

BIG IDEA Pitch Contest

Info Sessions: February 23 & March 10

Applications due: March 20

Finalist Notified by April 3

Final Pitch Contest: May 6, at 5 – 7 p.m. at College of DuPage, Homeland Security Education Center (HEC) RM 1022.

More Information:
innovationdupage.org/bigidea
pitchcontest@cod.edu

The BIG IDEA Pitch Contest gives you an opportunity to pitch your business idea to a panel of expert judges. It all starts with a BIG IDEA. We are looking for innovative products and services that solve real problems to satisfy the needs of growing markets. Successful applicants introduce scalable concepts that can be accelerated by connecting to key mentorship and business resources. Whether your idea is conceptual, in development or a launched startup, this competition is right for you.

Apply online with a written application and a short video submission. If chosen as a finalist, you will pitch on Wednesday, May 6, 2026, at 5 – 7 p.m. The contest is open for public viewing. Encourage your family, friends, teachers, and colleagues to save the date and register as a guest.

The BIG IDEA Pitch Contest is co-produced by College of DuPage (COD), Business & Applied Technology Division and Innovation DuPage (ID) and DuPage Foundation.

Prizes

1st Prize - \$5,000

2nd Prize - \$4,000

3rd Prize - \$3,000

All finalists receive a six-month membership to Innovation DuPage

Who Should Apply

Apply on your own or with a business team! Participants must be:

- College of DuPage Students or Recent Alumni (1-2 years)
- Local area students attending a High School located in DuPage County
- Students enrolled in one of the Academic Partners of Innovation DuPage

Application Process

Complete the online BIG IDEA Application by Friday, March 20, 2026.

The application includes a written portion where we ask you to tell us about yourself (and your business team, if applicable) and provide information on your business. You will also submit a link to a 2-to-3-minute video where you briefly showcase your business idea.

For help in completing the application, we are offering two information sessions with COD Assistant Professor-Business, Lea Dan and Program Support Specialist, Beverly Carlson.

RSVP to attend in person or via a live Zoom link:

- Monday, February 23 @ 2pm – 3pm Hybrid @COD BIC Room 1E05, Instructor(s): Lea Dan and Beverly Carlson
- Monday, March 10 @ 4pm – 5pm Virtual, Instructor: Beverly Carlson

Finalists will be selected through a screening process and notified on or before April 3, if chosen to pitch in the final round.

Preparing Your Pitch

If chosen to pitch in the final round, you are required to participate in a one-hour prep sessions with Innovation DuPage.

Pitch Prep Session -- Consultation

The required one-hour session will be held with an ID staff member who will view your pitch presentation, along with your pitch deck, and provide constructive feedback about your product or service. Please note that finalists will be asked to schedule their pitch prep sessions before the final pitch deck submission deadline of April 27.

Zoom link and scheduling information for the required pitch prep session will be provided when we notify you of your advancement to the final round.

Final Round

You will designate up to two members on your business team to present a 5-minute pitch. After your pitch, you will field up to 3 minutes of questions from the judges.

Once all the pitches conclude, judges' scores will be tallied, and the top three winners will be announced.

Finalist's pitches will be judged on the following criteria:

Introduction - Clearly identify who you are, your company name and your product or service.

Need - Explain the problem and how your company —and your product or service— will solve the problem.

Target Market - Who will buy your product or service?

Competition - Who are your competitors and why do they fall short?

Business Model - How will you make money?

Presentation Delivery - Your confidence, clarity and poise during the presentation.

Use of Funds - What will you do with the money if you win the contest?

Judges Questions - How well you answer questions from the judges.

Confidentiality/Privacy/Waivers

The final round of the contest will be in-person and open to students, staff, and the wider community, therefore confidentiality is not guaranteed. If you wish to keep elements of your business or idea confidential, you should not include this information in your pitch.

A video version of the Pitch Contest will also be shared on the College of DuPage and Innovation DuPage websites. There is no way for College of DuPage and Innovation DuPage to prohibit the sharing of pitch contest content with others.

Pitch applicants and all participating business team members under the age of 18 are required to have a parent/guardian sign a waiver for participation. The waiver is available on the BIG IDEA website and must be signed and sent back to us via email to pitchcontest@cod.edu at the time of your application submission.

Pitch Contest Partners

