

# SPONSOR & PROBLEM CRITERIA

## Minimum Requirements to Sponsor

H4D will require a serious commitment from both the sponsor and academic teams. Taking place over one period of study (quarter, semester, etc.) it will be a rapidly-moving journey that will draw on many resources: time, network contacts, potentially software/hardware resources, and more. As the problem sponsor, you will play a critical role that will help your academic team navigate your problem successfully. We have outlined the minimum commitment required from you below:

## Primary Point of Contact

The students working on these projects may often call upon a point of contact for guidance or questions. As a sponsor, your level of commitment will play a large part in setting the tone for the project but also providing legitimate guidance. We ask that the point of contact for the student be involved in the problem statement generation and validation.

## Communication

We ask that as a sponsor, you respond to all student correspondence within 3 days. Student teams will be iterating on ideas and presenting them to classes every week. In a fast class like H4D, 7 days therefore pass extremely quickly. Therefore, your availability to respond to questions, requests, and more from students is incredibly important.

## Network

Each sponsor must suggest 15 direct users who share the specific problem. To ensure a sufficient starting point for your academic team, the student teams need to conduct at least 10 interviews every week. These interviews are critical to building a community of users invested in the problem and the evolving solution. They will provide both breadth and depth on your problem. The “15 users” requirement also serves as a check that your problem is not too niche or specific. In the past, problems that are too narrow hinder reasonable MVP generation and obstruct dual-use potential.

## Problem Criteria

Problems **must** meet the following criteria:

- Not a general research project
- Have a definite scope
- Not require access to classified knowledge or materials

Problems will also be evaluated according to:

- What skills the problem requires
- How many potential users and individuals are available to help the students
- Whether the Problem Statement describes a problem and not a proposed solution
- Whether the problem prescribes a single solution
- Whether a solution is actionable within 3 years.

## Inspire

Remember that the student likely has **no** experience working with the DoD/IC. Write a bit of background about your organization that gives the problem context.

Write about the problem your organization is facing and **why** this problem is so important.

Please view [Examples](#) of good and bad problem statements for more information.

## Getting started

If you are having trouble creating your problem statement here are some templates that have been successful:

**How might we \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ in order to \_\_\_\_\_.**

Ex: **How might we provide real time location for Navy SEAL Divers in order to increase their situational awareness and increase mission capabilities.**

Ex: **How might we identify social media narratives for NSA analysts in order to increase their ability to track hostile dialogues.**

## Vetting the problem

The problem will be vetted primarily on the same criteria laid out for a good problem statement. In order to achieve the right number of interviews, the problem must be “large” enough that the team will be able to conduct valuable customer discovery.

The problem must also be a true pain point, not just a “nice to have” solution. In the past, teams that were given a problem that was not a primary pain point for the end user, wasted many weeks finding the real problem that their sponsors were facing.

Keep in mind the students working on your problem come from a wide array of backgrounds and may or may not have any experience dealing with Department of Defense or Intelligence Community problems. Ensure that your problem is appropriate and appealing for these audiences.

When we vet a problem we also ensure that the sponsor will have appropriate authority to ensure success of the project. The sponsor cannot change positions during the entirety of the course. The students need consistent, committed, and timely contact. The Point of Contact **must not be voluntold** to participate.

## Define Success

There are multiple metrics of success:

1. Teaching team – Students to learn Steve Blank’s Lean Methodology and the tools associated with it. We also want students to understand the pressure and stress of starting a company. We will be pushing the students harder than they have ever worked, creating high pressure environment for great results.
2. Students – A genuine interest in helping your organization. The barrier of entry to working on a national security problem is often very high. For many of these students it will be their first time working in this space and they are passionate about your problem and learning the methodology.
3. Sponsor – You need to decide how you will define success. What is your expectation by the end of the course? Remember you may only have one term and possibly only 10 weeks. This class moves very quickly and your students’ ability to move forward is directly dependent on your involvement. You need to be clear about your objectives for the team. Some of the greatest successes came from opposite ends of the spectrum. For example, one team rooted-out an organizational issue that caused the problem, and one developed dual-use software valuable to both the Intelligence Community and commercial markets.