**Acara**

**Acara** is an innovative entrepreneurship program in which students envision, pilot and launch impact ventures to address societal and environmental challenges in the US and abroad. Challenge areas are often complex, with local presence but global impact.

**Acara’s Mission** is education + impact. We offer a series of courses to educate highly motivated students, who develop plans for sustainable enterprises. Beyond the classroom, we incubate and fund teams to establish ventures using best practices from corporate and start-up environments.

We believe it is unlikely a single person will solve our global challenges. Finding effective solutions requires collaborative teams drawing on an array of talents, perspectives, and resources, using the best tools available.

It is important we have future leaders who have learned these lessons early in their careers, and know how to develop effective solutions to tough multi-faceted problems.

Your goal in this course is to build your entrepreneurial skills and to create a venture solution to address a global grand challenge.

More about Acara at [www.acara.umn.edu](http://www.acara.umn.edu)

We believe successful solutions will be:

- **Multidisciplinary**: Arise from teams with diverse backgrounds and skills.
- **Meaningful**: Address a global grand challenge that effects a significant number of people and about which your team is passionate.
- **Scalable**: Provide a scalable model to reach 100,000 people in 5 years.
- **Grounded**: Use reliable, real market info from communities and professionals.
- **Viable**: Build self-sustaining business models, not dependent on charitable donations.
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This handbook has been designed to provide an overview of Acara and available resources. The handbook will also provide useful strategies and advice to address common issues and frequent questions.

Pay special attention to the important instructions and information contained in these blue boxes.

Information contained in green boxes provides helpful tips and advice.
INTRODUCTION
Program Overview

As a student in CE 5571, known as the Acara Challenge course, you will collaborate with students and professionals of various disciplines, conduct research on a serious problem in India, and ultimately develop an impact venture solution. This process will be both exciting and challenging. It will require you to think creatively, learn and apply new skills, be part of a diverse team, gain global exposure, and communicate effectively.

**Goals** (1) to provide students opportunities to learn about impact entrepreneurship and global grand challenges in a collaborative, real-time space, (2) to develop viable social-environmental venture plans, (3) to help students pilot and launch ventures if desired.

**Inputs** passionate students and instructors, background knowledge, start up resources, mentors, exposure to industry.

**Outputs** venture solutions that are ready to be piloted and launched by the students on the teams or by other interested parties.

Business Development Process
The teams will use design and discovery thinking, combined with ideation and input from experts in India, to develop a deep understanding of a challenge and a corresponding venture solution. Teams must develop sustainable business models to deliver a product or service that solves a specific problem. A viable business model means that the company or organization delivering the product or service can do so and scale by generating revenue.

The business model may be either a for-profit enterprise or a non-profit organization, but in either case the same viability criteria would apply. The solution should generate financial returns and social-environmental impact. For example, in creating a clean water business in the slums, the venture should be able to profitably provide clean water, scale operations, and improve public health for a large number of individuals.
2014 Challenge Topic
The primary challenge topics include waste, food, agriculture, energy, water, health and safety, and transportation.
During the initial weeks of the course you will learn about these challenges and conduct independent research in order to select a challenge area of interest. You will then rank areas and multidisciplinary teams will be created during week two. Once formed, teams will select or create a specific objective.

In ranking topics you should: (1) pick an important challenge, (2) identify an area intriguing to you, (3) choose a topic that ties in with past experiences or future career interests.

Topics and Objectives

Waste
To create an innovative solution to the urban waste crisis.
To make use of unused resources to generate value.

Food
To use an innovative product to reduce child malnutrition.
To connect marginal farmers to markets while creating value at both ends of the supply chain.

Agriculture
To help low-income farmers improve their yields.
To optimize use of fertilizer and/or pesticide to reduce environmental consequences.

Energy
To reduce reliance on dirty fuels and enhance energy access.
To reduce indoor air pollution caused by cooking indoors.

Water
To improve access to water treatment devices.
To affordably test for drinking water contamination.

Health and Safety
To enhance women’s safety (and quality of life) in cities.
To bring awareness to women’s health issues such as menstruation, birth control, and child care.

Transportation
To harness existing transportation systems in creative ways to solve a transportation or environmental challenge.
To create a new and sustainable mode of transportation to alleviate traffic congestion and/or air pollution.
Key Deliverables:
Percentages refer to portion of overall grade.

1. Participation [20%] including:
   - **Individual Assignments** - Assignments such as readings, flip grid videos, activities.
   - **Team Evaluation** - Teams will develop a grunt fund and evaluate their teammates.
   - **Online Business Model Canvas** - A business model canvas using an online tool.
   - **Presentations (2)** - An intermediate 5-min presentation on **Oct 10** to summarize your problem in detail. Mid-term 10-min presentation to summarize the need, solution, and impact on **Oct 31**. The mid-term judge panel will include MBA students.

2. Final Business Plan [40%] Each team will submit a written business plan (max 10 pages) by **Dec 8**. Plans must contain sections on:
   - Executive summary, problem, solution, customer, technology, operations, financials, competition, impact, risks and assumptions, team, pilot, etc.

3. Final Presentation [40%] Each team will give a 15-min venture pitch. The pitch may include, but is not limited to, the following:
   - **Problem:** What is the problem your venture will address? Why does it matter? Why hasn’t the problem been solved before?
   - **Solution:** What is the product or service? What are the financial and social value propositions? Why would someone opt for your solution as opposed to maintaining status quo? What is innovative about your approach? Why is it the right solution?
   - **Customer:** Who are your customers? Why would they pay for the solution? What is the target market size? How will you market?
   - **Technology:** What technology is required to provide your solution? Is it technically feasible?
   - **Operations:** What key activities will you perform? Who will you partner with? Which channels will you use to reach your customers?
   - **Financials:** What would be your pricing, margins, revenue, costs, and capital needs over time? What funding is needed to pilot?
   - **Competition:** Who is the competition? What’s your unique advantage over them?
   - **Impact:** What impact do you seek? What’s your theory of change? How will you measure impact?
   - **Risk and assumptions:** What are risks and assumptions? How will you address them?
   - **Team:** Who is on your team? Who are your advisors? Why are you the right team?
   - **Pilot:** How would you validate your plan? What would you (as foreigners) do to ensure a contextually appropriate solution?
Acara Challenge Process

CE 5571 - Acara Challenge Course
During the semester, teams will develop business plans and pitches for impact ventures. Teams will submit final business plans and make final pitches in December 2014. Acara will invite top CE 5571 teams to advance to the Acara Challenge Finals.

Acara Challenge Finals
The Acara Challenge Finals will occur in February 2015. Along with teams from CE 5571, outside teams from U of M may also present in the finals after taking CE 5572 or submitting an application. At the Finals, an external panel will select winning teams to receive award funding. Teams will be categorized as gold, silver, bronze or honorable mention.

Acara May-Term Course and Acara Fellowship Program
After the Finals, top CE 5571 teams will be invited to apply for seed funding, incubation, and travel for the Acara May-term program to Bangalore, India in May-June 2015. The purpose of ongoing support is to help passionate teams meet successful entrepreneurs, connect with start up service providers (i.e. law, finance, marketing experts), identify mentors and refine their business plan and pitch. During field visits teams meet experts, interact with potential customers, and build understanding of business viability. In classroom sessions, teams apply their learning from the field to refine their plan and pitch. In addition to attending the May-term course, UMN students can elect to pursue an Acara Fellowship in summer 2015 to pilot their venture plan in cooperation with an existing early start up impact venture in India for 3-6 months.
Judging Criteria
During the CE 5571 and Acara Challenge Finals presentations, teams will be judged by an investor-like panel. The judging criteria falls into five categories, further detailed in the appendix:

What is the problem? Is the customer need clearly identified? Has the customer need been identified through research? Are the social and economic needs clearly identified and defined? Has the team verified the customers are willing to buy the product or service?

What is the solution (value proposition)? Is the solution well connected to the problem? Is the solution validated by prototypes or existing examples? Is the solution realistic? Is the plan for implementation complete? Is the solution achievable by the team? Are the customer and customer segment clearly defined, and confirmed through research with potential customers?

How will your venture make money? Will the revenue streams sustain expenses incurred by the business? Can the business maintain a competitive advantage over competitors? Has the potential for revenue been validated?

What is the social impact? Does the venture have a substantial solution for goods/services penetration? Will a significant number of people be affected by the given solution? Will the venture create significant financial, social and environmental impact?

How well does the team communicate their ideas? Is the business plan organized, well written and void of errors? Is the presentation engaging and easy to follow? Was the team articulate and confident?
Confidentiality/Ownership
The intellectual content formed in CE 5571 and the Acara Challenge follows an “open source” model. Business plans and team presentations submitted to Acara will be posted online and publicly available. If teams generate intellectual property they do not wish to disclose publicly, they should exclude private details from their submissions. Solutions presented in CE 5571 and the Acara Challenge should focus on market research, business models, technology and/or products and implementation.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. Every year students are expelled from universities for plagiarism. We want to highlight what plagiarism is, why it brings severe penalties and how to avoid it.

Plagiarism is a form of dishonesty that occurs when a person passes off someone else's work as his or her own. It can range from failing to cite an author for ideas incorporated into a student’s paper to cutting and pasting paragraphs from websites to submitting a paper downloaded from the internet.

The U of M Definition
The U of M Student Conduct Code classifies scholastic dishonesty as an offense actionable by the University. Scholastic Dishonesty is: “Submission of false records of academic achievement; cheating on assignments or examinations; plagiarizing; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement.”

Knowing what to document is a key to avoid plagiarism
St. Martin’s Handbook’s Annotated Instructor’s Edition, defines that “Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s words as your own without crediting the original writer for those words” (566).

Sourced from the University of Minnesota and Rutgers University
Materials requiring credit

Direct quotations
Always credit the source when you directly quote another person. If you are paraphrasing but using a quote in the middle of a sentence, be sure to use quotation marks.

Assertions that are arguable or facts that are not widely known
If other people like you would not know the information, include a citation. In addition, include a citation if you use material that may not be true.

Judgments, opinions, and claims of others
Credit ideas and opinions of others. Even if you summarize someone else’s opinion in your own words, the idea doesn’t belong to you and needs citation.

Statistics, charts, tables, graphs and photos from any source
Include citations for all material. Information or help provided by friends, instructors, or others should be cited. Anyone who assists in the development of your ideas deserves credit. Instructors and friends can be valuable sources in your research. Don’t forget to acknowledge their contribution (566).

Materials not requiring credit

Common knowledge
If other people know the material (e.g., who is the President of the U.S., what “economic development” means, etc.) you need not cite the source. If you are giving specific data about a President’s policies and their impact, or citing the number of malnourished children in India, you should document the source.

Facts available in a wide variety of sources
Information that is commonly available in encyclopedias, almanacs, and textbooks does not need a citation. For example, if you wrote that John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 23, 1963, in Texas, you would not need to cite a source. If you went on to discuss a theory about a conspiracy behind the assassination, you would then need to cite your source.

Your own findings from primary field research
Facts or results from your own primary research can be credited to your team.

Useful Reading on Plagiarism
“How to recognize plagiarism” from Indiana University’s School of Education
http://www.indiana.edu/~istd
“How to paraphrase and quote appropriately” from University of Wisconsin
http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html
“Tips for avoiding plagiarism” from the University of Minnesota Libraries
http://tutorial.lib.umn.edu/infomachineb5bb.html
**Key Milestones**

[Week 1 – Sep 5] Introduction and Course Objectives
Introduction to the challenge areas of waste, food, agriculture, energy, water, women’s health and safety, and transportation.
Begin to research challenge areas and rank challenge areas from 1-5.

[Week 2 – Sep 12] Team Selection and Getting Started
Teams form, mentors selected.
Explore social venture case studies.
Discuss the framework for starting (problem identification, solution seeking).
Discuss communication processes, meeting times/locations, tasks, and roles with teammates.
Research your challenge area and develop grunt fund.
Create summary of an existing business plan.

[Week 3 – Sep 19] Venture Design Workshop I - Design Thinking
Explore discovery process, design thinking, empathy building and customer identification.
Problem definition.
Hold initial meetings/calls with US and India mentors.

[Week 4 – Sep 26] Venture Design Workshop II - Ideation
Learn about ideation, insight sharing, value proposition.
Begin to identify contacts you may wish to talk with to learn more.
Continue to establish in depth knowledge of your challenge area and potential solutions.
Define social value proposition and value proposition, apply them to your solution.
Review business models and the business model canvas.
Update your online business model template.
Continue to research your challenge and begin to define a solution.
Complete initial problem research and create 5-minute problem presentation.

[Week 6 – Oct 10] Problem Presentations
Make 5-minute presentation on a specific problem within your challenge area.
Research relevant business models and begin to define a workable venture solution.

Teams continue to build solution including understanding of value proposition, social value proposition, customer segments and target market, products/services, financials, etc.

[Week 9 – Oct 31] Mid-term Presentations
Provide 10-minute mid-term presentation on your problem and proposed venture solution.
Receive and apply feedback in order to improve your solution.

[Week 10-11 – Nov 7-14] Working Sessions
Continue to research challenge area, go deeper into the problem, and adapt venture solution.
Interact with experts in your challenge area in order to create a workable solution.
Revise presentation based on feedback from mid-terms.
[Week 12 – Nov 21] Making effective presentations
Submit first draft of full business plan.
Learn about making effective presentations.
Revise presentation based on effective presentations lecture.
Begin preparing your practice final presentation.

[Week 13 – Dec 5] Final Business Plan and Practice Final Presentation
Submit final business plan.
Revise and practice final presentations.

[Week 14 – Dec 12] Final Presentation
Final presentations to an external panel of experienced business professionals.

Additional Acara Opportunities
Grand Challenge Impact Studio, Fall 2014, Mondays 3:30-5pm. Apply by 9/22.
CE 5572 Acara Social Venture Launchpad one-week, two-credit J term course Jan 12-16, 2015.
Acara Challenge venture plan competition in February 2015.
CE 5570 Design for Sustainable Development: Discovery May-term course in Bangalore.
Acara Fellowship Program working with start up social venture in India for 3-6 months.
Resources for Students

**Acara’s website** provides content (www.acara.umn.edu) including past online lectures and Acara Challenge business plans.

Your two **Acara Mentors** are members of the business community who can give general business advice. They can guide your team in developing your business plan and pitch, thinking strategically, connecting with other relevant organizations and more.

**Acara Program Coordinator**, Aruna Raman, based in Bangalore, India, will provide regular on ground support in India. She will be available to address questions for each team, will provide primary research support, will help make connections in India, and will be available for regular skype calls with each team.

**Acara Assistant Program Director**, Brian Bell, will monitor teams’ progress. Each team should meet with Brian several times during the semester to review your challenge and solution. If you experience communication issues with team members or mentors that you cannot resolve, Brian should be your first point of contact.
Team Mentors
Each team will have two mentors. Mentors are an integral part of the Acara Challenge process. They help teams maintain focus while guiding development of innovative, robust solutions.

Each team will have a US-based mentor and an India-based mentor. The US mentors will have general business experience while the India-based mentors will have experience in India; subject matter expertise may vary. US-based mentors will be able to meet in person while India-based mentors will communicate online.

During the course you will work closely with your team’s mentors. It is important to contact both mentors immediately after teams are formed to establish the relationship and to set up a plan for communication. It is the responsibility of students to maintain communication with the mentors.

Mentor-Mentee Relationship
1. Your team must drive the relationship. At first you should reach out, introduce yourselves and establish expectations. The mentor is there to help, but you must put the work in ahead of time, initiate a meeting schedule and help mentors be effective.
2. Your mentors are not going to determine the solution for you. Their role is to lend their expertise to help you develop your ideas.
3. Mentors are busy people. Respect their time and be prepared for every meeting/call.
4. Meet/Skype your mentors regularly (i.e. each 1-2 weeks) so they stay engaged.
5. Your mentors will not know everything. If you need expertise beyond the mentor’s area, you can ask Acara staff for contacts or reach out to experts on your own.
6. If a mentor is not fulfilling their role, you should express your concern to them and/or speak with Acara staff.
7. Your team should document interactions with mentors via: http://goo.gl/IFxCE0
Acara India Program Coordinator

Each UMN team will have the opportunity to be in regular communication with Acara’s India Program Coordinator, Aruna Raman, who is based in Bangalore, India. She will serve as a primary contact person and resident Acara expert on all things India.

**Process for Contacting Aruna**

UMN students are responsible for initiating contact with Aruna once teams are formed. In the initial weeks, be sure to prepare an agenda for calls, know your goals for interacting, and ask lots of questions. Each team will be able to have calls with Aruna 2-3 times per month. Aruna will be able to answer your questions, provide insights and feedback on your ideas, conduct basic primary field research activities in India, and at times make introductions to contacts in India.

**Communication Methods with Aruna**

Contact will be primarily via e-mail, Skype, Hangout and phone. Internet in India is often too slow for video, which may need to be turned off. Students may also use low-cost calling cards (e.g.: www.dial91.com) to call from a US phone to an Indian phone.

Who is Aruna?

Aruna Raman is contracted with Acara through the University of Minnesota. Along with supporting Acara’s general operations and programming in India, she is a resource for teams in CE 5571.

Aruna has a background in journalism, international development, and impact entrepreneurship and incubation. She has been involved with running Acara programs in Bangalore for several years and is very familiar with Acara’s program and staff. Aruna lives in Bangalore, and previously lived in Pittsburgh while pursuing her Master’s in International Development.
Contacting India Experts
Once your team is digging in deep, you should have interview calls with experts in India. Calls can occur on Skype, Hangout or mobile.

Although it can be difficult to schedule calls due to time differences, they are necessary. Good hours to have calls are in the morning between 8am-noon CT. The time difference is 10.5 hours during CDT, 11.5 hours during CST.

On calls with contacts in India:
On your first call, take time to formally introduce yourselves. Describe the purpose of the call. Discuss your goals and key learnings so far. On subsequent calls, discuss updates, upshots, concerns, and questions. Before closing a call, summarize any next steps or action items, and always graciously thank the contact for their time.

Must we contact people in India?
Yes. Creating a business plan based in India is not easy. It requires becoming grounded in a deep cultural understanding. In order to develop an effective plan it is necessary to form relationships with contacts in India and learn everything you can from them.

Helpful Tips for Calls to India
Poor internet connections can often interfere with calls. Be patient. If you have a bad line, hang up and call again.

Speak slowly and clearly. Don’t be afraid to ask for clarification, even a few times.

If connection difficulties are preventing you from communicating with your teammates, follow up with email or calls to mobiles.

If you will use reference material in your call, send materials out ahead of time so there is time for everyone to review it.

Keep in mind that although you will be speaking English, accents, pronunciation, and terminology may differ. Speak clearly, slowly, and avoid slang.

What if India contacts don’t respond?
Establishing communication can prove challenging. The best way to make contact initially is to introduce yourself in a brief email. If you do not receive an email response in a few business days, send another email and call by cell phone at a reasonable time. Cell phones will be a prime form of communication for some contacts who do not rely on email as regularly.
Online Collaboration Tools

There are countless online tools to facilitate communication with US teammates, mentors, and contacts in India. Skype, Google Hangout, and Google Docs are some we have found most useful for teams. Flipgrid and Dropbox will be used during the course as well. There are other tools, too. You should experiment to find which are most effective for you and your team.

**Skype:** Skype is a free software to make video or voice calls. You can download it from www.skype.com and create an account. Along with low-cost or free calls, Skype can be used for text chatting.

**Google Hangout:** Hangout is a simple way to have frequent contact with contacts in India. It has similar functions to Skype, and is sometimes better for sharing presentations and files on calls, and for video calls.

**Google Docs:** This tool allows you to upload documents or spreadsheets and share them with your teammates. More than one person can edit a document at a time.

**FlipGrid:** This video sharing site will be used to communicate responses to questions specified by the instructors. The course FlipGrid can be accessed via: http://flipgrid.com/#71ed647c. Password = India.

**Dropbox:** This file sharing tool will be used to distribute course readings and materials. You can access it via www.dropbox.com online or install it on your computer for free. You may also create a Dropbox folder for your team to store shared documents. Be aware that once a folder is shared it syncs files. A file deleted from a shared folder will delete it for everyone on the folder.
Conducting Research

1. After teams form you should collect primary and secondary information via the internet, Aruna Raman, and contacts in India.

2. Your team should begin by making a list of questions and information to be collected.

3. You should talk to Aruna, Brian, your mentors, and the instructors about people to interview to learn more on your topic.

4. You can collect info to help define your problem and solution through sites, online newspapers and journals, documentaries, library books, etc. You should also collect info via Acara’s team and contacts you reach out to on your own in the US and India. Successful teams in past years have built their own contacts with experts in India.

5. When you find interesting resources online, you should share them with your team. You may want to store key resources in a shared location for your team, such as Dropbox.

6. You may want to maintain a folder with photos related to your team’s solution. You can find photos through blogs and photo sites such as Flickr and Picasa, as well as through Acara’s staff.

Customer Interaction

Before finalizing your business plan, it is important to clearly understand your target market. To achieve this, your team must conduct interviews with individuals in India. You can conduct interviews with your mentor, with experts and entrepreneurs, or with communities in India. Some of these interviews can happen with support of Acara’s India Program Coordinator.

When interacting with customers you should:

1. **Assess and analyze the overall situation:** Gain a clear understanding of how they live, their beliefs, and their culture.

2. **Explore areas of daily life that the product or service will impact:** If marketing a water purification system, discover how they presently purify water, who completes this task, where the water comes from, etc.

3. **Determine your customer’s need for the product you are marketing:** How would it help improve their lives?

4. **Communicate effectively:** Find a clear way to communicate the info you gathered to your team, mentors, and Acara staff.
Design and Creative Thinking Process

Once your team has completed initial research, you are ready to begin developing your business plan in more detail. Reaching your target customers may require you to employ unique and innovative marketing strategies which can be developed using creative thinking techniques.

The following diagram outlines the creative thinking process:

At this point, the primary research phase has already been completed, so it is time to move to analysis and brainstorming, then ideation. We are providing you with activity guidelines to help with each step. The goal is not to complete the entire step within one activity, but to start the phase and give your team a strong framework to continue through the development process.

Diagram by Linda Pulik, Design and Creative Thinking for the Acara Challenge, 2010
Analysis

Analysis is a way to synthesize the information gained through research and create a focus for your business plan. The analysis phase should begin after initial research has been conducted online and through contacts in India.

1. **Review the specifics** of your product/service and market to renew your focus.

2. Read through all the research notes and pull out **key trends** that appear. The goal is to organize the information you have received to make it more manageable.

3. Interpret the information by attaching **overall themes** to the key trends you observe. *(e.g., people have a difficult time carrying water from the pump to their homes and others cannot lift the heavy jugs when they are filled, so you could conclude that water transport is an issue)*.

4. Share your overall themes with your teammates and begin deciding on a more **specific focus**. *(e.g., if you learned many people have a difficult time acquiring clean drinking water, perhaps you would choose to focus on a water purification and distribution system in your business plan)*.

After the initial analysis of research information, your team will want to continue analyzing and gathering information as you develop your plan.

Some points you may want to consider:

- Determining the value your product will offer to a customer.
- Gaining a clear understanding of your customers’ financial capabilities and resources available to them.
- Clearly defining your market segment (focus on demographics, beliefs, and lifestyle).
- Assessing the feasibility of your plan: why has this not been done already? If there is competition, what added value will your product or service bring?
- Determining the key players and decision-makers within your market.
- Identifying the main obstacles that have (or could) prevented the product or service from being successful in the market.
Brainstorming

Conducting a group brainstorm session is a helpful way to generate many new ideas. Through analysis, your team should already have identified some areas that need more focus, so brainstorming will help develop these ideas.

1. Find a time that your team can come together. Allow about an hour without any distractions.

2. Review the main problems you hope to solve. “We have found that customers lack knowledge of how to properly use the product, so we must come up with strategies to educate them.”

3. Provide blank pages for sketching and sticky notes. Set a team goal for a certain number of ideas in a specified time frame (less than a minute should be spent on a single idea). This is a time to focus on quantity over quality. Try to get out as many ideas as possible.

4. You may want to set a specific goal. “In 15 minutes let’s come up with 25 different ideas related to various education strategies”.

5. Once the brainstorming period is up, review the ideas. Determine which have the most promise and create a plan of action to develop them (some ideas may require further research or exploration).

**Brainstorming Tips:**

Do not dismiss ANY ideas: try building on the thoughts of others rather than shooting them down.

Encourage radical ideas: out-of-the-box thinking can lead to revolutionary solutions.

Be visual: use colors, sketches, and large writing to convey your ideas.

Stay focused on the topic at hand.

Be polite and respectful to all involved.

*Framework for brainstorming exercise inspired by article on IDEO’s “Power of Design.” Businessweek 17 May 2004.*
Ideation

Ideation is a way to develop your thoughts and ideas into tangible solutions. This process begins after you have determined an overall direction for your plan. For example, you may have decided your marketing strategy will focus on educational campaigns in schools. But now, you must refine ideas produced in brainstorming to determine the specifics. At this point, details become more important.

**Ideation Tips:**

Engage the consumer as much as possible by frequently asking for feedback via interviews and prototyping (see following page).

First, focus on the outcome, don’t get hung up on small details until you have a clear direction.

Try to come to mutual agreements with your teammates on each aspect.

1. Similar to the brainstorming method explained previously, take time to rapidly generate various approaches to achieve the focus of your sales plan. However, at this point your ideas will be more focused. You may want to come up with some general categories to consider separately. *(e.g. if creating an educational campaign focused in schools, your categories may include bridging language barriers and adapting the program for various age groups).*

2. Create rough sketches of various business scenarios and visual maps of systems to help your teammates understand your ideas.

3. After generating many concepts, begin narrowing them down by considering which approaches are most efficient and will best serve the needs of your customer segment.

4. Once an overall solution or idea has been developed, identify additional research needed (technology, target market, business practice, etc).

5. Consider specific elements of your plan that may need to be designed for the user such as educational or visual marketing materials.
Prototyping
Prototypes can directly reduce risks associated with creating a new product or business by:
• Assessing the market for a product.
• Testing the performance of a particular technology (structural).
• Testing a delivery system, marketing campaign, etc. to gauge customer acceptance.
• Determining factors that need improvement to increase usability.
• Providing proof-of-concept to investors.

Prototyping Tips:
• Use video to record customers’ interaction with the prototype model.
• Keep it simple. Avoid expensive or complicated mock-ups.
• Focus more on the overall function than the small details.
• Test prototypes with a variety of consumers and scenarios.

Behavioral Prototypes do not replicate the product. Instead, they are used to simulate what a system will do for the user. These prototypes are often temporary and done with little effort. This type of prototyping can be especially helpful to determine if a particular marketing or distribution plan will be effective.

Structural Prototypes usually test the infrastructure of the system such as the specific technology and will often evolve into the actual solution.

Example: if your business is a water distribution and purification network, the behavioral prototype would simulate the delivery system to examine customer reaction, while the structural prototype may test the viability of your water purification technology.
## Judging Criteria

### What is the problem?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No clear customer need articulated</td>
<td>Customer need identified but not well validated</td>
<td>The customer need has been clearly identified and validated with field research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement does not articulate social or economic need</td>
<td>Either social or economic need clearly identified</td>
<td>Both social and economic need clearly identified and defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little to no feedback from potential customers on interest or affordability</td>
<td>Either indirect or similar product identified to validate customer interest</td>
<td>Validated that customers are willing to buy the product/service (do they want it, can they afford it, do they value it)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### What is your solution (value proposition)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The solution is not well tied to the problem definition</td>
<td>The solution is clearly connected to the problem definition</td>
<td>The solution is well connected to the problem and is also shown by prototypes or similar examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The solution is lacking in realism</td>
<td>The solution is realistic but implementation team needs not identified</td>
<td>The solution is realistic and implementation plans is complete and doable by the team identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer and customer segment not clearly defined</td>
<td>Customer and customer segment defined but not confirmed with field research</td>
<td>Customer and customer segment clearly defined and confirmed through primary research with potential customers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How do you make money?
[1-10 points]

Low
Customer and customer segment not clearly defined
The revenue does not meet costs
The business plan has no discussion of maintaining competitive advantage and advantages over the next best alternative

Medium
Customer and customer segment defined but not confirmed with field research
The revenue is just enough to meet costs
The business plan has limited discussion of how the competitive advantage will be maintained but does identify next best alternative

High
Customer and customer segment clearly defined and confirmed through primary research with potential customers
The revenue is above costs and will sustain the organization
The business plan is defined to maintain the competitive advantage over next best alternative, and has customer validation

What is the social impact? (social value proposition)
[1-10 points]

Low
Low projections of goods/services penetration and of people affected by use of said goods/services
Low estimate of financial impact (number of jobs, increased income); social impact (public health); or environmental

Medium
Medium projections of goods/services penetration and of people affected by use of said goods/services
Medium estimate of financial impact (number of jobs, increased income); social impact (public health); or environmental

High
High projections of goods/services penetration and of people affected by use of said goods/services
High estimate of financial impact (number of jobs, increased income); social impact (public health); or environmental
**How well did you communicate your ideas?**

[1-5 points]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written plan was disorganized, had spelling or grammatical errors, difficult to understand. Presentation was unclear, presenters unprofessional.</td>
<td>Written plan somewhat organized, some proofreading errors. Presenters or presentation clear but not polished.</td>
<td>Written plan well organized, well written, no spelling or grammatical errors. Presentation was engaging, easy to follow, speakers were confident, articulate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Overall team scores can range from a 5 to 45.*