ACCELERATE 2023
APPLICATION GUIDEBOOK

ACCELERATE 2023 IS PRESENTED BY

CLEVELAND
LEADERSHIP CENTER

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You have an idea and want to pitch it to win funding. Here is everything you need to know about how to apply for Accelerate 2023 and what to expect if you are selected to pitch at the event.

What is Accelerate ?

Accelerate is a high-energy annual civic pitch competition. This Shark Tank-style event gives individuals across Northeast Ohio a chance to win seed money to help launch their idea to make the region a better place.

Accelerate 2023, sponsored by Citizens, will take place the evening of Thursday, February 23, 2023. From November 1 to December 2, 2022, anyone with an idea to improve Greater Cleveland can submit an application to pitch at the event.

Five proposals are selected from each of the six pitch categories (30 pitches total) to be pitch at the event. In the first round, presenters pitch their ideas to a panel of community leaders who select one finalist in each category to pitch in the Finalist round to the full audience, which votes for the winner.

The winner receives $5,000, and the remaining five finalists each receive $2,000 to help fund their ideas.

Technovation, sponsored by the Cleveland Foundation, is a separate contest at Accelerate for ideas featuring technology. The five selected presenters pitch their idea to a panel of judges with the winner taking home $3,500.

What are the six categories ?

Applicants apply to one of six Accelerate categories. Pitches may be moved to a different category by CLC during the selection process. The six categories are:

CLEVELAND EXPERIENCES & EXCURSIONS
Evoking connection to place for visitors and locals, and inspiring return visits.

Past pitches have included promoting Cleveland's grit through shared stories of struggle, experiences that showcase Cleveland's landmarks, events that highlight Cleveland's unique natural assets, projects that highlight Cleveland's unique Black culture and history, and a platform to promote and support Cleveland's Black artists.

Last year's winning pitch

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY
Creating pathways to financial success for people and places.

Past pitches have included projects to increase financial literacy, promote financial independence, grow Cleveland's film industry, expand entrepreneurship, and establish social enterprises.

Last year's winning pitch

EDUCATION

Advancing access, readiness, and success for pre-k through college students.

Past pitches have included ideas to better prepare incoming Kindergarteners, mentorship programs, literacy initiatives, ways to help address educational disparities, and projects to increase interest in STEM.

Shane and Courtney won the grand prize!

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Promoting the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of individuals and their communities.

Past pitches have included mental health support programs, ideas to cope with anxiety, initiatives to help special needs populations thrive, programs to help individuals understand and navigate the medical and insurance systems, and products to aid health and wellness.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Improving lives through art, culture, the environment, and community improvement projects.

Past pitches have included ways to elevate and support local art and artists, a community bee keeping program, ways to reduce food waste and helping families in need, initiatives to help homeless individuals, sustainability and anti-pollution projects, and empowerment programs for special populations.

Last year's winning pitch

SOCIAL CHANGE

Increasing equity, access, and opportunities within communities.

Past pitches have included projects to elevate minority voices and experiences, initiatives to fight crime and support victims, collaborations for resource and knowledge sharing, ideas to expand technology access, and programs to support immigrants and refugees.

Last year's winning pitch

Adam also won Technovation!

What is Technovation ?

TECHNOVATION

Technovation is a separate pitch contest at Accelerate for innovative technology ideas.

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Applicants to any Accelerate category may opt to be considered for the Technovation competition at the time of applying. Applications for the Accelerate category competition and Technovation competition are evaluated separately, therefore it is possible for an applicant who applied to both competitions to only be selected to pitch in one at the event.

Past pitches have included projects that meld nature and technology, initiatives to teach coding and technology skills, projects to leverage technology to create sustainable food supplies, an online platform to help elderly individuals learn to eat healthier, and apps to help individuals recycle, learn to play instruments, and leverage creative writing as a form of therapy.

Last year's winning pitch

What info is on the application ?

Ideas are submitted through an online form, where applicants provide the following information *(each answer must be 250 words or less)*:

- Description of the initiative.

- Identify the community issue it addresses.

- How will it benefit the community?

- Why are you passionate about the issue?

- How will you know if the initiative is successful?

Ideas cannot be affiliated with an established organization or business - the system automatically filters out these applications. Ideas may become part of an organization or business, but at the time of application they must be stand alone ideas, not embedded as part of an established entity.

View a pdf of the application >

How are pitches selected **?**

Independent panels of leaders from across Northeast Ohio review the pitch applications and select 30 ideas for the category competition (five in each category) and the five Technovation ideas to be pitched at the event.

The reviewers evaluate the applications based on the following criteria:

- Potential for community impact and advancing NE Ohio.

- How unique, creative, and innovative the initiative is.

- A realistic implementation plan that would be aided by the prize money.

Although the Technovation applications are reviewed separately from the Accelerate categories, the same selection criteria are used for both.

What makes for a strong application ?

Since Accelerate pitch selection is a competitive process, applicants should submit the strongest case for their pitch in the application. Before starting the application, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

- What's motivating you? Why are you doing this?

- What challenges are you hoping to solve?

- Will you be able to measure your impact?

- What difference are you trying to make in our community?

- How will you use the funding to help you achieve your goals?

- How is your idea filling a gap in services in the community?

Pitch reviewers are looking for applications that are innovative, clear, and effective. Applications should answer the 'what', the 'who', the 'why', and the 'how' of the idea. It is helpful to have a clear understanding of each before starting the application.

Ideas at all stages of development are welcome – a fully developed plan is not required.

It may be helpful to consider the following prompts:

- What needs to be improved? What does your end goal look like? What is the scope (or size) of the project?

- Who will this initiative or project benefit? Who might be potential partners/collaborators? Is there someone else already doing this?

- Why is this project important, to you, to those you will serve, and to the Greater Cleveland community?

- How will you accomplish your goal? What steps are needed to get to your desired outcome?

These details give the reviewers a deeper understanding of the pitch idea and can help you think through the people, places, and things you will need for your project to be successful.

Reviewers are also seeking a clear understanding of how the funding will be used. It may be helpful to think through the following questions:

1. How would you use the Accelerate money? Are there items to puchase? Services to contract?

2. If the Accelerate prize money is not sufficient to fully fund your idea, how will you bridge the gap? What are other potential sources of funding for your project (donors, generated revenue, etc.)?

Before hitting submit... make sure all questions are answered clearly and concisely. If possible, have someone who is unfamiliar with the idea read through it to see if there are spots that need more clarification.

What happens if you're selected ?

While most everyone applies in hopes of winning funding, the Accelerate experience is about much more than the prize money.

Past presenters and other participants have been surprised to discover how extensive and beneficial the entire Accelerate process is. From the time pitches are accepted, to the event and long after, presenters receive a tremendous amount of support, professional development, unparalleled networking opportunities, and connections to resources.

If you are selected, you are expected to be in-person to present your pitch on Thursday, February 23rd beginning at 4:00 p.m. You are also expected to actively engage in the prep activities (noted below), stay in communication with CLC throughout the experience and to actively promote the event to your networks.

PROMOTION
Once selected, presenters are promoted across social media, through CLC's email network (11,000+ contacts), and are sometimes featured by local media outlets.

The goal is to not only build awareness and excitement for the February event, but also for the presenters' ideas. Something as simple as one social media post can connect a presenter with a supporter or resource to help move their idea forward.

WHILE WE CAN'T FUND ALL THE IDEAS, WE WANT TO SEE THEM ALL SUCCEED!

TRAINING SESSIONS

Leading up to Accelerate, presenters are provided the opportunity to take part in three separate training sessions to help them give their best pitch at the event.

1. The first training session covers the basics of creating a prize-worthy presentation.

2. The second session is a practice pitch where presenters receive feedback from local leaders and entrepreneurship students to refine their pitch.

3. The final training session is a "how-to" on being a dynamic presenter.

PITCHING AT THE EVENT

Pitches can take up to five minutes. Presentations can include physical visual aids and/or props but A/V is not permitted (i.e., no slide shows, videos, etc.).

In addition to competing for the coveted $5,000 prize, presenters have their ideas heard by hundreds of local leaders, which can lead to connections, resources, collaborators, and alternative and/or additional sources of funding — regardless of the outcome.

We're here to help !

The application process can seem daunting. If you have questions about the process or your application, email _Rachel Ciomcia_ or call (216)-592-2280.

ADDITIONAL INFO ACCELERATE 2023

- _Learn more about the event >_
- _Apply to pitch >_
- _View Winning Pitches from Accelerate 2022 >_