

the
pitch!
must charities ●

Program Guide
2026

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About Must! Charities

Must! Charities is a nonprofit organization dedicated to changing the model of philanthropy. We unite donors, pool resources, and invest strategically in our region while empowering nonprofits and educating our community. At Must! Charities, 100% of community donations go directly into projects, thanks to our Executive Board and a few private donors covering all our operating costs.

About The Pitch

The Pitch is an exciting initiative designed to help local nonprofits refine their message, amplify their impact, and connect with key supporters. This three-month coaching experience provides nonprofit leaders with expert coaching, strategic insight, and a dynamic platform to elevate their mission. Cohort participants receive professional coaching to develop a clear organizational pitch, gain increased visibility and connections, and build the capacity needed to sustain long-term growth.

The program culminates in a high-energy pitch event in November. Finalists deliver a powerful 3-minute presentation in front of a live audience and a panel of judges. Judges evaluate each pitch using a standardized rubric, and monetary awards are presented to 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners.

The Pitch is exclusively for 501(c)3 non-profit organizations.

How It Works

- The Application: Non-profit organizations serving needs in San Luis Obispo County are invited to apply.
- The Cohort: From the applicant pool, 10 nonprofit organizations will be selected to participate.
- Finalists: Of the cohort, 6 organizations will be chosen as finalists and will present at The Pitch event. Organizations that are not selected as finalists will still be represented at the event and included in event collateral.
- Coaches: Each participating nonprofit organization will be paired with 2 coaches.
- Training Sessions: From August through November, participating nonprofits will attend group training sessions.
- The Event: The Pitch is the culmination of months of preparation where finalists present a refined 3-minute pitch. Audience members have the opportunity to donate directly to participating nonprofit organizations, and judges award 1st, 2nd and 3rd place awards.
- Must! Charities' Awards: Must! Charities provides monetary awards to the top three finalists, as determined by scores from an independent panel of judges. Judges are not affiliated with Must! Charities as staff, board, or committee members.
 - 1st Place: \$20,000
 - 2nd Place: \$15,000
 - 3rd Place: \$10,000
- Payment of Awards and Audience Donations: By the end of December, Must! Charities will distribute monetary awards and audience donations to participating organizations.

Program Schedule

January	Application launch for coaches
February	Application launch for non-profit organizations
March	Information meeting for interested non-profit organizations Final coaching roster determined
April	April 9 th : Applications close
May	Remote interviews with top 20 applicants Non-profit finalists selected and notified
July	Coaches and non-profit organization assignments announced
August	August 19 th : Kick Off Party August 26 th : Session 1
September	September 9 th : Session 2 September 23 rd : Session 3 Tickets go on sale
October	October 7 th : Session 4 October 21 st : Session 5 Presenting finalists selected
November	November TBD : The Pitch Event
December	Audience donations and monetary awards sent to organizations

Sessions and Homework Overview

Session 1: August 26th

Dual Coaching + Participant Training

5:00pm – 7:00pm

StoryLabs: 8965 El Camino Real, Atascadero

Coach's Breakout: Tools, resources, expectations.

Participant Breakout: Team building.

Group Session: Overview of expectations and program, Q&A with past coaches and participants, and Q&A with staff.

Homework completed by Session 1: None

Session 2: September 9th

5:00pm – 7:00pm

StoryLabs: 8965 El Camino Real, Atascadero

This session provides training on the key elements of a strong pitch, including a breakdown of what makes a winning pitch. Significant time is allotted for coaches and participants to meet.

Homework completed by Session 2: Brainstorm notes identifying the program or project that will be the focus of your pitch.

Session 3: September 23rd

5:00pm – 7:00pm

StoryLabs: 8965 El Camino Real, Atascadero

This session provides an opportunity to meet one-on-one with experienced professionals in a series of breakout rooms to review elements of your draft pitch and receive feedback and insight.

Homework completed by Session 3: Prepare a 30-word introduction of the organization for the emcee, identify key statistics that support the pitch, select a testimonial or story to reinforce the message, and bring these materials, along with a one- to two-paragraph draft of the pitch, to soundboard with panelists.

Session 4: October 7th

5:00pm – 7:00pm

StoryLabs: 8965 El Camino Real, Atascadero

Nonprofit organizations will present their three-minute pitch for the first time. This is an opportunity to practice delivery and experiment with body language, movement, and stage presence. Organizations may use notes with bullet points; complete memorization is not recommended at this stage, as pitches will continue to evolve based on feedback. Coaches will provide verbal feedback and written scores. It is recommended that coaches and nonprofit organizations meet immediately following the session to review strengths and identify areas for improvement.

Homework completed by Session 4: Final 30-word introduction complete, draft of the pitch complete, walk-up music selected, presentation notes prepared in bullet-point format, and body language, movement, and stage presence practiced.

Session 5: October 21st

5:00pm – 7:00pm

Location TBD

Non-profit organizations will present their three-minute pitch without notes. Two coaches per organization will provide verbal and written feedback. The Pitch finalists will be selected from this session by an independent panel of professionals.

Homework completed by Session 5: Show ready – polished, final music selection and timing cue chosen, and your pitch is no more than three minutes. Practice. Practice. Practice more. Be ready.

About Pitch Presentations Sessions 4 and 5

- Presentation Quality: At Session 4, participants may use notes, and the pitch is not expected to be fully polished. This session is about practice, not perfection. At Session 5, participants should treat their pitch as if it were the final event. Pitches should be memorized, polished, and incorporate intentional body movement and facial expressions.
- Timer: Both Sessions 4 and 5 will include a visible timer during each pitch.^[1] At Session 4, there is no penalty for exceeding the time limit.^[2] At Session 5, point penalties will be applied to pitches that exceed three minutes, as follows:
 - 10 seconds: grace
 - 11-15 seconds: 1-point penalty
 - 16-20 seconds: 2-point penalty
 - Over 20 seconds: disqualified
- Feedback: Each participant delivers a three-minute pitch and receives written feedback from all coaches and verbal feedback from two coaches at Session 4. As Session 5, there will only be verbal feedback from two coaches for each pitch. Following Session 5, each participant will have access online to the panelists' feedback.
- Order: Participants are assigned to an order at random.
- Video: Team members of non-profit organizations are allowed to video the presenter.
- Scoring: Coaches will score each presentation using individual score sheets, which will be shared with nonprofit organizations at the end of each session.
- Improvement: Coaches and non-profit organizations are encouraged to meet between sessions to review scores and discuss areas of improvement.

Access to Resources

Participants and coaches have access to the Program Guide, Calendar, Timeline, Scoring Sheet and Contact Information in a Shared Google Drive that will be provided when finalists are confirmed.

Main Event

The main event is held on November **TBD** at **Location**.

- Schedule
 - 1pm: Presenters participate in sound check and rehearsal
 - 3pm: Presenters' meal served in the green room
 - 4:30pm: Wine Reception
 - 5:30pm: Program Begins
 - 7:00pm: Dessert Reception
- Presentation Order: Order of presentations are random and determined ahead of time. Participants will be notified of the order one week in advance of the main event.
- Timer: A timer will be onstage and visible to presenters. It will not sound an alert should you go over three minutes.
- Visual Aids: Presenters may not use visual aids.
- Judges: Judges will be to one side of the stage.
- Leaderboard for Donations: The live donation leaderboard will be displayed throughout the evening and will show total donations for each participating nonprofit organization. All donations are tracked through an app.

Event Awards

There are three ways monetary awards are generated at The Pitch:

- Must! Charities' Awards: Must! Charities provides monetary awards for the top three places, determined by scores from a panel of judges. These judges are members of the San Luis Obispo community and are not affiliated with Must! Charities as staff, board, or committee members.
 - 1st Place: \$20,000
 - 2nd Place: \$15,000
 - 3rd Place: \$10,000
- Live Audience Participation: Throughout The Pitch, audience members have the opportunity to pledge real-time donations through their phones. Donations are tracked and will be periodically displayed throughout the evening. Leveraging your own community and supporters for onsite donations is suggested.
- Post Event Donations: Audience members may connect directly with nonprofit organizations following the event. In some cases, these conversations result in donations made at The Pitch or in the weeks that follow, and any subsequent donations generated through The Pitch will be paid directly to the respective nonprofit organization.

Tangible and Intangible Benefits

The Pitch offers more than an opportunity to win a monetary award. In addition, participants can expect to receive:

- Approximately \$20,000 value in direct, measurable coaching and practice/
- Potential value of \$25,000+ when factoring in media exposure, volunteer recruitment, and improved strategic messaging.
- The greatest impact often comes from increased strategic capacity and visibility, which are difficult to quantify but essential for long-term growth.

Non-Profit Expectations

To ensure successful participation in Must! Charities' The Pitch program, we request that each nonprofit carefully consider and adhere to the following expectations:

- **Calendar Availability**
 - August 19th from 4:00pm – 6:00pm: Kick-Off Party
 - August 27th from 5:00 – 7:00pm: Session 1
 - September 9th from 5:00 – 7:00pm: Session 2
 - September 23rd from 5:00 – 7:00pm: Session 3
 - October 7th from 5:00 – 7:00pm: Session 4
 - October 21st from 5:00 – 7:00pm: Session 5
 - November **TBD** from 5:00 – 7:00pm: The Pitch
- **Time Commitment**
 - Training Sessions: Attend five sessions lasting 2 hours each, plus a kickoff event.
 - Pitch Event: Participate in a 3-hour pitch event.
 - One-on-One Coaching: Schedule individual coaching sessions in between training sessions at your discretion.
 - Nonprofit Visit: We encourage coaches to visit the nonprofit organization to better understand their work.
- **Primary + Secondary Presenter**
 - Primary Presenter: The primary presenter should be a nonprofit executive who regularly speaks on behalf of the organization.
 - Secondary Presenter: In addition to the primary presenter, each nonprofit is required to designate a secondary presenter who will attend all sessions. The secondary presenter's role is to actively engage in the process by studying the presentation, taking notes, and providing valuable feedback to the primary presenter.
 - Unforeseen Emergencies: If an unforeseen emergency prevents the primary presenter from attending a session, the designated secondary presenter is expected to attend in their place.
 - Nonrepresentation: Failure to have a representative at any session, without a valid emergency, may jeopardize the nonprofit's eligibility to participate in the final event.
- **Team Collaboration**
 - Team Makeup: Each team consists of 2 coaches and a primary and secondary presenter from the nonprofit.
 - Scheduling Meetings: The nonprofit is responsible for scheduling team meetings with the coach(es) between sessions to review and refine pitch content.
 - Face-to-Face Meetings: We strongly recommend face-to-face meetings to practice pitch presentations in a standing position and to choreograph body and eye movements.
- **Continuous Improvement**
 - Incorporate Feedback: The presenter from the nonprofit carries the responsibility of actively incorporating feedback received during team meetings to create a new and improved pitch.
 - Ongoing Refinement: This iterative process of development and refinement is essential to each participant's success in the program.
 - Strengths and Weaknesses: Coaching is designed to highlight the presenter's strengths and address areas for improvement, increasing the pitch's appeal to a general audience in a large public setting.
 - Be Coachable: Nonprofit presenters have been asked to be coachable. This means being open to change, growth, and improvement in order to strengthen the pitch and overall presentation.

Coaching Expectations

To ensure successful participation in Must! Charities' The Pitch program, we request that each coach carefully consider and adhere to the following expectations:

- **Calendar Availability**

- August 19th from 4:00pm – 6:00pm: Kick-Off Party
- August 27th from 5:00 – 7:00pm: Session 1
- September 9th from 5:00 – 7:00pm: Session 2
- September 23rd from 5:00 – 7:00pm: Session 3
- October 7th from 5:00 – 7:00pm: Session 4
- October 21st from 5:00 – 7:00pm: Session 5
- November **TBD** from 5:00 – 7:00pm: The Pitch

- **Time Commitment**

- Training Sessions: Attend five sessions lasting 2 hours each, plus a kickoff event.
- Pitch Event: Participate in a 3-hour pitch event.
- One-on-One Coaching: Schedule individual coaching sessions in between training sessions as needed.
- Nonprofit Visit: Coaches are encouraged to visit the nonprofit organization to better understand their work.

- **Guiding Coaching Principles**

- Purpose of Coaching: Coaching is designed to highlight the nonprofit speaker's strengths and address areas for improvement, resulting in a more compelling pitch for a general audience in a large public setting.
- Balancing Feedback: Speakers may receive conflicting feedback from the larger training group and their matched coaches. While it is the speaker's responsibility to decide which feedback to apply, coaches should help evaluate what is most valuable.
- Addressing Concerns: Speakers should communicate with their coach if any feedback feels offensive, unsupportive, or misaligned with their mission and goals.
- Being Coachable: Nonprofit speakers are expected to be open to change, growth, and improvement. While they are not required to agree with every suggestion, coaches can point out instances where speakers appear resistant to feedback. Speakers understand that they may be encouraged to step outside their comfort zone, as outlined in their memorandum of understanding.
- Scope of Coaching: Coaching does not include rewriting the nonprofit's pitch but helping guide and redefine it.

Event Promotion and Leveraging Audience Donations

The Pitch is a unique and engaging experience that often inspires a greater desire to get involved in our local community.

We encourage coaches and non-profit organizations to actively promote The Pitch as an informative and inspiring evening in addition to a money raising opportunity. Here is how you can leverage your relationships for increased donations:

- Social Media Promotion: Share event information and the ticket link across social media platforms.
- Share with Contacts: Spread the word to friends, family, board members, and colleagues via text, email and/or good old-fashioned in-person opportunities. Having supporters in the audience creates an exciting buzz in the air at The Pitch.
- Email Marketing: The Pitch is a unique and engaging experience that often inspires a greater desire to get involved in our local community. Include The Pitch in organizational newsletters or email campaigns to encourage attendance and engagement.
- Donor Prospects: The Pitch offers a unique opportunity for you to engage donor prospects – a creative alternative to traditional “pitches.”

Active participation in promoting The Pitch is vital to our shared goals to support the non-profit organizations serving our community. Together, we create a significant impact!

2026 Coaches Score Sheet

Non-Profit: _____ Pitch Session Number: _____

Presenter: _____ Evaluator: _____

Creative Hook

The presenter has an opening, attention-grabbing hook to capture audience interest and spark curiosity, setting the tone and establishing relevance of the organization and/or specific program.

Organization's Purpose

The presenter clearly communicates the mission of the organization and the need they serve.

Innovation + Differentiation

The organization has a program, service or resource not previously available **or** is approaching the need differently than other organizations.

Measurable Impact

The presenter provides data/metrics demonstrating the organization's positive outcomes in the community.

Funding Request

The pitch is clear and connects objectives with the funding request and demonstrates how funding is or will be used.

Stage Presentation

The presenter conveys authenticity, confidence, and appropriate tone and body language in three minutes or less.

10-Point Grading Scale

Score each pitch component from 1-10 based on the descriptions above with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest.

1-2 Rating Poor	3 or 4 Rating Fair	5 or 6 Rating Good	7 or 8 Rating Very Good	9 or 10 Rating Excellent
Little to no evidence of considering this area in the pitch.	Some attempts to address the criteria, but insufficient content or development.	Reasonable inclusion of content and details that demonstrate fulfillment of the criteria.	Significant and substantial inclusion of the content and details that clearly shows fulfillment of the criteria.	Excellent coverage of key elements demonstrating relevance, capability, and success in fulfilling the criteria.

Please total the score for each area.

Creative Hook	Organization's Purpose	Innovation + Differentiation	Measurable Impact	Funding Request	Stage Presentation	TOTAL

What did you like most about the presentation?

Given the elements of the score sheet, what was missing from the presentation?

What areas do you suggest for improvement?

Contact

Event Contact + Coordinator:

Any communications about session and event details or clarification on program overview should be directed to Kyle Flaherty at kyle@mustcharities.org or 805.286.1879.

Sponsorship Director:

Any questions or interest in sponsorship should be directed to Cara Wright at cara@mustcharities.org.

Must! Charities Staff

Becky Gray, Executive Director

Randy Gray, Director of Community Investments

Cara Wright, Director of Development and Community Engagement

Erika Martin, Community Projects and PURPOSE Concierge Manager

Megan Leishman, Manager of Company Culture

Ann Holland, Office Assistant

The Pitch Committee

Jacob Allred, SCADA

Lori Bickel, Community Member

Morgan Dewar-Voss, JB Dewar

Courtney McKeever, Whitney, Thompson & Jeffcoach LLP

Kelly Pope, Community Advocate