Background

IDEAS is an annual public service competition started in 2001 by Amy Smith and Sally Susnowitz at MIT to promote innovation and inventiveness for community needs worldwide. The IDEAS Competition provides an opportunity for MIT students to work with community partners in developing designs, plans, strategies, materials, and mechanisms that can make a positive societal impact locally, nationally or internationally. The guiding principles of IDEAS are:

- To promote inventiveness, entrepreneurship and design skills
- To increase awareness of community needs
- To provide resources to implement ideas that can resolve community needs
- To expose students to real-world problem solving
- To empower students with the conviction that they can make a difference in the world

Each year the IDEAS Competition begins in October, providing student-led teams ample time to incubate and refine their ideas. At the end of the academic year, a panel of judges recruited from industry, academia, and social enterprises selects the winners of the year’s competition. Winners are presented with IDEAS awards at the Final Awards Ceremony and Poster Session.

The IDEAS awards are intended to support innovations in the early stages of implementation and facilitate further financial support from other organizations. The IDEAS Competition offers awards for $5000, $3000, and $2000. Additionally, the Lemelson-MIT program sponsors $10,000 in awards for international technology projects, and The Boeing Company sponsors $5000 for domestic projects.

Team projects are judged for their innovation, feasibility, and societal impact, rather than for their profit-making potential. A successful entry will be unique and feasible, clearly explaining the problem that it addresses, its benefits, and its beneficiaries.

It is anticipated that successful projects will develop into business ventures or non-profit programs in the future. However, unlike most business plan competitions, teams are not required to submit financial analysis, cash flow projections, market economics, and competitive analyses. Teams should perform background research, have a clear strategic approach, and perform feasibility analyses; however profitability is not the main concern.

The IDEAS Competition is jointly sponsored by the Edgerton Center and the MIT Public Service Center and organized by a team that includes student and community volunteers. The 2002-2003 competition is made possible by grants from the d’Arbeloff Fund for Excellence in Education, The Boeing Company, and The Silicon Spice Founders Fund. Additional funding to support technological innovations for the developing world is provided by the Lemelson-MIT program.

http://web.mit.edu/ideas/