THE CONNECT CHALLENGE

RULES AND INFORMATION

Updated February 2025

ABOUT THE CONNECT CHALLENGE

The Connect Challenge is an idea pitch competition for the IU College of Arts + Sciences. Students are invited to share their ideas, and winners will be awarded a prize package to help bring the idea to life. The Connect Challenge exists to serve the Walter Center's mission, recognizing that many students will pursue entrepreneurship and innovation in their careers.

SPONSORS

The Connect Challenge is made possible by financial and professional support from The Walter Center and IU Innovates.

PRIZES

Winners in each category will receive scholarship money along with other gifts. If the recipient is a team, the money will be divided evenly among team members. Winners in each category will receive a $2000 scholarship, a part-time membership to the Mill, and a trophy. Runners-up in each category will receive a $500 scholarship, a part-time membership to the Mill, and a trophy.

Note that this scholarship money will be directly deposited into your IU Bursar account and may impact scholarships/financial aid.

The Mill Memberships
Winners: 6 month, part-time student membership
Runners-up: 3 month, part-time student membership
(The Mill will enter them in their system and students receive a code to redeem their membership within 30 days)
Part-time Student memberships = nights and weekends, with access to the building M-F from 5:30pm-8:30am and all day Saturday and Sunday. No parking pass (due to parking being free during those hours).

ELIGIBILITY

The Connect Challenge is open to any student enrolled at Indiana University Bloomington during the semester in which the Connect Challenge takes place. Students may enter the Connect Challenge on their own or with a team of up to five people. If applying as a team, all members must be enrolled at IU Bloomington. During first-round vetting, a select number of spots at the finals may be reserved for students who are in a program in the IU College of Arts + Sciences. Students may apply only once per year with one idea. Students who applied in previous Connect Challenges may apply again but must apply with a different idea.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

The only thing needed to apply is an idea! Manifestations of the idea (prototypes, patents, launched businesses, minimum viable product) are not required to apply. The idea must be the student's own. Students may apply to one of three categories. The categories are:

- Creative Endeavors
  - Ideas in which the main objective is to create or manufacture something. The idea can, but does not need to, generate revenue or solve an overt issue.
  - Ex: Fine arts projects, film or tv scripts, music compositions, creative writing projects.
- Nonprofit + Social Good
  - Ideas in which the main objective is to address, typically generating revenue not from the sale of goods or services but from donations, grants, membership fees, or public funding.
  - Ex: public programs, environmental programs, consumer products, business models that give back, research, investigative journalism
- Startups and Technology
  - Ideas that are typically seen at pitch competitions, in which the idea addresses a problem and generates revenue through the sale of goods or services.
  - Ex: Software as a service (SaaS), phone apps, consumer products, medical devices, inventions

TIMELINE

*Please refer to Handshake to see details and register for events

Week of February 24, 2025 – Info session

February 28, 2025, 12am - Application opens

March 16, 2025, 11:59 pm - Application closes

March 21, 2025 - Finalists notified

March 25-26, 2025 – Finalist feedback sessions

April 4, 2025, 9:00-11:30am - Connect Challenge during Connect Conference

April 4, 2025, 12:15pm-2:00pm – Awards Ceremony during Connect Conference

INFO SESSIONS

Info sessions are 1-hour events in which students can learn about the competition, ask questions, and receive advice from experts.

ONLINE APPLICATIONS

All students wishing to be considered must apply online. The application link will become available when the application opens and can be accessed through the Walter Center website. The online application asks for student information, a summary, and a pitch deck.

The summary is a 1-page document that outlines what the idea is and why it should be pursued. The summary must be a PDF document. The pitch deck is a 10-slide maximum slideshow that shows what the idea is and why it should be pursued. The pitch deck must be a PowerPoint document.

Successful summaries and pitch decks typically address:

- The problem – why should the idea be pursued?
- The solution – what is your idea?
- The team – who is involved in bringing the idea to life?
- The audience – who benefits from the idea?
- The challenges – what are potential setbacks, and how will you address them?
- The plan – how will this idea come to life?

JUDGING RUBRIC

At both stages of judging (initial applications and the in-person Connect Challenge) ideas will be evaluated with the following rubric based on the core values of the IU College of Arts + Sciences.

SKILL	DESCRIPTION	SCORE 1-5
QUESTION CRITICALLY	Did the student/s question the status quo? Are they solving a problem? Is the reason behind this idea compelling?	
THINK LOGICALLY	Did the student/s create a plan for their idea? Did they analyze a target audience, challenges, or resources? How viable is this plan? Will it work?	
COMMUNICATE CLEARLY	How well did the student/s convey their idea? Is it clear what it is? How was the overall presentation?	
ACT CREATIVELY	Is the idea innovative? Are there elements that are particularly imaginative or creative?	
LIVE ETHICALLY	Did the student/s analyze the ethical implications of the idea? You do not have to agree with the ethics – but have they been addressed?	
	TOTAL	

FINALISTS AND FINALIST EXPECTATIONS

After the initial application closes, a committee comprised of IU staff will select three (3) ideas from each category that will pitch their idea in-person at the Connect Challenge. Those finalists will be notified via email.

Finalists are expected to:

- Complete a finalist form
- Schedule and attend a 1:1 feedback session with an expert
- Pitch in-person at the Connect Challenge
- Attend the Connect Challenge awards ceremony

WAITING LIST

Applicants who are not chosen as finalists will automatically be placed on a waiting list. If any finalist cannot compete in the Connect Challenge, the students on the waiting list may be invited to pitch their idea at The Connect Challenge.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND PUBLICITY

Finalists will potentially have their name, photos, and brief information about their idea shared on a slideshow during the Connect Challenge awards ceremony and on the Walter Center website. Finalists will have an opportunity to consent to this in their finalist form.

DAY-OF CONNECT CHALLENGE FORMAT

The Connect Challenge will take place in-person the morning of the Connect '25 Conference. Students will pitch their ideas in front of a panel of judges. A computer and projector will be available.

Each idea category will have a distinct panel of judges and ideas will only be judged with other ideas in the same category. For example, an idea from the creative endeavors category will not be competing with ideas from the startups category.

The general public is welcome to watch pitches. Finalists are also invited to watch the pitches of other finalists. We ask that everyone in the audience show respect to the people pitching.

Each room/category will have the following volunteer staff: An emcee to host the event, a timekeeper, a doorkeeper, and a panel of 3-5 judges.

The emcee will give opening statements, then invite the finalists to the "stage" to pitch their idea. Finalists are expected to be in the room (or just outside the door) and ready at their assigned pitch time. The doorkeeper will close the door while finalists are pitching, and people will be asked to limit entering and leaving during a pitch.

Finalists will have a total of 20 minutes in front of the judges – 10 minutes to pitch their idea and 10 minutes to answer questions from the judges. Only judges may ask questions; the audience will be asked to withhold questions.

After all ideas have been pitched, the judges will have time alone to decide the winners.

AWARDS CEREMONY

Winners will be announced at a luncheon and awards ceremony during Connect '25. Connect is a 1-day conference-style event in which alumni of the College of Arts + Sciences talk to students about their careers.

DISTRIBUTION OF PRIZE MONEY

After winners are determined, prize money will be awarded to the students as an academic scholarship on their IU Bursar accounts. If the recipients are a team, the scholarship money will be divided evenly among the team members.

The value of this prize will be reported to the Office of Student Financial Assistance. This prize will reduce the financial aid for any students who are 21st Century Covenant recipients, Groups recipients, or Pell Promise recipients by its total value. The prize will also reduce student's loans or Federal Work Study if they have reached their cost of attendance. Please note that awards over $600 will be reported on the IRS Form 1099-MISC by Indiana University. The IRS has stipulated amounts less than $600 must be self-reported by the recipient on their personal tax return. Please consult with your personal tax advisor for any questions or concerns.

WINNER FOLLOW-UP

At any time between 6 months and 1 year after the competition, the Walter center will contact the finalists to see where their idea has taken them.

CONTACT

For questions, contact:

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