2026 FOWLER
BUSINESS CONCEPT CHALLENGE

# WIN A $15,000 SCHOLARSHIP for your idea!

## MARK YOUR CALENDER:

**Concept Submission Deadline**
Oct. 26, 2026
Due online by 11:59 p.m.

**Semifinalists Announced**
Nov. 5, 2025

**2026 Semifinals**
Nov. 20, 8 - 11:30 a.m.

**Finals & Awards Ceremony**
Nov. 20, 1 - 4:45 p.m.

*"Competing in the Fowler Business Concept Challenge pushed me to grow my pitch and business concept with support and feedback every step of the way. Reaching the final round just three months into my first year was an unforgettable moment."*

**Kaiya Daley '29, Entrepreneurship Major**
Bloom, a compact, solar-powered water monitoring device that tracks water quality and detects chemical spills in real time to support early detection and rapid response.

2026 FOWLER
BUSINESS CONCEPT CHALLENGE

**Open to ALL majors & graduate students! Learn more:**

*"I didn't realize I had that entrepreneurial mindset... I entered into the Fowler competition and was accepted as a semifinalist. I took a huge leap of faith in something that was out of my comfort zone."*

**Drew Devore '26, Executive MBA**
Humanized Health, an AI-powered healthcare communication platform designed to help patients better understand their lab results and navigate conversations about their care.

# WORKSHOPS

## LET'S GET STARTED!

**Thursday, Sept. 24**
**5:30-6:30 p.m. in MCH 117**
Learn how to get started! Find a problem you're passionate about and think through the early stages of your concept.

## FROM IDEA TO BUSINESS

**Tuesday, Oct. 6**
**5:30-6:30 p.m. in MCH 117**
Hone in on the market opportunity for your solution, brainstorm a business model and determine what makes your venture investor-worthy.

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR PROBLEM & CUSTOMER

**Tuesday, Sept. 29**
**5:30-6:30 p.m. in MCH 117**
Gain a deeper understanding of the problem, your customer and begin thinking through potential solutions.

## MENTOR SWARM

**Tuesday, Oct. 20**
**5:30-7:00 p.m. in MCH 100**
Connect with several mentors for feedback on your submission prior to the deadline.

UNIVERSITY OF St.Thomas
Schulze School of Entrepreneurship

# FOWLER SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Provide a brief description of your business concept following the questions outlined below. Your submission can be a maximum of five pages, double-spaced, 11-point font.

## Business Track

**Description:** Provide a concise description of the proposed business and why it is unique/compelling.
**Proposed Solution:** What is your product or service? How will it solve the problem? How will your solution create exceptional value for the customer? How is it different from and superior to other solutions in the market?
**Target Market:** Who is your customer? What customer problem will you solve? How does your customer solve that problem today? What other solutions will compete for that customer?
**Market Opportunity:** Provide a preliminary estimate of the size of the potential market (number of customers that can be reasonably addressed).
**Business Model:** How will you deliver this solution to your customer affordably and effectively, and how will the venture make money (revenue model)?
**Investment Potential:** Why should someone invest in your venture? Explain why you will be successful.
**Ethical Considerations:** What are the ethical principles guiding your business model, operations, and decision-making process? How does your business address fairness, transparency, social responsibility, and environmental impact?
**Transparent AI Use Statement:** Describe how you used AI in developing your business concept, including which tools you used and for what purpose, where AI influenced or challenged your thinking, and what you learned from real people that AI could not tell you.

## Business Track Judging Criteria

**Originality:** business idea is new, novel and unique
Value Proposition: a clear and compelling value proposition – legitimate, recognized need and appropriate solution
**Competitive Advantage:** creates more value for customer than alternative solutions
**Market Opportunity:** adequate market size; viable business model
**Feasibility:** reasonable prospect of funding and successful implementation
**Stakeholders and Society:** clear understanding and articulation of impact on stakeholders and society – demonstrate understanding of potential benefits, harms, ethical issues, that might arise in conjunction with this concept and how to address them
**Well-researched:** demonstrates clear understanding of customer/customer need, market, competitive set, solution requirements
**Investment Opportunity:** the business concept is attractive to potential investors as it has a good opportunity to have substantial return
**AI Transparency Statement:** clearly and accurately discloses how AI was used, evaluated, verified, and supplemented by human insight

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## Social Track

**Description:** Provide a concise description of the proposed business and why it is unique/compelling. What social or environmental problem does your business aim to solve? Provide some evidence of the scale of the problem.

**Proposed solution:** What product or service will you offer to address the problem? How will your solution help alleviate the problem?

**Target Market:**

A.Who is impacted by the problem? How do they experience the problem today? How do they try to solve it today? How will they be impacted by your solution?

B.Who is your customer (ifdifferentfromabove)? What customer problem will you solve? How does your customer solve that problem today? What other solutions will compete for that customer?

**Market Opportunity:** Provide a preliminary estimate of the size of the potential market (number of customers that can be reasonably addressed).

**Business model:** How will you deliver this solution to your customer affordably and effectively, and how will the venture make money (revenue model)? How is your revenue model connected to your goal to deliver social impact?

**Ethical Considerations**: What are the ethical principles guiding your business model, operations, and decision- making processes? How does your business address fairness, transparency, social responsibility and environmental impact? Are there any potential harms to stakeholders or society, and how do you mitigate those?

**Potential social impact:** How will your concept contribute to the common good? How will you measure the success of your venture against the problem it's working to solve? What measures or metrics will you use (e.g. number of clients fed; decrease in chemical run-off, etc.)?

**Transparent AI Use Statement:** Describe how you used AI in developing your business concept, including which tools you used and for what purpose, where AI influenced or challenged your thinking, and what you learned from real people that AI could not tell you.

## Social Track Judging Criteria

**Social or Environmental Problem:**Research-based outline of a social or environmental problem that needs to be addressed
**Originality:**business idea is a new, novel and unique approach to addressing stated problem
**Value Proposition:**a clear and compelling value proposition –legitimate, recognized need and appropriate solution
**Competitive Advantage:**creates more value for customer than alternative solutions while also offering a solution to a social/environmental problem
**Market Opportunity:** adequate market size; viable business model
**Feasibility:**reasonable prospect of funding and successful implementation
**Stakeholders and Society:**clear understanding and articulation of impact on stakeholders and society –demonstrate understanding of potential benefits, harms, ethical issues, that might arise in conjunction with this concept and how to address them
**Well-researched:**customer/customer need, market, competitive set, solution requirements
**Impact:**the potential for positive social/environmental impact is significant
**AI Transparancy Statement:** clearly and accurately discloses how AI was used, evaluated, verified, and supplemented by human insight

# 2026 AWARDS

# FOWLER BUSINESS CONCEPT CHALLENGE

## SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS IN EACH TRACK:

Winner: $15,000 per team
Runner-up: $7,500 per team
Second Runner-up: $5,000 per team
Third Runner-up: $2,500 per team
Second Place Semifinalist: $1,500 per team

Students who compete in the semifinal competition but do not place first or second in their room will be awarded a scholarship of $1,000 per team.

## SPECIAL TRACK AWARDS:

KATE HERZOG AWARD- $2,500 PER TEAM
BEST USE OF TECHNOLOGY AWARD - $2,500 PER TEAM
HEALTH EQUITY AWARD - $2,500 PER TEAM

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# Fowler Business Concept Challenge
## Overview of Business Track

Opus College of Business | UNIVERSITY OF St.Thomas

# BUSINESS CONCEPT TRACK

The Business Concept Track is for students interested in creating a *highly profitable* venture that can attract investment capital

# Fowler: An “entry level” competition to get you started!

## Business Track submission (5-page summary)

**Description:** Provide a concise escription of the proposed business and why it is unique/compelling.

**Proposed Solution**: What is your product or service? How will it solve the problem? How will your solution create exceptional value for the customer? How is it different from and superior to other solutions in the market?

**Target Market**: Who is your customer? What customer problem will you solve? How does your customer solve that problem today? What other solutions will compete for that customer?

**Market Opportunity**: Provide a preliminary estimate of the size of the potential market (number of customers that can be reasonably addressed).

**Business model**: How will you deliver this solution to your customer affordably and effectively, and how will the venture make money (revenue model)?

**Investment Potential**: Why should someone invest in your venture? Explain why you will be successful.

**Ethical Considerations**: What are the ethical principles guiding your business model, operations, and decision-making process? How does your business address fairness, transparency, social responsibility, and environmental impact?

**Transparent AI Use Statement:** Describe how you used AI in developing your business concept, including which tools you used and for what purpose, where AI influenced or challenged your thinking, and what you learned from real people that AI could not tell you.

# A concise description of the proposed business and why it is unique/ compelling.

This isyour executivesummary thatismeantto quicklysummarize your proposal and capture the attention of the reader/judge about why this is an important opportunity.

- What is the problem you are addressing?
- Who experiences it and why does it matter to them?
- How does your solution address their problem better than any other product/service out there?
- What is the potential for this idea? (e.g. how many people experience it? How much money is currently spent in this area? Etc.)
- Why are you the right one(s) to pursue this opportunity?

# Solution – What is your proposed solution? How is it different from and superior to other solutions in the market?

- What product or service will you offer to address the problem?
  - How specifically does it work? What are the features and functions?
  - What are the outcomes or benefits from using this product/service?
  - How will you deliver it to the people you serve? (through what partners or channels?)
- How is your solution different from and superior to other solutions in the market?
  - What other solutions are out there?
  - What are their strengths and weaknesses? What are the gaps and opportunities?
  - What is distinctive about your approach and organization?
- How does your solution create exceptional value for all it serves? (your value proposition – benefit you will deliver and why it is dramatically different and better)

# Target Market – who is your customer?

- Provide more detail about the people you will target with this offering.
  - Who are they? (e.g., demographic and psychographic description)
  - How do they experience the problem?
  - How does the problem impact their lives?
  - How do they try to solve the problem today?
  - What are the constraints they operate under that make it difficult to solve the problem?

    What are the enablers, if any, that make it possible for you to serve them?
- How will they be impacted by your solution – how will their lives change for the better?
- Are there other "customers" or stakeholders you must serve in order to deliver or fund your solution or impact? (Forinstance,LoveYour Melon sells hatsto consumers in order to raise money to donate hats and funds for children experiencing cancer and to the nonprofits that serve them).
  - Who are these customers?
  - Why will they want your offering?

# Market Opportunity – What is the potential size and impact?

- How many people experience this problem/ fit your target description? How many people can you impact/ or the number of customers you can reasonably address?
- How much money is currently spent in this space?
- Why is this a good time to launch this venture – are there any market/industry/technology trends that create a particularly compelling window of opportunity?

# What is your business model?

How will you deliver this solution to your customer affordably and effectively, and how will the venture make money (revenue model)?

- Who is going to pay for this? The end user? Someone who purchases for an end user? Another stakeholder (e.g. Love Your Melon)?
- How will they pay for this? (Fee for service? Subscription? Fremium? Licensing?)
- What are the largest costs and why do you feel these revenues will be able to cover them?

# Why should someone invest in you?

- Explain why *you* will be successful!
- What unique value or expertise you do you bring as an entrepreneur (e.g. subject matter expertise, application development, network of experts)?
- What personal attributes do you have that will make you a successful entrepreneur (resilience, grit, solution-oriented, etc.)?
- What set you apart from the competition?

# What are the ethical considerations of your business?

- What are the ethical principles guiding your business model, operations, and decision making?
- How does your business address fairness, transparency, social responsibility, and environmental impact?
- Are there potential harms to stakeholders or society, and how will you mitigate those?
  - Data privacy issues?
  - Ethical issues?
  - Think through anything within your venture that may inadvertently cause a negative impact to stakeholders or society.

# Transparent AI Use Statement Template

**Short form (75 words – Fowler Business Concept Challenge, Innovation Challenges or Hackathons)**

- Which AI tools did we use, and for what?
- Where did AI change our thinking, and where did we disagree with it?
- What did we learn from real people that AI could not tell us?

**Example (fictional team, short form)**

We used a general chat assistant to brainstorm names and to tighten our summary. It suggested a subscription model. After talking with six food pantry coordinators, we chose a per delivery fee, because they told us their budgets are set by grant cycle. AI could not tell us that the coordinators wanted a text message reminder more than an app, and we heard it directly.

# So, how do you find this information?

**Secondary Research**

- Google
- IBISWorld
- ABI Inform
- Trade associations

**Primary Research**

- Prospective customers
- Other stakeholders/ service providers
- Experts (e.g., journalists, nonprofit associations)

For secondary research help, contact business librarian Andrea Koeppe at andrea.koeppe@stthomas.edu

# Judging Criteria

**Originality:** business idea is new, novel and unique

**Value Proposition**: a clear and compelling value proposition - legitimate, recognized need; appropriate solution

**Competitive advantage:** creates more value for customer than alternative solutions

**Market opportunity:** adequate market size; viable revenue model

**Feasibility:** reasonable prospect of funding and successful implementation

**Stakeholders and Society**: Clear understanding and articulation of impact on stakeholders and society - demonstrate understanding of potential benefits, harms, ethical issues, that might arise in conjunction with this concept and how to address them

**Well-researched:** demonstrates clear understanding of customer/customer need, market, competitive set, solution requirements

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**AI Transparency Statement:** clearly and accurately discloses how AI was used, evaluated, verified, and supplemented by human insight

# AI Use In Competitions Policy

Our programs and competitions ask three things of every entrant, regardless of institution:

- **No fabricated evidence**
- **A transparent AI use statement**
- **The ability to explain and defend your work**

Entrepreneurship runs on human judgment: choosing a problem, listening to the people who live it, deciding what to build, and taking responsibility for the results. We ask for transparency about how you worked, honesty about your evidence, and the ability to explain and defend your decisions. We do not use AI detection tools, and the use of AI by itself is not a scored criterion. We evaluate the quality of the submission, the credibility of the evidence presented, the accuracy of any disclosures, and the team's ability to discuss its process, reasoning, and conclusions.

**Guidelines**

- Lead with human judgment. You and your team choose the problem, the people you serve, and the decisions. AI advises, and you or your team decides.
- Use AI openly. Brainstorm, research, stress test assumptions, draft, translate, edit, build prototypes and rehearse with any tool you choose. But you must disclose how you utilized AI in your application process and materials. Disclosure is standard professional practice and is never scored against you.
- Validate with real people. Evidence about customers, users, partners, communities, and experts comes from real conversations and real data.
- Own what you submit. You can explain it, defend it, and correct it, in writing and live. Every team member can discuss the core of the submission without notes.

# AI Use In Competitions Policy

**Behaviors we expect**

- Check all information. Check every fact, source, and number that AI gives you before it enters your submission. Label assumptions as assumptions, including any figure that came from an AI tool without validation.
- Protect your and others' data. Protect other people's information. Do not upload confidential material from customers, community partners, or other teams into tools that retain it.
- Cite and give credit. Give credit to the people and communities whose stories and knowledge shaped your idea.

**Lines we hold**

- Label any AI generated evidence. If the information is AI generated, clearly identify fabricated customers, interviews, quotes, testimonials, survey results, pilot results, financials, or more.
- Simulations stay in preparation. Synthetic personas and simulated interviews are useful for research, rehearsal, and initial concepts. They cannot be presented as evidence of real-life demand or need.
- Represent communities with consent and authenticity. Speak for the people you serve only with their involvement and consent.

**How we respond to concerns**

- A concern starts a conversation. Staff, judges, or mentors may invite your team to walk through your process, sources, and decisions.
- Good faith mistakes that you correct openly are treated as learning.
- Consequences apply to fabrication and misrepresentation that continue after a conversation.
- The Schulze School of Entrepreneurship reserves the right to disqualify participation from any event.

**How submissions are evaluated**

- Reviewers score the ideas and the evidence: the problem, the people, the solution, and the model.
- The AI use statement is not scored. It gives later rounds better questions to ask.
- Every team that advances will present live with an active Question and Answer period with experts. You will need to be prepared to speak to your venture, submission, artifacts, and the process by which you came to your conclusions, including your AI use if applicable.

CUBED

***"Empowering International Minds, One Click at a Time"***

## Introducing CUBED

In an era of boundless opportunity, international students often face unique challenges while studying in the United States. As international students ourselves, we have found that navigating a complex web of internships, scholarships, visa regulations, and tax matters can be very daunting. That's where CUBED comes in (*creatively named to reflect the app's multifaceted nature and many functions*). Our revolutionary app is set to redefine the way international students access essential information, offering a centralized hub that simplifies and streamlines the journey to academic and professional success.

CUBED has been meticulously designed to empower international students with the knowledge they need to thrive in the US education landscape. By providing easy access to a wealth of critical information and resources, we aim to make each student's experience a seamless and successful one. In this proposal, we will explore how our groundbreaking app addresses the key pain points faced by international students, ultimately transforming the landscape of educational support and guidance. By doing so, we aim to not only support individual students but also contribute to the collective good by fostering a diverse, informed, and empowered community.

## Target Market

Our primary customers are international students pursuing higher education in Minnesota, USA. According to the Institute of International Education's Open Doors Report, in the 2019-2020 academic year, there were over 1 million international students studying in the United States. This number has been steadily increasing over the years, making this a substantial and growing market. The typical international student is aged between 18 and 30, seeking undergraduate or graduate degrees in various fields, including STEM, business, humanities, and more. They possess a strong desire for educational and career growth and are determined to overcome the unique challenges of studying abroad.

International students contribute significantly to the U.S. economy. In 2019, they added an estimated $41 billion to the U.S. economy, supporting numerous jobs and local businesses. However, navigating the complexities of studying and working in the U.S. can be challenging. According to a survey by NAFSA, 55% of international students reported that they find it challenging to find on-campus jobs, internships, and scholarships.

These students face constraints due to visa restrictions. U.S. immigration policies, such as Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT), play a crucial role in determining their work eligibility. It is very important to emphasize that our business in no way frowns upon the employment restrictions placed on international students. We recognize the importance of these regulations for the integrity of the U.S. immigration system. Instead, our aim is to help international students make the most of their temporary experience by providing them with the resources necessary to navigate these regulations and seize the opportunities available to them.

Currently, international students rely on scattered resources, generic advice, and word-of-mouth information. They attend career fairs and spend countless hours searching for scholarship opportunities or navigating the complex U.S. tax system. They often rely on peers who have faced similar challenges, but this approach is far from efficient or reliable. The lack of centralized information means that they often miss out on valuable opportunities and struggle to find the most relevant solutions.

Our solution will be a game-changer for international students. By providing this hub, we will streamline and simplify the support process, reducing stress, enhancing financial stability, and fostering a stronger sense of belonging. It's a transformative solution that improves lives.

## Our Product

Our proposed solution is an innovative mobile application called CUBED. This app will serve as a one-stop-shop for international students, offering dynamic updates on internship opportunities, scholarships, tax information, and essential guidance on setting up financial accounts and navigating U.S. immigration and tax laws. More simply put, an *"everything I wish I knew as a new international student in the U.S."* hub. It will provide real-time access to a wealth of information, including:

**Internship Opportunities**: The app will compile real time updates on internship opportunities, allowing international students to explore and apply for positions aligned with their academic pursuits and eligibility.

**Scholarships**: International students will have access to an extensive database of scholarships, complete with deadlines and criteria, enabling them to easily find and apply for financial aid opportunities that are available to them.

**Tax Information**: For those new to the U.S. tax system, the app will offer reliable, up-to-date tax information and assistance, including the option to connect with a tax professional. This will ensure that international students can fulfill their tax obligations accurately and with confidence.

**Immigration Updates**: The app will keep users informed about the latest immigration news and how it may affect their student status, helping them stay compliant with changing regulations.

**Financial Guidance**: International students will receive valuable guidance on setting up bank accounts, obtaining Social Security Numbers (SSNs), and navigating the complexities of financial matters in the U.S.

CUBED will have a user-friendly interface with separate tabs for each resource, allowing users to easily access the information they need. It will offer the following features:

**Search and Filters:** Users can filter internships and scholarships by major, graduation year, and other relevant criteria, ensuring that the opportunities presented are tailored to their individual needs.

**Dynamic Updates:** The app will be dynamically updated in real-time, ensuring that users have access to the most current information and opportunities.

**Resource Directory:** A comprehensive directory of resources will be available, offering direct links and contact information for relevant organizations, financial institutions, and tax professionals.

**Real-Time Notifications:** Customers can tailor instant notifications to their preferences, guaranteeing they receive timely updates on opportunities that match their unique criteria. Whether it's the latest information on U.S. immigration regulations, tax details, or any other vital resources, our app grants users the ability to remain informed and up to date.

**AI Chatbot:** Our 24/7 accessible AI Chatbot will be designed to promptly address student inquiries and guide them to valuable resources.

**Tailored Newsletters:** Personalized newsletters on a weekly or monthly basis, allowing users to catch up on essential information they might have overlooked.

Using the CUBED App will provide international students with several crucial benefits:

**Streamlined Access:** International students will have easy and instant access to scholarships, internships, tax information, and other vital resources, eliminating the need for tedious manual searches.

**Increased Opportunities:** With the app, students will never miss a scholarship application deadline or an internship opportunity, enhancing their chances of success.

**Compliance and Confidence:** The tax and immigration information provided will ensure that international students fulfill their legal obligations accurately, boosting their confidence and peace of mind.

**Financial Empowerment:** The app will empower students to navigate financial processes in the U.S., from setting up bank accounts to obtaining SSNs.

The CUBED App will be available for download on popular app stores, making it easily accessible to international students. We will also establish partnerships with universities, colleges, and student associations to promote the app to its intended audience.

## Why Us?

Our solution upscales the value of existing solutions. Current solutions available include browser extensions that provide limited notifications about job applications' eligibility and job boards that offer internships for international students. However, these solutions fall short in multiple ways.

**Job Boards:** Strengths include providing job listings. However, job boards primarily provide internship listings, while CUBED serves as a comprehensive hub, offering a wide range of resources, including scholarships, tax information, and immigration updates.

**Browser Extensions:** Browser extensions still require that students manually scour for individual job postings to check their eligibility, creating inefficiencies and missing out on broader resource opportunities. CUBED offers a more holistic solution.

**Scattered Resources:** Existing resources, while valuable, are often scattered and difficult to find. There is an opportunity to centralize this information for the benefit of international students.

## Market Opportunity

International students face additional hurdles in accessing resources due to their immigration status and limited networks. As a result, they often miss out on a fully immersive college experience. According to a survey conducted by the World Education Services, 59% of over 2,000 international students and alumni identified work authorization regulations as their primary obstacle in securing internships. Currently, students spend up to $40 dollars a month on competing premium subscription resources like LinkedIn and Indeed which house limited to no aids specific to international students. This further emphasizes the gap in the market and pushes the need for our offering in the undergraduate education market.

During the COVID pandemic, there was a fall in international student enrollment in the United States. However, according to the Department of Homeland Security’s SEVIS reports, these numbers have recovered this year to almost match pre-pandemic enrolments indicating that our market is indeed growing at an accelerated rate. In fact, as of January 2023, there are 1.08 million international students with active study visas in the US.

Within this group, our initial focus will center on international students attending colleges in the Midwest, with a specific emphasis on undergraduate students based in Minnesota. Our strategic choice is driven by our capacity to gain a deeper understanding of the local dynamics and nuances relevant to international students. According to data from the Minnesota Office of Higher Education, an annual average of 10,900 international students enroll in post-secondary institutions within the state. We anticipate a similar

enrollment rate in the coming years. Therefore, by projecting this annual rate over the typical four-year duration of undergraduate education, we estimate a potential customer base of 43,600 students annually in the region.

## Our Business Model

We understand that college is a costly endeavor, particularly for international students. Considering aspects such as fluctuating exchange and interest rates, we seek to minimize the cost of our app on the students as the final users. To do this, we plan to establish a 3-tiered revenue model that pools income from multiple streams.

Our primary strategy for reaching our target audience, especially during the initial phase, involves white labeling. We will offer international admission offices in institutions a seamless integration of our system with their existing databases for a one-time setup fee of $5,000. This integration provides them with a unified resource to connect their students with the support they require. Following this setup, institutions will then be subject to an ongoing monthly licensing fee, calculated based on the number of students in the system. For instance, in the campus mode, we propose a fee of $400 for every 100 students enrolled. This approach ensures a cost-effective and sustainable partnership with our institutional partners while allowing us to expand our reach and impact.

We will then capitalize on this exposure to include subscriptions where we will offer two tiered levels of access, one free and one charged premium for individual students. Free users will be able to access our basic offerings, that is an updated and filterable list of internship opportunities accepting temporary work authorization, AI chatbot for FAQs and updates on immigration changes affecting international students while premium subscribers gain exclusive access to scholarship opportunities, tax assistance and early application and deadline notification features at a premium of $6 a month.

Finally, we will offset the losses from the free users by incorporating in-app advertising through partners we intend to interact with for example banks providing services for non-locals, tax auditing firms, travel agencies, insurance providers, and other organizations targeting international clientele by charging 50 cents an impression.

We are confident that we will be able to cover our largest costs, that is, software development personnel and data administrators, through this model as we are able to gain revenue from stakeholders at each possible contact. Based on data from salary.com, the average cost of a Data Administrator in Minnesota is between $51,000 and $65,000 a year. From the white labeling model, we estimate a minimum initial revenue of $336,000 (($400 per 100 students) * 7,000 students * 12 months) - we estimate this by projecting an initial usage of 7000 students within St Paul and Minneapolis. In 5 years, we can grow to the whole acquire the whole international student market of Minnesota (43,600) and gain over $2 million in revenue.

## Fostering the Common Good

When international students embark on their journey for internships in the United States, the digital landscape presents them with an overwhelming challenge. An astonishing 319 million search results on Google alone greet their queries, and when they focus their search within the confines of Minnesota, that number is still a daunting 9.7 million. This relentless maze of clicking on websites for hours transforms the initial excitement of future endeavors into a disheartening and demoralizing experience.

Moreover, as students refine their search criteria by specifying their major and preferred career positions, the already limited results dwindle even further. The journey to secure an internship becomes an arduous burden, a relentless pursuit with diminishing returns.This issue carries implications for the common good. It signifies that, despite the ambitions and potential of international students, a substantial number of them—represented by the staggering figure of 59% (WES, 2019), miss out on or struggle to acquire the

invaluable experience of an internship. This hinders their personal and professional growth and limits their contributions to society. CUBED offers a streamlined solution, leading students a few clicks away from a valuable career experience in their respective careers.

Collectively, international students serve as an asset to their local communities by injecting resources into different sectors of the economy. NAFSA went as far as reporting that in 2018, for every 8 international students, 3 local jobs were created, not to mention the innovation born of diversity. However, without the students reaping the full benefits of their experience, the common good is in turn directly hindered.

## Why invest in the CUBED family?

Our unique advantage is that we, the founders, are international students who are personally experiencing these challenges. We understand the pain points, constraints, and needs of our target market. Our deep empathy and personal experience enable us to create a solution that truly speaks to the unique needs of international students. Additionally, private universities spend an estimated $585, while public universities allocate $125 to recruit one international student. Given the substantial investments that colleges make in recruiting international students, aligning with us and adopting our app guarantees that these recruited students enjoy the finest educational experience.

**Ava Mayomi Juma** is an entrepreneurship major whose journey has been fueled by a relentless pursuit of making a meaningful impact on people's lives. From her leadership roles, she has honed her ability to network and gained profound insights into marketing strategies. By investing in this business, you are not just supporting a promising concept; you're investing in a vision guided by empathy, innovation, and a genuine desire to advance the common good through provision of valuable resources.

**Bifuh Ngongalah** is a Computer Science major who brings a unique blend of technical expertise to our app, instrumental in developing and maintaining the app's technical backbone. Investing in this app means aligning with a leader who combines technical expertise with a genuine desire to make a difference.

**Shakira Mwakitawa** is a Civil Engineering major. Her academic journey has nurtured innovation, refined project management skills, and ignited a creative spark for problem-solving. She thrives in collaborative settings and appreciates the value of diverse perspectives. Her personal connection to this project fuels her unwavering motivation to create change.

## Bibliography

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**Business Description**: Evala is an artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) software application designed with the goal of alleviating the disability examiner crisis and aiding community members living with disabilities. Thus far, proposed solutions prioritize increasing federal Social Security Administration funding to hire more examiners and improve resources. This will be difficult to achieve due to division in Congress and continued financial pressures on the SSA. Evala tackles this issue from an innovative angle by enhancing the examination process' efficiency by up to 50%. As an AI/ML algorithmic tool, Evala scans through applicants' disability claims and medical records, automating numerous examiner tasks.

**Target Market**: Evala's target market is the state agencies that are responsible for examining disability claims. These agencies are usually called Disability Determination Services (DDS) and are undergoing a severe crisis. Thousands of people nationwide are left waiting for months or even years to learn whether they qualify for Social Security Disability Insurance through the Social Security Administration. As a result, many elderly adults and people with disabilities are left to struggle without aid, and are suffering, going homeless, or even dying in the process. At the root of this issue is the disability examiner crisis. Since 2010, the United States has seen a 16% decrease in examiner employment despite a 22% increase in beneficiaries (22 million people), causing agencies to be severely understaffed and unequipped to handle claims (Romig, 2023). During the pandemic, 1 in 8 new examiners quit their jobs, a hard blow as entry-level claims representatives need at least 3 years to become proficient in the process (Rein, 2022). Additionally, the SSA's customer service budget has been cut by 17% since 2010, causing examiners working for state disability agencies to be overworked, underpaid, and undertrained (Cabezas, 2023). This contributes to a cycle of low job satisfaction and overall examiner employment.

On average nationally, each disability claim will take at least 200 days to be processed, putting potential beneficiaries at risk of being unable to afford basic needs (Cabezas). As this crisis is at its height, some politicians are calling for increased federal funding to provide DDSs with more resources. While President Biden has proposed a 10% increase in SSA funding for 2024, House Republicans have vowed to continue to cut non-discretionary federal funding, making SSA's chances of receiving more

funding unlikely (Romig). Even if the SSA secures more financing, the heart of the crisis persists as DDSs' inefficiencies remain unaddressed. In this way, Evala enters a market with few direct competitors while providing a cutting-edge and affordable solution.

**Proposed Solution**: Disability claim examiners have a variety of responsibilities during the applicant process. Outside of receiving and reviewing applications, examiners document data from claimants' medical records, determine eligibility, interview applicants, consult with medical professionals, calculate benefit amounts, and record why claims are approved or denied. These duties can become quite extensive, and many examiners are responsible for up to 200 cases per year (Rein). Considering that this equates to about 1.8 cases daily, efficiently compiling all this essential data for applicants becomes nearly impossible. These realities contribute to applicants' long wait times. Our solution is Evala: A Software as a Service that leverages advanced AI/ML tools to enhance capabilities for state agency workers.

Using Optical Character Recognition (OCR), Evala scans through disability claims to extract text and recognize handwritten or printed content from documents. Evala can analyze this text along with other visual elements using well-understood Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithms, which cognize the content of the document and identify keywords, phrases, or specific data points. Evala organizes and presents the necessary data from claimants' documents, removing the time-consuming need to sift through forms. At the same time, using its word processing capabilities and recommendations, Evala helps examiners write their long records. Lastly, Evala calculates the benefit package that each beneficiary receives based upon previous user input and the extracted information.

Another time-consuming issue that examiners often face is the need to sift through claims that are filed incorrectly. Evala's OCR and NLP algorithms assist in this measure by analyzing beneficiaries' forms and prompting examiners with suggestions if it identifies a potential mistake. At the same time, the software can calculate helpful metrics of performance, such as the time duration of the entire application process. Lastly, as a machine learning tool, Evala improves and updates its operations and proposals according to user input. This means that as Evala analyzes more data, we can pivot and develop our own NLP algorithms that correspond more precisely to clients' needs.

Evala provides exceptional value for state agencies by streamlining a time-intensive process, thus aiding overworked examiners in providing crucial care for people in need. When using Evala, examiners have more time to focus on claimants' results and technical aspects of their job. By speeding up the examination process, our software removes the need for substantial amounts of federal funding and unlikely bipartisan compromises while alleviating immense pressure on disability examiners. On the applicants' end, potential beneficiaries receive their claim results back sooner, helping them obtain assistance promptly.

Evala is cloud-hosted because it operates as a SaaS (Software as a Service). As a result, state agencies do not have the need to install or download Evala on local devices. This allows for easy scalability, automatic updates, and accessibility from anywhere with a Wi-Fi connection. This aspect of Evala is crucial in a world where remote and hybrid schedules become common.

Among the various available AI data extraction tools, Evala stands apart due to its unique design parameters. Our software is tailored with the intent of analyzing disability examiner documents with the highest accuracy. Additionally, Evala contains robust security measures such as encryption, access controls, and regular security audits.

**Market Opportunity**: There are 50 American states in which DDSs operate, in addition to 5 inhabited U.S. territories. Evala can expect to take a 10% market share in its first year, operating in 5 to 6 states. States such as Illinois, Texas, and Kansas could especially benefit from Evala having lost 35%, 40%, and 49% of their DDS staff since 2010, respectively (Romig, 2022). Evala enters this market at a crucial and opportune time as there are currently no alternative solutions in operation. As a unique resolution, Evala expects to assist states in extreme need immediately upon launch.

**Business Model**: As a SaaS, Evala delivers a solution to the disability examiner crisis by providing its services via the internet. As a firm, Evala hosts its applications on its own servers and cloud infrastructure, offering its examiner solutions through a subscription-based pricing model. States' DDSs will pay a recurring monthly or annual fee based upon their chosen subscription package. This is a cost-effective model for DDSs in that it eliminates a need for large investments in software licenses and

hardware. At the same time, Evala is responsible for maintaining and updating its software. We can seamlessly deploy updates, address bugs, and introduce features with minimal effort from the users' end. This ensures Evala's scalable design.

Additionally, Evala complies with industry standards to guarantee DDSs' data privacy while offering SLAs (service level agreements) to assist customers in addressing issues. The level of service reliability and uptime varies depending on the subscription plan that each DDS chooses. Meanwhile, customers are offered data backup and recovery services to ensure that their data is safe from hardware failures or other unforeseen events. Lastly, as Evala experiences growth, customization and control monitoring tools will be added, allowing DDSs to make informed decisions about their subscription to optimize their usage.

In these ways, Evala provides both an elite and ethical service with a range of options while simultaneously enjoying a healthy revenue from multiple streams. Evala can charge premiums for the most advanced subscription plans as state agencies realize and appreciate its effectiveness. At the same time, Evala's cost-effective pricing model aids both state-level DDSs as well as the Social Security Administration in the struggle for increased funding and friendly federal budgets.

**Common Good Contribution**: Evala's contribution to the common good is evident in its ability to aid community members living with disabilities as well as overworked examiners struggling to provide quality service. To get an understanding of this situation, one only needs to find online reviews from those claimants attempting to receive aid. The disability claim process is arduous and complicated. As this problem is widespread throughout many states, our software can aid a very large audience. Evala has the potential to alleviate the crisis and aid every stakeholder. After implanting our software, understaffed DDSs can provide more incentive for prospective employees to work in less intensive examiner roles. Examiners can work in a less stressful and more productive environment, as they possess more time for training as well as the ability to work through claims with a higher turnaround time. People with disabilities and their families can file claims with greater ease and receive their results, aid, and answers that they desperately need in an efficient manner, while the SSA requires less dire resources.

While Evala clearly has the ability to aid society, one potential harm to examiners is job loss due to Evala's automation. We plan to decrease this situation's likelihood by making our software easy to operate and understand. As opposed to laying off examiners to hire more technical workers, current and future disability appraisers will be upscaled in their training to utilize Evala effectively. With an Evala-designed training program, DDS workers can implement our software quickly.

**Why Invest in Us?:** The potential for Evala's success is obvious in the open market that it plans to enter. Using cutting-edge software, Evala sets itself apart through resolving a crisis that is largely ignored by the rest of the country. At the same time, Evala's founders make for a diverse and unique team. Our Co-Founder and COO is a bilingual first-generation college student majoring in Computer Engineering. She has firsthand experience in helping loved ones struggle through the disability claim process, which enables her to tackle this issue from a true stakeholder's perspective. Moreover, she is a person of color and comes from an immigrant family, meaning that she can significantly relate to and understand the situations of the most marginalized groups in our country. On the technical front, she has extensive experience in software projects, coding, and solutions consulting. Our Co-Founder and CEO is an Economics major and has experience in technical product development, sales, operations, and management. Through his experiences living, working, and volunteering in diverse communities, he also has obtained the capacity to relate to many different groups of people, especially those living with disabilities. When combined into a team, both of us bring entrepreneurial and solicitous mindsets as well as many skills that are necessary to succeed in running our firm.

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# Fowler Business Concept Challenge
## Overview of Social Track

Opus College of Business | UNIVERSITY OF St.Thomas

# SOCIAL VENTURE TRACK

The Social Venture Track is for students whoare interested in creating an innovative and entrepreneurial solution to a pressing social or environmental problem

# Fowler: An “entry level” competition to get you started!

## Social Track submission (5-page summary)

**Description:** Provide a concise description of the proposed business and why it is unique/compelling. What social or environmental problem does your business aim to solve? Provide some evidence of the scale of the problem.

**Proposed solution:** What product or service will you offer to address the problem? How will your solution help alleviate the problem?

**Target Market:**

A.Who is impacted by the problem? How do they experience the problem today? How do they try to solve it today? How will they be impacted by your solution?

B.Who is your customer (ifdifferentfromabove)? What customer problem will you solve? How does your customer solve that problem today? What other solutions will compete for that customer?

**Market Opportunity:** Provide a preliminary estimate of the size of the potential market (number of customers that can be reasonably addressed).

**Business model:** How will you deliver this solution to your customer affordably and effectively, and how will the venture make money (revenue model)? How is your revenue model connected to your goal to deliver social impact?

**Ethical Considerations**: What are the ethical principles guiding your business model, operations, and decision-making processes? How does your business address fairness, transparency, social responsibility and environmental impact? Are there any potential harms to stakeholders or society, and how do you mitigate those?

**Potential social impact:** How will your concept contribute to the common good? How will you measure the success of your venture against the problem it’s working to solve? What measures or metrics will you use (e.g. number of clients fed; decrease in chemical run-off, etc.)?

**Transparent AI Use Statement:** Describe how you used AI in developing your business concept, including which tools you used and for what purpose, where AI influenced or challenged your thinking, and what you learned from real people that AI could not tell you.

# A concise description of the social or environmental problem you are seeking to fix & the scale of the problem

- Describe the problem
  - What is the problem?
  - What causes the problem?
  - How is the problem experienced by the people affected?
- Why does it matter? What is the impact at an individual and societal level? What is the scale of the impact?
- Provide some evidence of the scale of the problem.

# What is your proposed solution?

- What product or service will you offer to address the problem?
  - How specifically does it work?
  - What are the features and functions?
  - What are the outcomes or benefits from using this product/service?
  - How will you deliver it to the people you serve? (through what partners or channels?)
- How and how will it help alleviate the problem?

# Target Market

- Provide more detail about the people you will target with this offering.
  - Who are they? (e.g., demographic and psychographic description)
  - How do they experience the problem?
  - How does the problem impact their lives?
  - How do they try to solve the problem today?
  - What are the constraints they operate under that make it difficult to solve the problem?
  - What are the enablers, if any, that make it possible for you to serve them?
- How will they be impacted by your solution – how will their lives change for the better?
- Are there other "customers" or stakeholders you must serve to deliver or fund your solution or impact? (for instance, Love Your Melon sells hats to consumers to raise money to donate hats and funds for children experiencing cancer and to the nonprofits that serve them).
  - Who are these customers?
  - Why will they want your offering?

# Market Opportunity

- Provide a preliminary estimate of the size of the potential market (number of customers that can be reasonably addressed).
- How is your solution different from and superior to other solutions in the market?
  - What other solutions are out there?
  - What are their strengths and weaknesses?
  - What are the gaps and opportunities?
  - What is distinctive about your approach and organization?
- How does your solution create exceptional value for all it serves?

# What is your business model?

- How will you deliver this solution to your customer affordably and effectively, and how will the venture make money (revenue model)?
  - Who is going to pay for this? The end customer/client? A donor? Another stakeholder (e.g. Love Your Melon)?
  - How will they pay for this? (Fee for service? Cross-subsidy model? Donation? Etc.)
  - What are the largest costs and why do you feel these revenues will be able to cover them?
- How will the money flow toward the problem you are trying to solve?

# What are the ethical considerations of your business?

- What are the ethical principles guiding your business model, operations, and decision making?
- How does your business address fairness, transparency, social responsibility, and environmental impact?
- Are there potential harms to stakeholders or society, and how will you mitigate those?
  - Data privacy issues?
  - Ethical issues?
  - Think through anything within your venture that may inadvertently cause a negative impact to stakeholders or society

# What is the potential social impact?

- How will your concept contribute to the common good?
- How will you measure the success of your venture against the problem it’s working to solve? What measuresormetricswill youuse?

# Transparent AI Use Statement Template

**Short form (75 words – Fowler Business Concept Challenge, Innovation Challenges or Hackathons)**

- Which AI tools did we use, and for what?
- Where did AI change our thinking, and where did we disagree with it?
- What did we learn from real people that AI could not tell us?

**Example (fictional team, short form)**

We used a general chat assistant to brainstorm names and to tighten our summary. It suggested a subscription model. After talking with six food pantry coordinators, we chose a per delivery fee, because they told us their budgets are set by grant cycle. AI could not tell us that the coordinators wanted a text message reminder more than an app, and we heard it directly.

# So how do we find this information?

**Secondary Research**

- Google
- IBISWorld
- ABI Inform
- Nonprofit associations

**Primary Research**

- Prospective clients/Customers
- Other stakeholders/ service providers
- Experts (e.g., journalists, nonprofit associations)

For secondary research help, contact business librarian Andrea Koeppe at andrea.koeppe@stthomas.edu

# Judging Criteria

**Social or Environmental Problem:**Research-based outline of a social or environmental problem that needs to be addressed
**Originality:**business idea is a new, novel and unique approach to addressing stated problem
**Value Proposition:**a clear and compelling value proposition –legitimate, recognized need and appropriate solution
**Competitive Advantage:**creates more value for customer than alternative solutions while also offering a solution to a social/environmental problem
**Market Opportunity:**adequate market size; viable business model
**Feasibility:**reasonable prospect of funding and successful implementation
**Stakeholders and Society:**clear understanding and articulation of impact on stakeholders and society –demonstrate understanding of potential benefits, harms, ethical issues, that might arise in conjunction with this concept and how to address them
**Well-researched:**customer/customer need, market, competitive set, solution requirements
**Impact:**the potential for positive social/environmental impact is significant
**AI Transparancy Statement:** clearly and accurately discloses how AI was used, evaluated, verified, and supplemented by human insight

# AI Use In Competitions Policy

Our programs and competitions ask three things of every entrant, regardless of institution:

- **No fabricated evidence**
- **A transparent AI use statement**
- **The ability to explain and defend your work**

Entrepreneurship runs on human judgment: choosing a problem, listening to the people who live it, deciding what to build, and taking responsibility for the results. We ask for transparency about how you worked, honesty about your evidence, and the ability to explain and defend your decisions. We do not use AI detection tools, and the use of AI by itself is not a scored criterion. We evaluate the quality of the submission, the credibility of the evidence presented, the accuracy of any disclosures, and the team's ability to discuss its process, reasoning, and conclusions.

**Guidelines**

- Lead with human judgment. You and your team choose the problem, the people you serve, and the decisions. AI advises, and you or your team decides.
- Use AI openly. Brainstorm, research, stress test assumptions, draft, translate, edit, build prototypes and rehearse with any tool you choose. But you must disclose how you utilized AI in your application process and materials. Disclosure is standard professional practice and is never scored against you.
- Validate with real people. Evidence about customers, users, partners, communities, and experts comes from real conversations and real data.
- Own what you submit. You can explain it, defend it, and correct it, in writing and live. Every team member can discuss the core of the submission without notes.

# AI Use In Competitions Policy

**Behaviors we expect**

- Check all information. Check every fact, source, and number that AI gives you before it enters your submission. Label assumptions as assumptions, including any figure that came from an AI tool without validation.
- Protect your and others' data. Protect other people's information. Do not upload confidential material from customers, community partners, or other teams into tools that retain it.
- Cite and give credit. Give credit to the people and communities whose stories and knowledge shaped your idea.

**Lines we hold**

- Label any AI generated evidence. If the information is AI generated, clearly identify fabricated customers, interviews, quotes, testimonials, survey results, pilot results, financials, or more.
- Simulations stay in preparation. Synthetic personas and simulated interviews are useful for research, rehearsal, and initial concepts. They cannot be presented as evidence of real-life demand or need.
- Represent communities with consent and authenticity. Speak for the people you serve only with their involvement and consent.

**How we respond to concerns**

- A concern starts a conversation. Staff, judges, or mentors may invite your team to walk through your process, sources, and decisions.
- Good faith mistakes that you correct openly are treated as learning.
- Consequences apply to fabrication and misrepresentation that continue after a conversation.
- The Schulze School of Entrepreneurship reserves the right to disqualify participation from any event.

**How submissions are evaluated**

- Reviewers score the ideas and the evidence: the problem, the people, the solution, and the model.
- The AI use statement is not scored. It gives later rounds better questions to ask.
- Every team that advances will present live with an active Question and Answer period with experts. You will need to be prepared to speak to your venture, submission, artifacts, and the process by which you came to your conclusions, including your AI use if applicable.

SOUL SHOES

LOVE, NOT LANDFILL

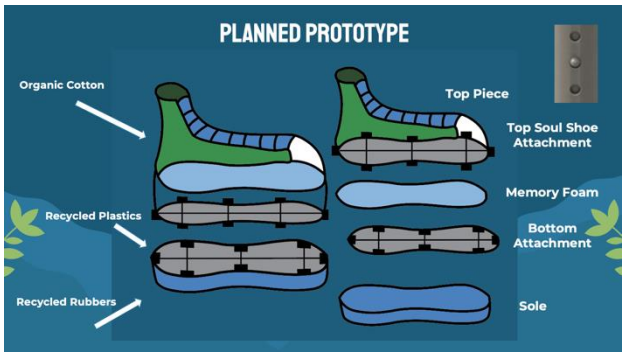
Social Venture

## I. Overview

Our social concern is based on environmental sustainability, specifically the effects that fast fashion within the shoe industry has on our ecosystem. Today, fast fashion accounts for up to 10% of the global carbon dioxide output. To contribute to this, each year in America, 300 million pairs of shoes are thrown away, taking an average of 30 to 40 years for just one pair to decompose. Moreover, by 2050, there is expected to be more plastic pollution than fish, by weight, in the ocean. This is important because many different plastics are used throughout shoes to make them more comfortable, lighter, and stronger. This combination of plastics, stitched, glued, and molded together in complicated ways, also makes shoes very hard to recycle.

## II. Unique Value Proposition

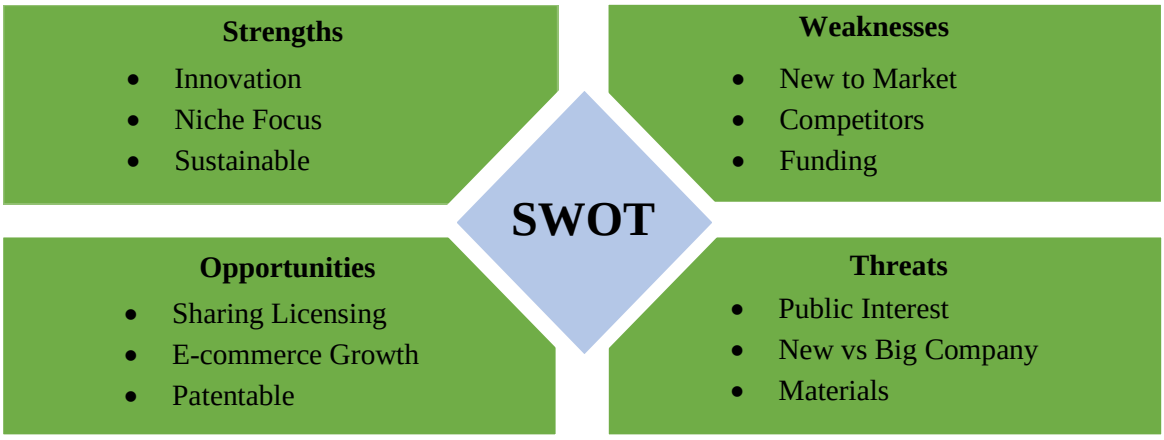
A prevalent issue in today's manufacturing of shoes is that big businesses tend to lower the quality of their products to ensure that customers will continue to replace the product within a short amount of time. This leads to the inevitable accumulation of worn shoes that get thrown in landfills to sit for years, polluting our environment. In addressing the issue of fast-fashion pollution, we introduce Soul Shoes, an innovative startup in the footwear industry. Our core mission is to establish a novel market centered around shoes made with recyclable material. Our strategy involves introducing a sneaker design with interchangeable soles, aimed at extending the lifespan of sneakers and fostering a design aesthetic that resonates with our target audience (as detailed in section III). To ensure that the attachment system of the



shoe performs no different than a normal sneaker, our product will undergo several stages of research and development as well as field testing. Our business can be explained through 2 factors: Innovation and Sustainability.

| Innovation | Sustainability |
|---|---|
| Soul shoes proposes to launch a new market for replaceable soles for shoes. A problem that a lot of people face when deciding what shoe to buy is the longevity of the sole. We seek to leverage this problem into making a creative solution through our durable and stylish soles manufactured to fit the formula of several different types of shoes. | Our shoes and replaceable soles will be made up of recycled material that are used to an optimal level before the consideration of throwing in landfills (thus our slogan, Love, Not Landfill). Soles will use combinations of plastics and rubbers to make an adequate and long-lasting piece. The top of the shoe will be made using recycled fabrics, leather, and other composites. |

In order to organize our position in the market, we created a S.W.O.T. Analysis. This helps us determine Soul Shoes' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This information can be found on the graphic below.

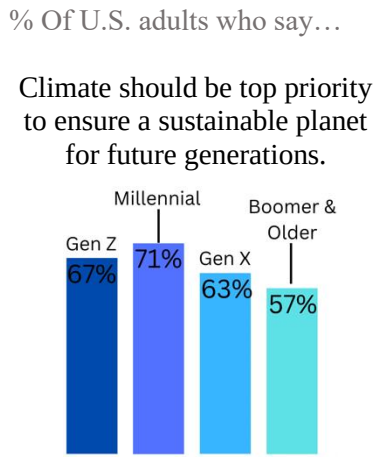


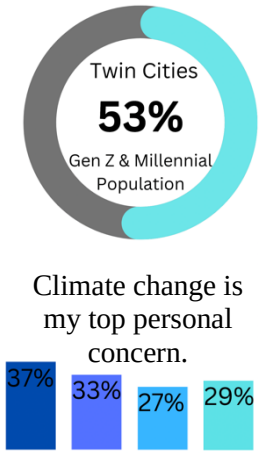

## III. Population Served

In order to find a strong target market, a business must identify their demographics and psychographics. It is important for businesses to find their target market as it helps with understanding the customer base. Demographics can be segmented into several markets to help an organization target its consumers more accurately. Psychographics focus on consumer activities, interests, and opinions.

## Demographics

With two of our main values being affordability and sustainability, our main demographic of clientele would include ages 16-36 years old. This includes ages from the Gen Z and Millenial population, which are the ages most involved in the act of sustainability to improve climate change. In addition to this, we are focusing our start-up in the Twin Cities area in Minnesota. According to Statista, in 2021, the population of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area was about 3.69 million people, nearly 2 million of that includes Gen Z and Millennials.




## Psychographics

Soul Shoes places a greater emphasis on fulfilling our mission and values than on mere profitability. Our core customer base is expected to consist of environmentally conscious individuals committed to finding sustainable solutions. The innovative nature of our products is likely to resonate with creative and open-minded consumers, drawing in those who appreciate unique, eco-friendly designs. This diverse customer demographic reflects

## IV. Compelling Advantage

With every purchase of a pair of Soul Shoes, customers not only acquire an affordable footwear option but also actively contribute to combatting the ongoing climate crisis. Our shoe collection, priced between $60 and $150, caters to various preferences, offering sustainable footwear at accessible prices. Buyers can enjoy high-quality, recyclable shoes that are easily repairable or replaceable, significantly reducing the emission of harmful pollutants into our atmosphere. Furthermore, we are committed to allocating 5% of our total sales to support sustainability-focused organizations, bolstering our collective efforts for the betterment of our planet.

## Channels of Distribution and Recognition

**Store**

As a B2C startup, we emphasize the importance of establishing a physical store. A brick-and-mortar location enables customers to interact with our products firsthand and receive valuable assistance from our store associates, enhancing their shopping experience. Moreover, this store will serve as a collection point for old, unused shoes, contributing to the creation of our patentable shoe design.

**Website**

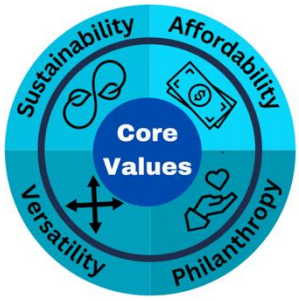
We see a website as an essential feature for Soul Shoes to establish credibility and build trust with customers through offering a more convenient line of business and give accessibility to everyone.

**Manufacturing Facility (Future)**

To ensure consistent production scaling and inventory management, we see the importance of allocating profits to establish a future manufacturing facility, the cornerstone of our innovation.

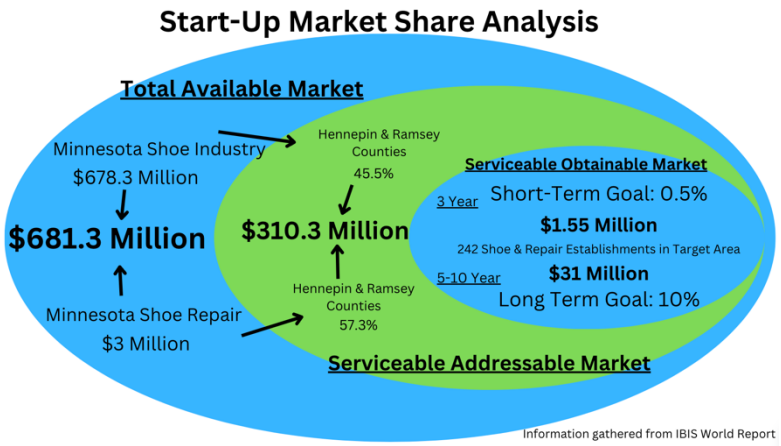
**Marketing Plan**

To optimize the positioning of Soul Shoes, we intend to leverage four marketing channels, as outlined below. Our goal in harnessing these channels is to foster efficient business growth and unlock the maximum potential for both our product and mission. Moreover, these strategies will enhance customer engagement, leading to increased sales and heightened brand awareness.




| Advertising | Personal Selling | Direct Marketing | Public Relations |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Tik Tok:** Age 18-24<br>**Instagram:** Age 18-34<br>**Facebook:** Age 25-42<br>Social media is our primary means of engaging with our target market in a compelling and informative manner, allowing us to connect with our clientele in an appealing way while promoting our product. | **Word of Mouth**<br>This can happen through virtual word of mouth or in-person connections. Using tags, captions, and social media sharing, we can broaden our market and increase our customer base. | **Email:** Age 18-34<br>**Website:** Age 15-34<br>**Subscription:** Age 18-34<br>Through this direct marketing approach, we can effectively reach the upper age range of our client base, making it simple and easy for them to engage with our product. | **Events**<br>Community and philanthropy are integral values for Soul Shoes. Through hosting events, we unite our community and enhance our clients' experiences. This also has the potential to attract new clients and expand our overall target market. |

## V. Business Model




Our approach follows the beachhead market strategy. We begin by focusing on a niche market and community, gradually establishing our presence, and growing. Once we've gained a foothold, we plan to franchise and license our sustainable fashion efforts to larger brands. Our revenue will be generated through the sale of our shoes and detachable soles. Shoe prices will span from $60 for basic sneakers to $150 for premium offerings, while soles will be priced between $15 and $40. These prices align with our affordability goals and will be implemented through the distribution channels outlined in section V.

## VI. The Impact of Soul Shoes

Time is running out, and the harm caused by unsustainable business practices is on the verge of becoming irreversible. The sustainable and innovative solutions pioneered by Soul Shoes, along with our forthcoming technological advancements, hold significant promise to steer the shoe industry towards sustainability. We anticipate that our distinctive product will carve out its own market and inspire competitors to embrace more sustainable practices through collaborative efforts with Soul Shoes.

## VII. Bibliography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SOUL SHOES
LOVE, NOT LANDFILL

# Open Door STEM

## I. Introduction

It is easy to think that education is something that is widely available to all, especially as someone who has never had a reason to believe it is not. However, if one takes a closer look at STEM education, it quickly becomes apparent that there is a large disparity in educational opportunities between those with an impairment and/or a learning difference and those without one. As this can affect them in the long run since the skills learned through STEM education are incredibly valuable and useful in many ways, it is apparent that something must be done to help those who have obstacles preventing them from taking part in all the STEM field has to offer.

## II. Social Impact Focus Area

Kids are usually introduced to STEM at a young age, typically in the classroom, but the experiments, projects, and technology are not designed to be used by kids who need accommodations. Therefore, how can kids learn these fundamental skills if they are unable to learn them in the classroom? The answer is they can't. The STEM field is developing, but not providing resources and tools accessible to individuals with learning differences. This prevents children from developing an interest in the STEM field and affects them long term, as they will be excluded from career opportunities. According to Frontiers in Education, "Economists report that "the United States will experience a 28.2% increase in STEM-related jobs between 2014 and 2024. Although students with disabilities (SWD) can help to fill those positions, 85% of SWD graduates are either underemployed or unemployed as they enter young adulthood," (Griffiths, Amy Jane et al.). This highlights significant inequality in education since these individuals should have the opportunity to fill those roles but are not given the chance to even gain an interest in it. It is unfair to allow so many individuals to be unemployed when there are positions out there that they could fill and excel in. Closing the STEM education gap between kids with learning differences and disabilities and those without will ensure they receive equal opportunities in the present and in the future. It is time to stop thinking of students' disabilities as the issue and begin adapting educational environments to fit the diverse needs of their students.

## III. **Proposed Solution: Open Door STEM**

To address the needs of students aged nine to fourteen with vision impairments, hearing impairments, and/or learning differences, we propose Open Door STEM, an online, nonprofit store and resource hub for STEM education tools. Our user experience could look like the following process:

> (1) *A family visits our website, and the student takes a short series of quizzes so we can know how to best address their needs.* (2) *Students are automatically matched with products and resources that address their needs (based on their quiz responses).* (3) *The family selects the best products for their student's needs, then chooses to buy the product(s), participate in an affordable rental program, or apply to be a sponsored student (and borrow products for free).* (4) *The student receives their STEM kit(s) in the mail. Now, they're equipped to discover new ways to learn and create!* (5) *If renting or borrowing, students mail back their kits after the rental or borrowing period ends, with the option to continue their learning with a new kit.*

Specifically, we will sell, rent, and loan our proprietary STEM education kits, as well as stand-alone products. Kits will be suggested to students based on their interests, and each will be designed to accommodate the needs of our target market. These products and kits will enable students to participate in hands-on activities tailored to a specific facet of STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, and/or Math. For example, this may include:

1. Tactile graphics, such as the periodic table of elements for introductory chemistry projects, which can be difficult to access for visually impaired students,
2. Tactile coding tools, so students can learn middle-school level computer programming concepts through engaging, hands-on challenges,
3. Or tactile resources to give students a better understanding of the abstract mathematic concepts that are introduced in middle school.

## IV. **Population Served**

Kids ages nine to fourteen who have either vision impairments, hearing impairments, and/or a learning difference are the ones to most benefit from Open Door STEM. The following statistics were all

gathered from Statista and further put into perspective how many individuals could be impacted by more accessible STEM technology:

- In 2018, 9.8 percent of kids in the U.S. had ADHD which equals 7.19 million kids
- 2.03 million kids had autism spectrum disorder in 2020.
- 413,700 five to fifteen-year-olds in the U.S. had a visual disability in 2021.
- 72,000 three to twenty-one-year-olds had hearing impairments in 2022.

This group of individuals faces problems with current STEM education products for many reasons. This could include but is not limited to, a visually impaired student who is unable to see the directions, a kid with ADHD who finds it hard to focus with traditional learning styles, or a student with dyslexia who prefers tactile learning but is currently limited to learning with a screen. At some schools, they even go as far as excluding young kids with disabilities from STEM activities because they have preconceived notions about their capabilities.

Some companies do exist that attempt to make STEM learning more inclusive for kids with disabilities, but these products are hundreds or thousands of dollars which is not something many of these individuals can afford. That is why Open Door STEM will place a large focus on making sure our products can be accessed by anyone so that STEM learning can take place regardless of how much money the family has. Furthermore, even if the product itself is modified to best suit those with disabilities it is also essential to provide resources to teach parents and teachers to properly include the kids in STEM education which is why our resource portion of the website will be equally as important. Open Door STEM will allow the children who normally cannot participate or learn with existing systems to use accessible products that allow them to better understand concepts, learn in ways they are comfortable with, and be able to use their senses to learn concepts they would not be able to otherwise. We will also ensure to provide support to educators and parents so they can further the students' STEM education instead of being an additional barrier.

## V. **Compelling Advantage**

Though products that address the needs of our target market exist throughout the education and toy markets, there is a lack of organizations addressing the specific needs at the intersection of STEM and special-needs education. We recognize two major compelling advantages of Open Door STEM:

> **(1)** ***STEM-focused:*** *our online storefront and resource library will be a one-stop shop for accessible and engaging STEM activities.* **(2)** ***Low barriers for customers:*** *with both rental and borrowing programs, as well as a free resource and project library and selling directly to households, Open Door STEM lowers the barriers customers traditionally face when accessing STEM education tools.*

Our organization will support a broad range of students with disabilities and learning differences. We believe that this creates exceptional value for our target market, since having any one of these disabilities or learning differences makes a student more likely to have comorbid disabilities, disorders, and/or learning differences as well.

## VI. Open Door STEM Business Model

The initial development of Open Door STEM will be funded by grants, donations, and angel investors. However, the company will be self-sustainable through the revenue made by selling our proprietary products and through the ten percent rental fee on the product if the family decides to go that route instead. STEM kits and stand-alone products will range in price from $15 - $250 depending on the product and the complexity. Existing kits and products are selling for three to five times the prices we selected (due to higher profit margins), which makes them highly inaccessible. While our products will be marked up by twenty percent compared to the cost of manufacturing them, this will go to running the company as well as developing new products to constantly be able to meet the needs of the consumer. Offering a rental option increases affordability, ensuring equity in education. Furthermore, those who can purchase will also be provided with the option to “sponsor” a child so that the rental fee can be waived for those who cannot afford it.

The products sold by Open Door STEM fit into two markets. The first is the educational toys market. This market was valued at $56.4 billion in 2022 and is projected to grow to $111.2 billion by

2032. The second market we fit into is the STEM education in K-12 market, which was valued at $37.4 billion in 2021 and is projected to grow at an annual rate of 14.6 percent until 2030. These two growing industries will allow adequate funding for our products so the company can continue developing and creating products that are best suited for all the learning differences and impairments that hinder a child's STEM education.

## VII. Potential Social Impact & Measures of Success

As stated above, will focus on addressing the needs of 4th-8th grade students with vision impairments, hearing impairments, and/or learning differences in the United States. In the 2019-20 school year, there were about 2.4 million "3- to 21-year-olds with specific learning disabilities served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States." When added to the statistics on visual disabilities and hearing impairments above (see section IV), an estimated 2.9 million U.S. children fit into our target market (not accounting for comorbidity or our target age range). Even adjusted, though, we estimate that there are still over half a million U.S. children and adolescents whose needs are specifically addressed by our products.

Reasonably, we would strive to impact 5% of this population: an estimated 25,000 students. This could be measured by the number of accounts on our website that have bought/rented/borrowed at least one product or kit from us. More qualitative measures of success could be derived from product reviews and testimonials from users and their families. In the long run, we would love to see an increase in the number of people with disabilities and learning differences employed in the STEM field and know that we played a part in the increase of those numbers.

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# BEST USE OF TECHNOLOGY AWARD

The Best Use of Technology Award aims to recognize and celebrate an innovative business concept that will effectively and ethically utilize emerging technology to solve a significant problem that has a substantial market opportunity.

Potential areas of focus may include how technology could be leveraged to:

- Use diagnostics to improve health outcomes for vulnerable populations
- Streamline accounting services or tax preparation
- Improve access to education

- A scholarship of $2,500 awarded each year at the Fowler Business Concept Challenge.
- Open to applicants submitting in either track - Business or Social Venture.
- Submissions for the general competition and the Best Use of Technology Award are due to the Reviewr portal by 11:59 p.m. on October 26, 2026.

# Best Use of Technology Award Criteria & Process

## Submission Criteria & Process

Student teams who want to be considered for this special award must first submit their concepts to the Business or Social Track of the Fowler Business Concept Challenge. To be eligible for the Best Use of Technology Award, students must submit an additional 1-page statement describing how their venture addresses the following criteria:

1. Value Proposition: the incorporation or integration of technology truly adds value as opposed to just being a surface level add-on to an existing offering.
2. Differentiation: the technology provides a clear competitive edge, distinguishing the business from its competitors.
3. Impact: the extent to which this concept can make a positive impact on an industry, community, or society at large while also considering the ethical implications of technological advances and mitigating risks of potential misuse.

## Selection & Award Process

A separate panel of judges will review submissions for this special award. A scholarship of $2,500 will be awarded to the individual or team whose concept best meets the criteria of the Best Use of Technology Award. The winner of the award will be announced during the Fowler Business Concept Challenge award ceremony on November 20, 2026

# HEALTH EQUITY CHAMPION AWARD

The Health Equity Champion Award recognizes and celebrates an innovative concept that will advance health equity. This special award seeks to spotlight concepts that are making significant strides in addressing health disparities and ensuring equal access to healthcare solutions for all. Potential areas of focus may include but are not limited to:

- Reducing health disparities
- Increasing access to quality healthcare services
- Improving health outcomes in underserved communities
- Promoting inclusivity in health innovation

- A scholarship of $2,500 awarded each year at the Fowler Business Concept Challenge.
- Open to applicants submitting in either track - Business or Social Venture.
- Submissions for the general competition and the Health Equity Champion Award are due to the Reviewr portal by 11:59 p.m. on October 26, 2026

# Health Equity Champion Criteria & Process

## Submission Criteria & Process

Student Teams who want to be considered for this special award must first submit their concepts to the Business or Social Track of the Fowler Business Concept Challenge. To be eligible for the Health Equity Champion Award, students must submit an additional 1-page statement describing how their venture addresses the following criteria:

1. Impact on Health Equity: The extent to which the business reduces health disparities and promotes equality in healthcare access, outcomes or innovation.
2. Innovation: The proposed business explores a new idea or offers an innovative strategy for expanding a promising approach/best practice to have greater impact or broader reach.
3. Alignment with Community Needs: The extent to which the concept considers the cultural and contextual needs of a specific community.
4. Feasibility & Sustainability: Viability and scalability of the business model and potential for long-term positive impact.

## Selection & Award Process

A separate panel of judges will review submissions for this special award. A scholarship of $2,500 will be awarded to the individual or team whose concept best meets the criteria of the Health Equity Champion Award. The winner of the award will be announced during the Fowler Business Concept Challenge award ceremony on November 20, 2026

# KATE HERZOG
## MEMORIAL AWARD

KATE HERZOG '09 MBA

***Kate launched her social venture, House of Talents, to help artisans build the lives they envision for themselves. This award supports aspiring social entrepreneurs with a passion for poverty alleviation.***

- A scholarship of $2,500 awarded each year at the Fowler Business Concept Challenge
- Open to applicants submitting in the Social Venture track
- To be eligible for consideration, students must submit an impact statement of up to 1-page describing how the venture addresses social challenges around poverty alleviation, serving under resourced communities and closing opportunity gaps

HOUSE of TALENTS

ENTREPRENEUR ALUMNA MENTOR TEACHER

# Kate Herzog Award
## Criteria & Process

### About the Award

The Kate Herzog Memorial Award was established in memory of Kate Herzog, '09 MBA. Kate was an entrepreneur, a scholar, a wife, and a mother. She launched her social venture, House of Talents, to help artisans build the lives they envision for themselves. This award supports aspiring social entrepreneurs with a passion for poverty alleviation.

This award recognizes the individual or team with a concept that shares a similar passion for social impact, innovation, and entrepreneurship. The award is open to applicants with concepts addressing social challenges around poverty alleviation, serving under resourced communities and closing opportunity gaps.

### Submission Criteria & Process

Students or teams who would like to be considered for this special prize must first submit their written concepts to the Social Venture Track of the Fowler Business Concept Challenge. To be eligible for consideration for the Kate Herzog Award, students must submit an additional impact statement of up to 1-page describing how their venture addresses social challenges around poverty alleviation, serving under resourced communities and closing opportunity gaps.

Social Venture track submissions and Kate Herzog Award submissions are due to the Reviewr portal by 11:59 pm on October 26, 2026 and can be submitted concurrently.

### Selection & Award Process

A separate panel of judges will review submissions for this special award. A scholarship of $2,500 will be awarded to the individual or team whose concept best meets the criteria of the Kate Herzog Memorial Award. The winner of the award will be announced during the Fowler Business Concept Challenge on November 20, 2026