

ISRC Leadership Pitch Competition

Frequently Asked Questions

Eligibility • Teams • Business Ideas • Submissions • Pitch Rounds • Judging

This guide answers common questions about participation in the ISRC Leadership Pitch Competition. Applicants should also review the official competition rules, deadlines, and stage-specific instructions. If a conflict exists, the official competition rules and written organizer instructions control.

1. Eligibility & Competition Divisions

1. Who is eligible to participate?

The competition is open to eligible middle school and high school students from around the world, including students enrolled in public, private, charter, international, and homeschool programs.

2. What are the competition divisions?

Junior Division: Grades 6–8 (or equivalent international school levels). Senior Division: Grades 9–12 (or equivalent international school levels). Students are evaluated within their appropriate division.

3. Can international students participate?

Yes. Eligible students from any country may participate.

4. Are Junior and Senior Division students judged against each other?

No. Students are evaluated within their appropriate age or grade division.

5. Will judges expect middle school students to have the same level of business knowledge as high school students?

No. Judges consider the student's educational level while evaluating creativity, problem understanding, leadership, communication, and business reasoning.

2. Individual & Team Participation

6. Can I participate individually?

Yes, if individual participation is permitted under the official competition rules. Team participation is also welcome and may provide additional opportunities to demonstrate collaboration and leadership.

7. Can we participate as a team?

Yes. Teams may include up to four students.

8. Do all team members need to attend the same school?

No. Team members may attend different schools.

9. Can team members live in different cities, states, or countries?

Yes, provided every team member meets the eligibility requirements. Teams may collaborate remotely.

10. Can students from different grade levels be on the same team?

Yes, unless otherwise restricted by the official rules. If team members fall into different divisions, the team will generally compete in the division of the highest-grade team member.

11. Can team members have different roles?

Yes. Roles may reflect each student's strengths, such as Team Lead, Finance Lead, Marketing Lead, Technology Lead, Product Lead, Research Lead, Operations Lead, or Design Lead.

12. Does every team need to have a CEO?

No. Teams may choose their own leadership structure. One student may serve as the primary team leader, or leadership responsibilities may be shared.

13. Can one student participate on more than one team?

No. A student may participate on only one team in the competition.

14. What happens if a team member can no longer participate?

The remaining team members should contact the organizers as soon as possible. The organizers will determine whether the team remains eligible.

15. Can we change our team leader?

Yes, if necessary. Teams should notify the organizers if the official team leader changes after submission.

3. Business Ideas & Venture Eligibility

16. Do I need to already own a business?

No. Students may participate with an original business, startup, nonprofit, social enterprise, product, service, technology, or other entrepreneurial idea. An existing company is not required.

17. Do I need to have revenue?

No. Revenue is not required. Early-stage ideas that have not generated sales are eligible.

18. What kinds of business ideas are allowed?

A wide range of ideas are welcome, including consumer products, software, mobile applications, AI solutions, healthcare ventures, education platforms, engineering products, financial technology, environmental solutions, e-commerce businesses, community initiatives, nonprofits, social enterprises, and sustainability ventures.

19. Can our idea be a nonprofit?

Yes. Nonprofits, social enterprises, community initiatives, and mission-driven ventures are welcome.

20. Can our idea focus mainly on social impact rather than profit?

Yes. The team should explain how the organization would remain financially sustainable, even if maximizing profit is not its primary purpose.

21. Does the business idea have to be completely new?

No. Students do not need to invent an entirely new industry, but they should demonstrate meaningful originality in the solution, business model, technology, customer experience, implementation, accessibility, cost, or another important area.

22. Can we improve an existing product or business concept?

Yes. Students may improve an existing approach, but they should clearly explain what makes their solution different and why customers or beneficiaries would choose it.

23. Can we submit a business idea that we have already started working on?

Yes. Early-stage ventures with prototypes, websites, customers, pilot programs, preliminary sales, or other progress may be eligible, provided students have made meaningful contributions.

24. Can we submit an idea that has been entered in another competition?

Generally, yes, unless another competition's rules prohibit it. The submitted work must accurately represent the students' own contributions.

25. Can we submit more than one business idea?

Unless specifically permitted in the official application rules, students should submit one primary business idea per application.

26. Can our business address a healthcare or medical problem?

Yes. Students should avoid unsupported medical claims and clearly distinguish between a business concept, research hypothesis, prototype, and clinically validated product.

4. Application, Business Plan & Research

27. Do we need a complete business plan?

No. A traditional full-length business plan is not required. Students should understand the major components of their venture, including the problem, customer, solution, competition, business model, leadership structure, execution strategy, and growth potential.

28. Do we need to conduct market research?

Market research is strongly encouraged. Students should provide evidence showing why the problem exists and why potential customers or beneficiaries may be interested in the proposed solution.

29. What kinds of market research can we use?

Students may use credible published reports, government data, industry reports, academic research, surveys, interviews, customer conversations, competitor research, or other appropriate sources.

30. Do we need to interview customers?

No, unless specifically required in the official rules. Customer interviews can strengthen a submission by demonstrating that the team understands the people it hopes to serve.

31. Are surveys required?

No. Surveys are optional. If used, students should accurately describe how the survey was conducted and should not exaggerate the results.

32. Do we need to cite our sources?

Yes. Important statistics, market figures, industry information, research findings, and other factual claims should be supported by credible sources.

33. What sources are considered credible?

Examples include government agencies, universities, peer-reviewed research, respected industry organizations, established market research organizations, major financial publications, and reliable company information.

34. Can we update our idea after submitting the initial application?

Yes. Reasonable development and improvement are expected as teams move through the competition. The core submission should remain sufficiently consistent for organizers to confirm eligibility and originality.

5. Financials, Revenue & Funding

35. Do we need financial projections?

Detailed financial statements are not necessarily required, but teams should demonstrate basic financial understanding. This may include expected pricing, major costs, revenue sources, startup expenses, or preliminary revenue projections.

36. What if we do not know exactly how much our business will cost?

Reasonable estimates are acceptable. Students should clearly identify estimates and explain the assumptions used.

37. Does the business need to make money?

For-profit ventures should explain how they expect to generate revenue. Nonprofits and social ventures should explain how they would sustain operations through donations, grants, sponsorships, memberships, partnerships, earned revenue, or another appropriate model.

38. Do we need investors?

No. Students do not need investors and are not required to raise actual funding.

39. Do we need to ask for funding in the pitch?

No. The final ask may involve funding, mentorship, partnerships, technology, customers, professional expertise, distribution support, manufacturing assistance, or another resource that would help move the venture forward.

40. Is there a minimum or maximum amount of funding we can request?

Unless the competition establishes a specific restriction, there is no required amount. Any funding request should be reasonable and connected to a clear use of funds.

41. What should we include in our funding request?

Explain how much you are requesting, what the funds would be used for, and what milestone or objective the funding would help achieve.

6. Prototypes, Technology & Artificial Intelligence

42. Do I need to build the product before applying?

No. A completed product, prototype, website, application, or business is not required. Students who already have evidence of progress may include it.

43. Do we need a working prototype?

No. Prototypes, mock-ups, demonstrations, wireframes, product designs, screenshots, or proof-of-concept models may strengthen a submission when appropriate.

44. Can our prototype be digital?

Yes. Digital prototypes, website mock-ups, application interfaces, demonstrations, simulations, CAD models, and other digital materials may be used.

45. Is coding required for technology ideas?

No. Students may propose a technology venture without a completed application or software platform, but they should understand how the technology would work at a conceptual level.

46. Can we use artificial intelligence in our business idea?

Yes. AI-based ventures and AI-enabled solutions are permitted, provided students can clearly explain the purpose, value, limitations, and responsible use of the technology.

47. Can we use AI tools to prepare our application or presentation?

Yes. AI may be used as a supporting tool for brainstorming, research, writing, data analysis, coding, design, presentations, and similar activities.

48. Do we need to disclose our use of AI?

Significant AI assistance should be acknowledged when appropriate. Students remain responsible for the originality, accuracy, reasoning, and content of their submission.

49. Can AI generate our entire business plan or pitch for us?

AI should not replace student leadership, creativity, decision-making, or understanding. Students must be able to independently explain and defend every major part of their submission.

7. Mentors, Originality & Academic Integrity

50. Can a teacher, mentor, parent, or business professional help us?

Yes. Students may receive reasonable guidance from teachers, mentors, parents, advisors, or business professionals.

51. How much help can mentors provide?

Mentors may provide feedback, teach concepts, suggest resources, review materials, and help students think critically. Students must remain the primary developers and decision-makers behind the project.

52. Can an adult write our business proposal or pitch?

No. Adults may provide reasonable editing and feedback, but the final work should represent the students' thinking, understanding, and meaningful contribution.

53. What happens if plagiarism or falsified information is discovered?

Plagiarism, false claims, fabricated financial information, invented customers, manipulated research, or misrepresentation of student contributions may result in score reduction or disqualification.

8. Advancement & Competition Rounds

54. Does submitting an application guarantee advancement?

No. Advancement is competitive and is based on the judging criteria and overall quality of eligible submissions.

55. What is a Semifinalist?

Semifinalists are top-performing students or teams selected to participate in the Business Pitch Round.

56. Who becomes a Grand Finalist?

The highest-scoring teams from the Business Pitch Round may be selected as Grand Finalists.

57. Will all Semifinalists give a pitch?

Yes, if the Business Pitch Round is the required Semifinalist stage. Detailed instructions will be provided to selected teams.

9. Business Pitch & Presentation

58. What should be included in the business pitch?

The pitch should generally explain the team, problem, customer, solution, business opportunity, business model, competition, leadership, growth strategy, impact, and the team's next ask.

59. How long should the business pitch be?

The exact pitch duration will be stated in the official Semifinalist instructions. Teams must follow the published time limit.

60. Do all team members need to speak during the pitch?

Meaningful participation by all team members is strongly encouraged, particularly because teamwork and leadership are part of the judging criteria.

61. Can only one team member present?

If permitted by the stage-specific instructions, one student may serve as the main presenter. Judges should still be able to understand each member's contribution.

62. Can we use slides?

Yes. Slides, visuals, diagrams, mock-ups, charts, prototypes, and demonstrations may be used when permitted by the presentation format.

63. Will professional video editing improve our score?

No. Students are evaluated primarily on their idea, business reasoning, leadership, teamwork, communication, and potential - not expensive production or sophisticated editing.

64. Can we include a video demonstration of our product?

Yes, if allowed by the presentation format and time limit.

10. Judging & What Makes a Strong Entry

65. Who are the judges?

Judges may include professionals with experience in entrepreneurship, business, leadership, innovation, technology, finance, education, marketing, management, investing, or related fields.

66. What makes a strong business pitch?

Strong pitches clearly explain a meaningful problem, a specific customer, a compelling solution, a realistic business model, a competitive advantage, a capable team, an achievable execution plan, and potential for growth or impact.

67. What are judges looking for in leadership?

Judges look for evidence of responsibility, initiative, communication, teamwork, decision-making, adaptability, accountability, ethical judgment, and the ability to move a team toward a shared goal.

68. Do we need to prove that our idea will definitely succeed?

No. Entrepreneurship involves uncertainty. Students should demonstrate thoughtful assumptions, realistic reasoning, awareness of risks, and a plan for testing and improving the idea.

69. Will risky or ambitious ideas be penalized?

Not simply for being ambitious. Judges will consider whether the team understands the risks and has a reasonable strategy for developing and testing the idea.

Important: Competition procedures, deadlines, pitch lengths, advancement criteria, and stage-specific requirements may be updated in the official instructions. Applicants are responsible for reviewing the most current information provided by the organizers.