.	40	45	45	3	3
My mentor gave me constructive feedback on the design of my project, service, or good.	39	46	41	10	3
I made a strong effort to use me mentor as a resource.	39	49	41	10	0
My final submission was improved by working with a mentor.	37	49	38	11	3

Resources After Leaving the Contest

Big Ideas was also interested in learning how winning teams can be better supported after they leave the contest. In an effort to address this question, finalists and past winners were asked to what extent a variety of incubation or idea acceleration resources would be or would have been useful to them in the upcoming year on a Likert scale from 1 (*Not at all helpful*) to 3 (*Extremely helpful*). As we can see from Table 4, finalists and past winners agreed that the two most useful resources would be introductions to capital or investors and professional mentoring. Although rated as slightly less helpful, students also thought that networking events, faculty advising, additional written feedback from the judges, financial management resources, grant writing resources, and business plan development would all be extremely helpful as well. Notably, finalists' ratings of resources asked about on the survey were all higher than past winners' ratings of these resources.

Table 4

Students' reports of potential usefulness of incubation resources

	Finalists			Past winners		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Introductions to capital/investors	26	2.81	.40	52	2.60	.60
Professional mentoring	26	2.81	.40	58	2.47	.60
Pitch and presentation feedback/advice	26	2.65	.56	57	2.16	.62
Networking events (including networking with other social innovators, judges, business professionals, etc.)	28	2.64	.49	59	2.31	.62
Faculty advising	26	2.58	.50	59	2.32	.65
Additional written feedback from the judges who reviewed your submission	28	2.57	.57	59	2.46	.65
Legal aid or IP support	24	2.54	.59	49	2.31	.74
Grant or proposal writing support resources (e.g., workshop, online resources, informational events)	27	2.52	.58	62	2.40	.66
Financial management/budgeting support or resources	27	2.52	.70	54	2.13	.65
Business plan development support or resources	27	2.48	.64	53	2.28	.69
Product development support or resources	24	2.38	.65	53	2.23	.58
Marketing and communications support or resources	27	2.37	.69	55	2.11	.69
Team building support (i.e., support finding team members to fill identified project needs)	26	2.35	.63	56	2.23	.66
One-on-one advice from past Big Ideas winners	25	2.28	.68	54	1.83	.61

Judges Feedback

In total, 13 judges filled out our feedback survey, 6 pre-proposal judges and 7 full-proposal judges. Of these 13, 4 judged in the Creative Expression for Social Justice category, 3 in the Improving Student Life category, 3 in the Information Technology for society category, 2 in the Global Poverty alleviation category, and 1 in the Scaling Up category.

Pre-proposal and Full Proposal Judges' Feedback

Judges were asked to comment on the process of judging and provide feedback on the judging criteria and the quality of the proposals they reviewed. Their feedback is presented in Table 6. Judges generally thought that YouNoodle was intuitive to use, that the experience of judging was rewarding, and that they would be willing to serve as a judge in future years.

Notably, less than two-thirds of judges thought the training webinar was useful, and reported that the webinar could have moved more quickly, that an email with a bulleted list of instructions would have been equally effective, and that it would have been useful to talk with other judges about what makes a good proposal to ensure parity in scoring. Also, no pre-proposal nor full proposal judge strongly agreed that the judging criteria provided a useful framework for evaluating submissions. When asked for their suggestions and comments on the criteria, the judges provided the following feedback:

- First and foremost, multiple judges noted that the competitions main goals were not made clear. Some judges noted that they felt most judges were inclined to reward money only to those projects that appeared to have a chance of success as a business and would spend it well, but it was not clear if this was how Big Ideas administrators thought funds should be allocated. A clear definition of success (e.g., social impact potential versus project viability) would be helpful.
- Judging was difficult for at least one judge because it was not clear to what extent projects in his or her category would be funded. In other words, it would be helpful to judges to know how to interpret funding gaps that appear in project budgets.
- In terms of the weights of particular criterion, one judge recommended weighting market familiarity less and weighting the overall score more. Two creative expression judges noted that there is a need to fine-tune the criteria in this category, and one recommended including a category for whether or not the project uses creative expression to solve a social problem. One creative expression also noted that it would be helpful to define “creative expression” and how it is different from “art.”
- One judge wished students had been asked to explicitly address how realistic their projects were; and that judges were given a concrete way of assessing project viability.
- Several pre-proposal judges noted that they would have liked to read all proposals in their category.

Table 6. Percentage of judges who reported judging was straightforward

	Strongly disagree	Percentage that disagreed somewhat	Percentage that neither agreed nor disagreed	Percentage that somewhat agreed	Percentage that strongly agreed
The judges' training webinar was useful.	8%	8%	23%	38%	23%
YouNoodle was intuitive and easy to use.	0%	0%	23%	23%	54%
The judging criteria provided an effective framework for evaluating submissions.	0%	0%	23%	77%	0%
The judging experience was rewarding and enjoyable.	0%	0%	31%	46%	23%
I would be willing to serve as a Big Ideas judge in future years of the contest.	0%	0%	8%	46%	46%

Finally, judges were also asked whether or not they thought the proposals they reviewed were high quality. 43% of pre-proposal judges thought the proposals were neither particularly high nor particularly low quality, 29% thought they were somewhat high-quality, and 29% thought the proposals were very high quality. In contrast, 33% of the full proposal judges thought the proposals they reviewed were somewhat-high quality and 67% thought that the proposals were very high quality.

When asked if they noticed consistent issues across proposals, the judges noted that many proposals were lacking in their competitive analyses/market strategy, that proposals did not sufficiently cite others' work, and that students should be instructed to speak with university administrators in advance who may be impacted by the project. Judges in the improving student life category noted that the ASUC should consider calling for projects that address specific needs identified by the ASUC leadership or that Student Affairs and the ASUC should consider developing a workshop for student leaders on how to leverage funding in this category to make significant, high-impact changes on campus.

Pitch Day Judges' Feedback

Grand Prize Pitch and Scaling Up Pitch judges were informally asked to provide feedback on the judging experience during conversations with Big Ideas administrators. During these conversations, the judges suggested the following:

- The judges agreed that the amount of time given for pitches and Q&A session worked well.

- One judge noted that the students were clearly energized and inspired, but that the ideas pitched were not “that big.”
- There was some disagreement on the utility of the judging criteria. While one judge thought the general criteria provided to judges were helpful, the weighting for these criteria were less useful. At least one judge thought it would be helpful to add a criterion that asked, “Will the prize money make a difference to the team?” Another judge noted that if the focus of the contest is on creativity, that the criteria were not appropriately aligned with this goal.
- At least two judges thought that evaluating the pitches is inherently difficult because the range of projects was too wide, and thus the projects were difficult to compare.
- At least one judge noted that the moderator for his or her deliberation was too heavy handed, but that having a chart writer present was helpful.

Considerations for Change in 2012-2013

Based on the data gathered in the surveys detailed about, the following changes should be considered for the 2012-2013 Big Ideas Contest.

Resources For Students

1. Provide budget workshops as well as proposal-writing workshops. Consider recording both and making them available online, or hosting more than two workshops before the pre-proposal deadline.
2. Organize a drop-in office hour session before the deadlines where both Graduate Student Assistants and past winners can read proposals and provide feedback.
3. Provide more example proposals, so that entrants have a clearer idea of what is expected of them.
4. Consider redesigning the website so that contest information, guidelines, and budget templates are easy to find.

Student Pre-proposal, Full Proposal, and Pitch Day Guidelines

5. Create a hierarchy of priorities for the contest and a clear definition of a successful. Determine whether it is most important to fund creativity and innovation or viable projects. Determine to what extent the judges should consider how much the prize money could benefit the students versus benefit the community they propose to serve.
6. Consider emphasizing competitive analyses/market strategy in the guidelines, if this is appropriate given the hierarchy of contest goals developed in response to #1 above.
7. Consider asking students to explicitly address how realistic their projects are, if this is appropriate given the hierarchy of contest goals developed in response to #1 above.
8. Be clear that students should sufficiently cite the work and research of others in their proposals.
9. Consider requiring that students speak with university administrators who may be impacted by the project in advance of their submission.

Pre Proposal and Full Proposal Judges' Training and Judging Criteria

10. Provide judges with a clear sense of the contest's priorities and with the definition of success determined in response to #1 above.
11. Consider adding a criterion that asks, "Will the prize money make a difference to the team?"
12. Fine-tune the criteria in the creative expression for social justice category. Provide the judges with a definition of "creative expression," and consider including a criterion for whether or not the project uses creative expression to solve a social problem.
13. Provide judges with a clearer sense of how to interpret funding gaps in student budgets. Provide judges with information on to what extent projects can be funded, and what specific expenses can and cannot be covered by Big Ideas funding.
14. Provide pre-proposal judges with the opportunity to read all proposals in their category.
15. Provide increased opportunities for discussion amongst judges so that judges can mutually agree on what makes a good proposal to ensure parity in scoring. This may also help create community amongst judges and improve the extent to which judging is rewarding for the judges.
16. Consider shortening the training webinar or, alternatively, providing the information in a document that can be emailed or downloaded from the website.

Pitch Day Judging

17. Revise judging criteria for Pitch Day so that it aligns with the contests' hierarchy of goals developed in response to #1. Communicate these goals clearly to Pitch Day judges so that judges.
18. Like #11 above, in the Pitch Day judging criteria, consider adding a criterion that asks, "Will the prize money make a difference to the team?"
19. At least two judges thought the range of projects presented at Pitch Day was too wide. Consider ways to narrow this range or provide the judges with a meaningful way to rank projects that vary considerably in project area. If this is impossible, consider eliminating Pitch Day or changing the format of Pitch Day.
20. To ensure moderators are not overly heavy-handed during deliberations, consider providing them with training materials.

Additional Considerations From Big Ideas Administrators

Beyond the data available in the survey, Big Ideas administrators reflected on the past year's competition to develop the following additional considerations for change:

21. Survey responses were very low, despite offering an incentive to non-finalists. Consider integrating survey questions into submission entry forms to ensure that all entrants answer at least some evaluation questions. Also consider offering a small incentive for each person who responds to a survey (e.g., a \$5 gift card).
22. Ten of the 42 finalist teams submitted videos for the People's Choice Contest. Some were unable to do so due to privacy limitations. Consider providing more time to finalist teams after the full proposal deadline to film and produce a video. Talk with a focus group of finalist teams to determine why many did not submit a video, and consider changes to the People's Choice Award as necessary.