WORLD SERIES of INNOVATION
Powered by NFTE

IMPACT LEAGUE

Competitor Guide

Everything you need to build a winning entry — no teacher or coach required.

Ages 13–24 • Free to enter • Solo or in teams of up to 4

How to Use This Guide

This guide is built so you can go from a blank page to a finished, competitive entry entirely on your own — whether or not you have a teacher, mentor, or coach walking you through it. Work through it in order:

1. Part 1 tells you what WSI Impact League is, who can enter, and how the season works.
2. Part 2 teaches you the design thinking process — the same method professional innovators use.
3. Part 3 walks you question-by-question through the actual Entry Form, in order, with tips and a preview of exactly what judges score at each step.
4. Part 4 gives you a self-check checklist to review your entry like a judge would, before you submit.

Look for these boxes as you go:

> 🤌 *A general tip or brainstorming exercise.*

> **ENTRY FORM — Example Question**
>
> **This is exactly what you'll be asked on the real Entry Form.**
>
> ***TIP:*** *This is the tip that goes with it.*

> ⚖️ **What judges are scoring here — Example % of total score**
>
> **High score:** what earns a top score
> **Low score:** what earns a low score

Part 1: Welcome to WSI Impact League

What is the World Series of Innovation?

The NFTE World Series of Innovation (WSI) is a free, global online competition from the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) that invites young people to design innovative solutions to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — big global issues like climate change, hunger, poverty, inequality, health, and education. Every season, NFTE opens a new set of Impact League challenges, and competitors submit an original idea in response to one of them.

WSI is primarily an ideation competition. You are not expected to have a working product or write a full business plan — you're asked to think like an entrepreneur and describe a feasible, well-reasoned idea.

Am I eligible?

- You must be between 13 and 24 years old (as of the entry deadline for the current season — check innovation.nfte.com for this season's exact cutoff date).
- You do not need to be a U.S. citizen.
- You do not need to have taken a NFTE class.
- There is no entry fee.
- If you know someone 12 or under who wants to compete, point them to the WSI Imagination League instead.

Solo or team?

You choose. Teams can have 1, 2, 3, or 4 members. You don't have to decide up front — sign up, and you can add teammates later.

Can I enter more than one challenge?

Yes, it's one entry per team, per challenge. If you're part of more than one team or entering multiple challenges, you can do so using the same account. Just make sure to update the team member information for each entry so it reflects the correct team for that specific challenge.

How the season works, start to finish

Every WSI season follows the same five phases. Exact dates change each year, so always confirm the current season's calendar at innovation.nfte.com — but the flow is always the same:

1. Entries open. New challenges launch in the fall. You register, pick a challenge, and build your entry using the online form. You can save your work and come back to it as many times as you like before the deadline.
2. Office hours. Live support sessions are offered throughout the entry period for anyone competing — you don't need a teacher to attend; check the current schedule and Zoom link on the WSI website here.
3. First-round judging. After entries close, judges score every entry. The Top 10 teams in each challenge category are notified in February and advance.
1. Finals. The Top 10 finalists in each category are notified and asked to submit a one-minute video pitch.

2. Winners announced. First ($1,500), second ($600), and third ($300) place winners are announced in each challenge category, typically around the UN's World Creativity and Innovation Week in April. Teams split prize money equally among members.

Step-by-step: how to register

1. Go to innovation.nfte.com and find the current season's Impact League challenges.
2. Register on the online submission platform here: World Series of Innovation. Provide your name, email address, a password, and a tentative innovation name (you can change the team name later).
3. Click the validation link in your confirmation email.
4. Log in to your WSI Dashboard. From here you can select your challenge, add teammates, and start your entry.

Part 2: Learn the Design Thinking Process

Design thinking is a human-centered problem-solving method, and it's exactly how the WSI Entry Form is structured. Once you understand the five steps below, the entry form will feel less like a test and more like a guided workflow. Design thinking is celebrated for putting the people you're designing for first, and for encouraging two habits that make ideas stronger: questioning assumptions and reframing the problem.

1. Empathize	2. Define	3. Ideate	4. Prototype	5. Test

Step 1 — Empathize

Learn about the customer (sometimes called the “end-user”) you're designing for. Who is affected by the problem? What do they need, want, and struggle with? This maps to the Empathize section of the Entry Form.

Step 2 — Define

Turn what you learned into one specific, well-defined problem statement. A common mistake is staying too broad (“people need better health care”) instead of specific (“teens in rural areas can't easily reach a mental health counselor after school”).

Step 3 — Ideate

Brainstorm as many possible solutions as you can before settling on one. Quantity first, judgment later — then narrow down to your strongest idea. This maps to the Ideate section of the Entry Form.

Step 4 — Prototype

Plan out how your idea would actually work and, if you want, sketch or mock it up. WSI does not require a working prototype — but you should think through the mechanics, how it would be implemented, financed, and marketed. This maps to the Implementation & Sustainability section of the Entry Form.

Step 5 — Test

Normally, this step means sharing your prototype to get feedback and refine it. Since WSI is an ideation competition, your “test” step happens in the Reflection section — where you look back on what you learned and identify what you'd want to explore or test further with more time.

> **Why this matters**
>
> *The Entry Form isn't a random list of questions — it's design thinking in order. If you work through the five steps above in sequence before you open the form, filling it out will be fast and your answers will connect logically from one section to the next.*

Finding an opportunity (if you're stuck on what problem to solve)

Not sure what idea to pursue yet? Look for opportunity in these classic places:

- Problems: What problems exist in your life, your community, or the world that a product, service, or initiative could fix?
- Questioning the status quo: Can you improve something that already exists, or adapt it for a new purpose?

- Changes: Shifts in laws, technology, social norms, or the climate often create needs that aren't being met yet.
- New discoveries: A new technology or finding can open the door to products that didn't exist before.
- Your own lived experience: A hobby, interest, or personal experience of yours could point toward a real, unmet need.
- Your own unique knowledge: Something you know really well could become the seed of a great idea.

Brainstorming exercise (do this solo or with your team)

1. Prep your materials. Grab paper, index cards, or sticky notes — one idea per sheet.
2. Rapid ideation. Set a timer for 10–15 minutes and write down as many ideas as possible to meet your customer's need. Ask “what if?” and don't censor yourself — every idea counts.
3. Share & build (team only). Spend 10 minutes exchanging ideas. Use “yes, and…” to build on each other's thinking.
4. Evaluate your ideas. Sort each idea into Yes / Maybe / No. Discuss as a team, or reflect solo, on which are strongest.
5. Pick & refine. Choose the idea you'll develop, and move into the Entry Form.

Identifying your customer

It's easy to design for yourself — you already know what you want. It's harder, and more valuable, to design for someone else. Build a customer profile before you write anything on the form:

- Who is most directly affected by this issue? Are there other groups with a stake in solving it?
- Paint a picture in your mind: How old are they? Where do they live? What do they do? What are their basic needs, dreams, and concerns?
- Avoid “everyone is my customer.” The more specific your customer, the more convincing your solution will be.

A note on the SDGs and social entrepreneurship

Impact entrepreneurs aim to create social good, sometimes through nonprofits and sometimes through for-profit strategies — many try to “do well by doing good.” Your customer doesn't have to be the person directly affected by the problem. It could be a different group — a school, a company, a government agency — that you activate to help the people who need it. If your customer isn't the direct beneficiary, understanding what motivates them is what will make your idea convincing.

Part 3: Build Your Entry, Section by Section

The Entry Form has five parts, and they follow the design thinking process you just learned. All questions in Parts I–V are required and scored — your answers to each individual question matter, not just your overall idea. You can save your progress and come back as many times as you need before the deadline.

Judging is blind

Your team name and entry image are visible to judges, but all other team information is hidden. Judges score your ideas, not your identity.

Part I — General

Start here with the basics.

ENTRY FORM — Question

What is the name of your innovative idea, service, or product?

ENTRY FORM — Question

Which challenge are you entering?

What judges are scoring here — Challenge & SDG Alignment — 10% of total score

High score: your idea directly addresses the challenge you selected and clearly promotes its related SDG.

Low score: your idea doesn't match the challenge or SDG you picked.

This part is graded together with your idea description in Part III — so make sure the connection between your chosen challenge and your idea stays obvious throughout your entry, not just here.

Part II — Empathize

This is Design Thinking Step 1 (Empathize) and Step 2 (Define). Review the issues in your chosen challenge and identify who is most impacted. Then build a profile of your target customer using geographic, demographic, or psychographic traits before you answer.

ENTRY FORM — Question

Who is experiencing the problem you are working to solve?

TIP: *Be specific. Think about a group or community that faces a real challenge — students, caregivers, small business owners, people in your city, or someone else.*

ENTRY FORM — Question

What problem or need are you trying to solve for your customer?

TIP: *Explain clearly what makes this a real problem for people. Why does it matter? What happens if it goes unsolved? Look for the root cause, not just the symptoms.*

What judges are scoring here — Empathize & Define — 20% of total score

High score: you show a deep understanding of a real need and clearly profile your customer.

Low score: the problem is vague or missing, or it's unclear who is impacted.

This is the single most heavily-weighted individual section on the form. Don't rush it — a specific, well-researched customer and problem statement makes every later section easier to write convincingly.

Part III — Ideate

This is Design Thinking Step 3 (Ideate) and the start of Step 4 (Prototype). Use the brainstorming exercise from Part 2 of this guide before you write your answer: set a timer for up to 10 minutes, write down every idea you can think of to meet your customer's need, then pick your strongest one.

ENTRY FORM — Question

What is your idea, how would it work, and what makes it different from what already exists?

TIP: *Walk us through it step-by-step — you don't need every moving part figured out yet. Then tell us what makes your version different or better: is it the approach, the audience, the delivery? A judge should be able to tell your idea apart from a similar one after reading this.*

ENTRY FORM — Question (optional, not scored)

Show us your idea — a logo, sketch, or mockup.

TIP: *This is optional and doesn't affect your score. It just helps judges picture your idea — hand-drawn is completely fine. Skip it if drawing isn't your thing.*

This single answer is scored from three different angles — make sure it covers all three:

What judges are scoring here — Ideate — 25% of total score

High score: your idea is original, well-suited to the need you identified, and explained with confidence.

Low score: the idea is unrealistic, confusing, or unrelated to the prompt.

What judges are scoring here — Marketing & Competitive Advantage — 15% of total score

High score: you have a creative idea name and a clear, competitive point of difference.

Low score: the idea is generic, with no clear reason why it stands out.

What judges are scoring here — Innovation & Feasibility — 10% of total score

High score: your idea is unique or first-of-its-kind, and you clearly explain how it could actually work.

Low score: the idea lacks innovation or feasibility.

Together, that's 50% of your total score riding on this one answer — spend more time here than on any other section. Re-read your answer and check: does it solve the specific problem from Part II? Is it clearly different from existing solutions? Could someone build a rough version of it?

Part IV — Implementation & Sustainability

This is the rest of Design Thinking Step 4 (Prototype). Even great ideas need a plan for how they'd work in the real world — as a business, a nonprofit, or a school project.

ENTRY FORM — Question

What type of group or funder would be the best fit to support your idea?

TIP: *Options include: business/company; non-profit organization; government agency or public program; school/college/education system; grassroots/community organization; international group like the UN/WHO; crowdfunding. Think about who already works on problems like this one — you don't need to name a specific organization, just pick the type that makes the most sense.*

ENTRY FORM — Question

How would your solution remain sustainable?

TIP: *This is where judges want to see your thinking, not just your final answer. Walk through why the type of support you picked above actually makes sense for your idea — can it generate money, get backing from a funder, or grow with more users or partners? What would need to be true for it to keep going?*

What judges are scoring here — Implementation & Sustainability — 10% of total score

High score: you give specific, credible reasoning for how the idea could be supported and sustained.

Low score: no real thought is given to how it would continue, or the funder type is picked with no reasoning behind it.

Part V — Reflection

This is Design Thinking Step 5 (Test) — reframed for an ideation competition. Instead of testing a physical prototype, you reflect on what you've learned and what you'd want to explore next.

ENTRY FORM — Question

What did working on this challenge teach your team about the problem, and what's one thing you'd want to explore further with more time?

TIP: *Answer this together as a team if you worked as one — what did you learn about the people you're designing for, or about how you think through problems? What would you dig into next if you had another week?*

What judges are scoring here — Reflect & Impact — 10% of total score

High score: your reflection is specific and genuine about what the team learned, with a thoughtful next step.

Low score: the reflection is generic or missing, with no clear next step identified.

Part 4: Self-Check Before You Submit

Without a teacher reviewing your draft, it's on you to catch weak spots before you hit Submit. Go through this checklist like a judge would — out loud, if you can, or with a teammate.

✓	Before you submit, ask yourself…
☐	Part I: Does my idea name and chosen challenge match what I actually describe later in the form?
☐	Part II: Is my customer specific (a named group, not “everyone”)? Would a stranger understand exactly who has this problem and why it matters?
☐	Part III: Does my idea directly solve the problem I described in Part II? Have I clearly said what makes it different from anything that already exists?
☐	Part III: Could a judge tell my idea apart from someone else's very similar idea after reading only this answer?
☐	Part IV: Have I explained why my chosen funder/support type actually fits my idea — not just picked one at random?
☐	Part IV: Have I addressed how the idea could keep going or grow over time?
☐	Part V: Is my reflection specific to my team's actual experience, with a real next step — not a generic sentence like “we learned a lot”?
☐	Overall: Have I answered every required question in Parts I–V? (Nothing left blank — every question is scored.)
☐	Overall: If I have a Team Member 2, 3, or 4, have I filled out all of their required “My Team” questions?
☐	Overall: Did I save/preview my entry and re-read it once, start to finish, before submitting?

One more thing

You're welcome to submit early once you're happy with your entry — you don't have to wait until the deadline. If you're selected as a Top 10 finalist, you'll be asked to do one more thing: record a one-minute video pitch in support of your entry. It's worth watching example pitch videos and pitch-advice resources on the WSI Hall of Fame even before you submit, just so you're ready if you advance.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the World Series of Innovation?

An annual, free online competition that invites young people ages 5–24 to design innovative solutions aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. NFTE launches new challenges every fall, and competitors can win cash prizes for ideas that advance the SDGs.

Do I need to be a U.S. citizen or have taken an NFTE class?

No to both. WSI Impact League is open to any eligible young person worldwide, whether or not you've ever taken an entrepreneurship class.

Do I need a teacher or mentor to compete?

No. Everything you need is in this guide and on the WSI website. Office hours are also open to anyone competing, whether or not you're connected to a school or program.

Can I be on more than one team, or enter more than one challenge?

Yes — but each team/entry needs its own unique email address, since your email is linked to a single entry. If you want to be part of multiple teams, you'll need multiple email addresses.

Do I need to build a working prototype?

No. WSI is primarily an ideation competition. You just need to describe a feasible, well-thought-out idea — including how it might be implemented, financed, and marketed.

What do I win?

There are three cash prizes in every Impact League challenge category: 1st place ($1,500), 2nd place ($600), and 3rd place ($300). Teams split their prize equally among members.

Still have questions?

Reach out to wsi@nfte.com, or check innovation.nfte.com for this season's specific challenges, dates, and office-hours schedule.