

Big Ideas@Berkeley Prize Competition

2014/2015

Summary

For this category, Big Ideas@Berkeley invites proposals that develop novel mobile technology-based innovations to enhance early grade reading outcomes for children in developing countries. Alternatively, proposals may use existing mobile-based technologies to improve early grade reading outcomes by adapting or applying those technologies in new and innovative ways.

For the scope of this competition, mobile devices include cell phones, e-readers, tablet computers, audio/visual devices, and any other mobile (i.e. portable) technologies that can educate young readers, rapidly produce materials, log data, and engage marginalized students to learn to read

Background

Literacy unlocks human potential and is the cornerstone of development. It leads to better health, better employment opportunities, and safer and more stable societies. However, a 2013/2014 UNESCO report indicates that 250 million children across the globe are not learning basic literacy and numeracy skills. Of these, 57 million children—a disproportionate number of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds, live in conflict-afflicted countries, are disabled, or are girls—aren't enrolled in school at all. In addition, there is a shortage of 1.6 million teachers.

It seems clear that non-traditional approaches are needed to increase reading outcomes—and future opportunities—for these children. As such, All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (ACR GCD) is sourcing technology-based solutions to improve the literacy outcomes for children in developing countries. Evidence confirms that children best learn to read in the language with which they are most familiar. However, many children enter schools where they are taught in a language that is foreign to them and have little or no access to mother tongue reading resources, making it difficult for them to gain the foundational skills needed to learn to read. This, coupled with limited engagement from family or their community to support their learning to read, limits the reinforcement needed to develop a proficient reader. Mobile technology can be an effective tool to disseminate local language instruction materials for teacher professional development and reading materials in a story, game or audio format for children. Additionally, it can provide assistive technologies which help remove barriers for children with disabilities as they learn to read. A basic phone or tablet, or other mobile technologies can provide new and vital mother-tongue reading resources to engage children's curiosity and interest in reading, to communities with sparse access to books.

Children who do not develop reading skills during early primary education are on a lifetime trajectory of limited educational progress and, therefore, limited economic opportunities. Early grade reading competency is critical for continued retention and success in future grades and the educational achievement of a country's population is directly correlated with its economic growth rate. UNESCO further reports that an increase in the average educational attainment of a country's population by one year increases annual per capita GDP growth from 2 percent to 2.5 percent.

The Big Ideas contest harnesses the boundless creativity of university students and provides a platform to turn their ideas into viable projects with real-world impact. Since 2006, the Big Ideas@Berkeley contest has inspired innovative and high-impact student-led projects aimed at solving problems that matter to their generation.

Additionally, rather than requiring fully fleshed-out proposals, the Big Ideas competition at University of California, Berkeley invites raw ideas, then provides interdisciplinary teams of student contestants with assistance to elaborate on them. The most promising ideas are designated finalists and then nurtured by the competition organizers. Finalists are paired with mentors from the university, private companies, or nonprofits who assist them for six weeks in turning their ideas into full proposals. The competition organizers hold workshops in proposal-writing, budgeting, and even how to get the most out of their mentor. To reflect the energy of students and the dynamism of the innovation community, Big Ideas launches with enthusiastic campus support and culminates with a public “Pitch Day” when finalists take the mic and deliver their best appeal for extra support.

Challenge

For this category, Big Ideas@Berkeley invites proposals that develop novel mobile technology-based innovations to enhance early grade reading outcomes for children in developing countries. Alternatively, proposals may use existing mobile-based technologies to improve early grade reading outcomes by adapting or applying those technologies in new and innovative ways.

For the scope of this competition, mobile devices include cell phones, e-readers, tablet computers, audio/visual devices, and any other mobile (i.e. portable) technologies that can educate young readers, rapidly produce materials, log data, and engage marginalized students to learn to read.

Proposals submitted to this category should describe a plan that:

- (a) demonstrates an understanding of a barrier preventing early grade students from learning to read,
- (b) develops or uses a mobile technology (defined above) that remedies this barrier,
- (c) demonstrates the capacity to improve literacy outcomes and/or to increase reading scores for early grade students,
- (d) is culturally appropriate within the target communities,
- (e) is appropriate for low-resource settings,
- (f) demonstrates the potential for sustainability and scalability beyond the pilot year of implementation.

Student teams applying to the Mobile category must include at least one matriculated graduate or undergraduate student from an eligible campus, listed below. Matriculated students at other universities around the globe are encouraged to apply in collaboration with students from eligible campuses.

- UC Berkeley
- UC Davis
- UC Irvine
- UC Los Angeles
- UC Merced
- UC Riverside
- UC San Diego
- UC San Francisco
- UC Santa Barbara
- UC Santa Cruz
- College of William and Mary
- Duke University
- Makerere University (Uganda)
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Monash University (Australia)
- Michigan State University
- Texas A&M University
- University of South Australia

Berkeley has expanded its network of eligible campuses beyond the HESN campuses, for the “Mobiles for Reading” competition, to two Australian schools, Monash University and University of South Australia, to represent the ACR GCD Partners.

Awards

This year’s Big Ideas@Berkeley competition will award over \$300,000 in prize money to students. The Mobiles for Reading Category, sponsored by All Children Reading, will award up to \$ 25,000.

Expanded advising drop-in hours and remote appointments are available with Big Ideas advisors in order to help students with their pre-proposals. Finalists from the pre-proposal round will be matched with mentors from the university, private companies, or nonprofits who assist them for six weeks in turning their ideas into full proposals. Applicants also have the opportunity to win through the People’s Choice Video Contest. Additionally, at the Grand Prize Pitch Day, select finalist teams will be invited to pitch their project ideas to a panel of judges to receive an additional award.

Moreover, to ensure the quality of submissions, Big Ideas provided a number of non-monetary incentives to attract mentors and judges including, the opportunity to give back to aspiring social innovators and entrepreneurs from 70+ disciplines; get inspired by novel ideas from the next generation of innovators, entrepreneurs and changemakers from UC Berkeley and other top universities; grow their network by joining a network of 200+ industry leaders and professionals who support Big Ideas as judges and mentors

Judging Criteria

The judging process is being coordinated by Big Ideas@Berkeley on behalf of ACR GCD. Proposals submitted to this category should describe a plan or prototype that:

- Creates a new method/or build upon an existing method of assessment that can evaluate literacy skills rapidly and efficiently,
- Develops or uses a mobile application or technology that is able to utilize this new method and Track the scores of individual students along with the technologies or methodologies used to teach that student how to read,
- Demonstrates the capacity to aggregate literacy data online by country or region through the mobile application or technology,
- Is culturally appropriate within the target communities,
- Is appropriate for low-resource settings,
- Demonstrates the potential for sustainability and scalability beyond the pilot year of implementation.

The success of the contest and the ideas that come out of it are made possible by 200+ energetic and experienced leaders and professionals who serve as judges and mentors each year. Past judges have included professors, industry leaders, innovative thinkers, entrepreneurs, consultants, and project designers from one or more of our categories areas - including representatives from Google, Twitter, Packard, USAID, Yahoo, World Bank, Bain & Co and many others.

Pre-Proposal Round: The pre-proposal round review period runs from mid-November through mid-December. Pre-Proposal judges review between 8-10 submissions - each of which is 3 pages long. In this

round, scoring emphasis is placed on how creative and innovative the idea is within its category. The pre-proposal will be judged based on the following criteria:

- **Innovation:** The extent to which the idea presented is a novel, innovative, or creative solution the proposed problem. (40% of overall score)
- **Potential for Impact:** The extent to which the proposed project addresses a pressing problem, and the extent to which your team provides sufficient statistics and research for the reader to understand the problem. (20% of overall score)
- **Viability:** The extent to which the proposed project appears viable, given the project description, the team's qualifications, and the team's understanding of the market or community needs. (15% of overall score)
- **Category Challenge:** For each contest category (except Scaling Up), judges will also consider a category-specific question. For this section, Scaling Up will be judged on progress made towards previous project thus far. (15% of overall score)
- **Quality:** The extent to which the proposal is professional, persuasive, well written, and well organized. (10% of overall score)

Final Round: The final round review period runs from mid-March to early-April. Final Round judges review 6-8 final proposals - each of which is 10-15 pages long. In this round, scoring emphasis is placed more equally on potential for impact, implementation and viability.

All judging is done entirely online, so that judges can participate remotely in their free time. During the Pre-Proposal round, judges are asked to review 6-8 pre-proposals. Each proposal is 3 pages long and most judges report spending ~30 minutes reviewing each of them and providing feedback. Including training, judges spend a total 3-6 hours on these responsibilities. During the Final Round, judges will review all of the final proposals in their assigned category. Each proposal is 10-15 pages long, and most judges report spending ~45 minutes reviewing each of them. The total time for final round judging will vary depending on the number of final proposals in each category.