Student Competitions & Entrepreneurship Opportunities

- Arkansas Governor's Cup
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Arkansas Governor's Cup

Turn Ideas Into Opportunities

The Arkansas Governor's Cup is a collegiate business-plan competition that provides students with opportunities to develop innovative business concepts, strengthen entrepreneurial skills, and compete for cash prizes.

Participation offers valuable experience regardless of whether you intend to start a business.



Learn More About Governor's Cup

For official competition information, guidelines, eligibility requirements, prize details, and application deadlines, visit:

Arkansas Governor's Cup Official Website

Note: Competition information is subject to updates by the organizers. Students should consult the official website for current requirements.

Official Resources

Startup Support Gallery	← Click here for training videos, including how to write a business plan, and specific instructions for both parts of the competition
Competition FAQ	See full eligibility rules, as well as how to submit your entry
2027 Rules and Guidelines	Direct link to the official rules and guidelines for 2027

Official 2027 Information Session by Maddy Stricklen, Program Director

https://www.youtube.com/embed/Kkh_yfiuUTk?si=3Blb7wADwFC7_228

Arkansas EDGE Summit

Explore Entrepreneurship. Build Connections. Turn Ideas into Action.

The **Arkansas EDGE Summit** brings together students, educators, entrepreneurs, and innovation leaders from across Arkansas to explore entrepreneurship and strengthen the state's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

EDGE stands for *Education to Develop and Grow Entrepreneurs*. The summit combines educational programming, networking, and hands-on entrepreneurial activities. Its student programming has included opportunities to collaborate with students from other universities, develop business concepts, and compete for cash prizes.

Unlike traditional business plan competitions, **the EDGE Summit offers an opportunity to experience entrepreneurship in action, even if you don't already have a startup or fully developed business idea.**

Key Dates and Deadlines: 2027 Summit

The Arkansas EDGE Summit is expected to return in 2027, although official dates, location, registration details, and student competition opportunities have not yet been announced.

Milestone	2027 Dates	2026 Reference
Registration opens	To Be Announced	August 2026
Student competition registration	To Be Announced	October 15, 2026
EDGE Summit	**To Be Announced**	**October 27–28, 2026**
Location	To Be Announced	Arkansas Tech University, Russellville, AR

The 2026 dates are provided for planning purposes only. The 2027 schedule and student programming may differ.

Students should monitor the official website for announcements.

Why Participate?

Experience Entrepreneurship Firsthand

Explore what it takes to turn an idea into a potential business. Through interactive activities and entrepreneurial challenges, students can develop practical skills without needing an established startup.

Collaborate with Students Across Arkansas

Work alongside students from other universities, exchange ideas, and approach business challenges from different perspectives. The 2026 student track featured a collaborative startup sprint involving teams from multiple institutions.

Put Your Ideas to the Test

Participate in hands-on activities that challenge you to identify problems, develop solutions, and communicate business concepts. Previous student programming has included competitive opportunities with cash prizes.

Connect with Arkansas's Entrepreneurial Community

Meet entrepreneurs, educators, business professionals, and organizations supporting innovation throughout the state. Discover resources and connections that can help you continue exploring entrepreneurship beyond the summit.

Who Can Participate?

The EDGE Summit welcomes individuals interested in entrepreneurship, innovation, and business development.

Student opportunities may include:

- Undergraduate and graduate students from Arkansas colleges and universities
- Students from any academic discipline
- Individuals interested in entrepreneurship, even without an existing business idea
- Students interested in collaborative challenges, networking, and entrepreneurial learning

Specific eligibility requirements and student competition details for 2027 have not yet been announced.

How to Get Started

1. **Explore the event:** Review the EDGE Summit website to learn about previous programming and student opportunities.
2. **Watch for 2027 announcements:** Check for registration dates, student competition details, and participation requirements.

3. **Identify your interests:** Consider what problems, industries, or entrepreneurial opportunities you would like to explore.
4. **Prepare to participate:** Be ready to collaborate, develop ideas, and engage with students and professionals from across Arkansas.
5. **Register:** Follow the official instructions when 2027 registration opens.

Visit the official summit website for announcements, registration information, student programming, and event updates.

Arkansas EDGE Summit Official Website

Event programming, student competition opportunities, eligibility requirements, and awards may change from year to year. Always consult the official website for current information.

e-Fest: Schulze Entrepreneurship Challenge

Take Your Startup to the National Stage. Pitch Big. Compete for $250,000.

e-Fest, hosted by the Schulze School of Entrepreneurship at the University of St. Thomas, is a national entrepreneurship competition designed specifically for undergraduate student founders.

Bringing together 25 finalist teams from colleges and universities across North America, e-Fest offers students the opportunity to **pitch their ventures, compete for $250,000 in cash prizes, and connect with entrepreneurs, investors, and fellow student founders**.

Unlike traditional business plan competitions, e-Fest combines multiple live pitching challenges, professional development workshops, and networking opportunities into a three-day entrepreneurial experience.

Key Dates and Deadlines: 2027 Competition

Date	Milestone
November 11, 2026	Applications open
January 31, 2027	**Application deadline: 11:59 PM Pacific Time**
February 26, 2027	Finalist notifications
March 2, 2027	Top 25 finalist teams announced
April 22–24, 2027	**e-Fest Finals:** Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dates are subject to change. Students should confirm details through the official competition website.

Why Participate?

Pitch Your Venture on a National Stage

Represent A-State alongside undergraduate entrepreneurs from across North America. The top 25 teams advance to Minneapolis to compete before experienced entrepreneurs, investors, and business professionals.

Compete for $250,000 in Cash Prizes

e-Fest offers multiple opportunities to win, including the Schulze Entrepreneurship Challenge, Pitch Slam!, Innovation Challenge, and Special Recognition Awards.

The Schulze Entrepreneurship Challenge alone awards **$50,000 to its first-place team**, with additional prizes for other finalists.

Get Feedback Even If You Don't Make the Finals

Every team submitting a qualifying entry receives feedback from competition judges. Use those insights to strengthen your venture, improve your pitch, and prepare for future entrepreneurial opportunities.

Connect with Entrepreneurs and Fellow Founders

Participate in workshops, meet experienced business leaders, and connect with student entrepreneurs from across the country. Finalist teams may also receive **travel stipends of up to $3,750** to help cover expenses associated with attending the competition.

Who Can Participate?

e-Fest is designed for undergraduate students developing early-stage business ventures.

- Teams must include **2–5 undergraduate students**.
- Students must be enrolled during spring 2027 or have graduated no earlier than fall 2026.
- Ventures must meet early-stage eligibility requirements, including limits on revenue and outside funding.
- Each team must have a faculty or staff advisor who can accompany finalists to Minneapolis.
- Teams from a wide range of academic disciplines and industries are welcome.

Students should review the complete eligibility requirements before applying.

How to Get Started

1. **Build your team:** Identify 2–5 undergraduate students and secure a faculty or staff advisor.
2. **Develop your venture:** Define the problem, your solution, target customers, and business opportunity.
3. **Prepare your pitch:** Create a pitch video of up to 7 minutes and a slide deck of up to 15 slides, excluding the title slide.
4. **Submit your application:** Complete the online submission by **January 31, 2027**.
5. **Prepare for the finals:** Selected teams travel to Minneapolis for three days of pitching, workshops, and networking.

Important: Students developing potentially patentable technologies or working with confidential research should consult A-State's Technology Transfer office before publicly disclosing proprietary information.

Learn More and Apply

Visit the official competition website for application instructions, eligibility requirements, competition rules, and prize details.

e-Fest | Official Website

Submit Your Venture

Competition Rules and Eligibility

Tulane Business Model Competition

Prove Your Market. Refine Your Model. Compete for $125,000.

The Tulane Business Model Competition, hosted by Tulane University's Freeman School of Business, challenges student entrepreneurs to demonstrate how they've tested, validated, and refined their business models through real customer feedback.

Unlike traditional business plan competitions, Tulane emphasizes **customer discovery, market validation, and the ability to adapt based on evidence**. Students compete by showing not just why their business idea could succeed, but what they've learned from potential customers and how those insights have shaped their venture.

The competition awards **$125,000 in cash prizes** to three finalist teams.

Key Dates and Deadlines: 2027 Competition

Date	Milestone
September 21, 2026	Applications open
January 10, 2027	**Application deadline: 11:59 PM**
March 8, 2027	Semifinal competition
March 9, 2027	Final competition and awards at Tulane University

Six teams advance to the semifinals, with three finalists competing for first, second, and third place.

Dates are subject to change. Students should confirm details through the official competition website.

Why Participate?

Let Your Customers Shape Your Business

Discover what potential customers actually need, test your assumptions, and use their feedback to build a stronger, more commercially viable venture.

Show Evidence, Not Just Potential

Go beyond describing your business idea. Demonstrate what you've learned through customer interviews, market testing, and real-world experimentation.

Compete for Significant Cash Prizes

The competition awards $125,000 across three finalist teams. In 2026, the awards were:

- **First Place:** $75,000
- **Second Place:** $30,000
- **Third Place:** $20,000

Refine Your Venture Through Competition

Present your business model to experienced judges, receive valuable feedback, and strengthen your ability to explain how your venture creates value for customers.

Who Can Participate?

The competition welcomes student-led ventures from colleges and universities.

- Teams must include **1–5 degree-seeking college students**, enrolled at least part-time.
- Student teams must own at least **20% of the venture** and control at least **51% of its voting rights**.
- Ventures should demonstrate customer discovery and business model validation.
- University-licensed technologies and research-based ventures are welcome, provided they meet competition requirements.

Students should review the complete eligibility requirements before applying.

How to Get Started

1. **Identify your target customers:** Determine who experiences the problem your venture aims to solve.
2. **Test your assumptions:** Conduct customer interviews, gather feedback, and validate your business model.
3. **Document what you've learned:** Show how customer insights have influenced your product, strategy, or business model.
4. **Prepare your application:** Explain your venture, customer discovery process, and evidence of market validation.
5. **Apply:** Submit your application by **January 10, 2027, at 11:59 PM**.

Important: Students developing potentially patentable technologies or working with confidential research should consult A-State's Technology Transfer office before publicly disclosing proprietary

information.

Learn More and Apply

Visit the official competition website for application instructions, eligibility requirements, and competition details.

Tulane Business Model Competition | Official Website

Rice Business Plan Competition

Pitch to Real Investors. Compete for $1 Million+. Take Your Startup Further.

The Rice Business Plan Competition (RBPC), hosted by Rice University in Houston, Texas, is one of the world's largest and richest collegiate startup competitions, bringing together promising student-led ventures from universities around the world.

Designed for startups ready to pursue investment and growth, the competition gives student founders an opportunity to **pitch directly to investors, receive intensive mentoring, and compete for more than $1 million in cash, investments, and prizes**.

Unlike competitions focused on exploring early-stage ideas, Rice is designed for ventures that have progressed toward commercialization and are ready to demonstrate their investment potential.

Key Dates and Deadlines: 2027 Competition

Date	Milestone
November 9, 2026	Applications open
November 18, 2026	Application information webinar
December 10, 2026	Application information webinar
January 29, 2027	**Application deadline: 11:59 PM Central Time**
February 16, 2027	Selected teams announced
February 22, 2027	Deadline for selected teams to confirm participation
April 8–10, 2027	**Final competition at Rice University in Houston, Texas**

Up to 42 startup teams will be selected to compete.

Dates and requirements are subject to change. Students should confirm details through the official competition website.

> **Important:** Rice is best suited for students with an established startup or a venture actively preparing to seek outside investment, rather than those exploring an initial business concept.

Why Participate?

Pitch Directly to Investors

Present your startup to venture capitalists, angel investors, and other experienced business professionals who evaluate ventures based on their potential for investment and growth.

Compete for More Than $1 Million in Prizes

The competition offers over **$1 million in cash, investment opportunities, and other awards**. Participating teams compete for funding that can help accelerate startup development and commercialization.

Experience the Startup Fundraising Process

Learn what investors expect from emerging companies. Through multiple rounds of presentations, feedback, and mentoring, strengthen your business strategy and ability to communicate your venture's investment potential.

Join a Global Startup Network

Connect with student founders, investors, and entrepreneurial leaders from around the world. Rice competition alumni have collectively raised more than $6.9 billion in funding, demonstrating the long-term opportunities available through its entrepreneurial network.

Who Can Participate?

The competition is designed for student-led, investment-ready startups.

- Teams must include **at least two current undergraduate or graduate students**.
- Student founders must hold meaningful leadership and ownership roles in the venture.
- Startups must be seeking investment or growth capital.
- Ventures must meet competition limits on prior revenue and equity financing.
- Teams should have progressed beyond the initial idea stage, with a developed business model and evidence of commercial potential.
- Ventures from a wide range of industries, including technology, healthcare, energy, and advanced manufacturing, are welcome.

How to Get Started

1. **Evaluate your venture's readiness:** Determine whether your startup has a viable business model, market opportunity, and potential to attract investment.
2. **Confirm eligibility:** Review student ownership, leadership, revenue, and funding requirements.
3. **Prepare your executive summary:** Clearly explain your business opportunity, competitive advantage, market potential, and growth strategy.
4. **Develop your investor pitch:** Be prepared to discuss your business model, financial projections, funding needs, and commercialization plans.
5. **Apply:** Submit your application and executive summary by **January 29, 2027, at 11:59 PM Central Time**.

> **Important:** Students developing potentially patentable technologies or working with confidential research should consult A-State's Technology Transfer office before publicly disclosing proprietary information.

Learn More and Apply

Visit the official competition website for eligibility requirements, application instructions, prize information, and competition updates.

Rice Business Plan Competition | Official Website

https://rbpc.rice.edu/eligibility

Important Dates and Deadlines

Note: Competition information is subject to updates by the organizers. Students should consult the official website for current requirements.

Stu Clark New Venture Championships

Take Your Venture to the International Stage

The Stu Clark New Venture Championships, hosted by the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada, brings together student entrepreneurs to compete with innovative business ventures from universities across North America and beyond.

With undergraduate and graduate divisions, more than $72,000 in cash prizes, and opportunities to present to experienced entrepreneurs and industry professionals, the competition offers students a chance to test their business concepts in a competitive, international environment.

Why Participate?

Compete Beyond Your Campus

Represent A-State alongside student entrepreneurs from other universities. See how your venture compares with emerging businesses developed by students across different institutions and disciplines.

Put Your Business Concept to the Test

Move beyond a promising idea by developing a detailed business plan, demonstrating market potential, and explaining how your venture can become a sustainable business.

Get Feedback From Experienced Professionals

Present your venture to entrepreneurs, investors, and business professionals who can challenge your assumptions, offer practical insights, and help you identify opportunities for improvement.

Compete for Significant Cash Prizes

The competition offers more than $72,000 in cash awards across undergraduate and graduate divisions, including business plan, video pitch, and social entrepreneurship opportunities.

Build Connections Beyond the Competition

Meet fellow student founders, industry leaders, and potential collaborators while gaining exposure to a broader entrepreneurial community.

Who Can Participate?

The competition welcomes undergraduate and graduate students from a wide range of academic disciplines.

- Individual students or teams of up to five may participate.
- Teams must have the endorsement of a faculty or staff advisor.
- Ventures should generally be new, independent businesses in the seed, startup, or early-growth stages.
- Additional eligibility requirements apply to each competition division.

Students developing ventures based on university research or licensed technologies may also be eligible, subject to competition requirements.

Key Dates and Deadlines: 2027 Competition

Date	Milestone
March 2, 2027	**Application Deadline:** Submit your competition application and required materials.
To Be Announced	**Finalist Notifications:** Selected teams will receive information about advancing to the competition.
April 28–30, 2027	**Competition Dates:** Selected teams compete at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada.

Important Planning Considerations

- **Start early:** Allow sufficient time to develop your business plan, prepare presentations, and secure faculty or staff advisor support.
- **Plan for international travel:** Selected teams should prepare for passport requirements, travel arrangements, and any applicable Canadian entry requirements.
- **Protect your intellectual property:** Students developing potentially patentable technologies should consult A-State's Technology Transfer office before submitting or publicly presenting proprietary information.

Dates and requirements are subject to change. Students should verify all deadlines and submission requirements through the official competition website.

How to Get Started

Interested students should review the competition's official eligibility requirements, application instructions, and submission materials.

Before applying:

1. **Review the competition guidelines** to determine whether your venture meets the eligibility requirements.
2. **Identify your team and advisor** and confirm their availability to participate.
3. **Develop your business plan** with particular attention to market opportunity, competitive positioning, and financial feasibility.
4. **Prepare your application materials** according to the competition's submission requirements.
5. **Submit your application** by the published deadline.

Learn More and Apply

Visit the official competition website for complete eligibility requirements, application instructions, prize details, and updates.

Stu Clark New Venture Championships | Official Website

AI Venture Velocity Challenge

Don't Just Pitch Your Idea. Test It, Learn, and Build Smarter.

The AI Venture Velocity Challenge, hosted by Texas A&M University's Mays Business School, challenges student entrepreneurs to use artificial intelligence to accelerate the development and validation of new business ventures.

Unlike traditional business plan competitions, this challenge rewards **experimentation, evidence-based learning, and measurable progress**, rather than simply delivering a polished pitch. Students use AI tools to test assumptions, explore market opportunities, and make informed decisions about their ventures.

The inaugural 2026 competition attracted 531 teams, with 12 finalists advancing to the final competition. [mays.tamu.edu]

Key Dates and Deadlines: 2027 Competition

The 2027 competition has been announced, but its official schedule has not yet been released. The 2026 timeline provides a general reference for planning.

Milestone	2027 Dates	2026 Reference
Initial applications	To Be Announced	May 2026
Experimentation and venture development	To Be Announced	Summer 2026
Finalist selection	To Be Announced	Before September finals
Final competition and awards	To Be Announced	September 2026

The 2026 dates are provided for planning purposes only. The 2027 schedule may differ.

Why Participate?

Put AI to Work for Your Business Idea

Discover how AI can accelerate market research, customer discovery, prototyping, and business development. Your venture doesn't necessarily need to be an AI product.

Start Before You Have All the Answers

You don't need a finished product or detailed business plan to begin. The competition encourages students to test promising ideas, identify uncertainties, and learn through experimentation.

Show What You've Learned, Not Just What You've Planned

Demonstrate how real-world evidence has shaped your venture. Whether you validate an idea or discover a reason to pivot, the emphasis is on meaningful progress.

Compete for Significant Cash Prizes

The inaugural 2026 competition offered $175,000 in prizes across the top three teams, including a $100,000 grand prize. Prize amounts for 2027 have not yet been announced.

Who Can Participate?

The competition welcomes student entrepreneurs from different academic disciplines and universities.

- Undergraduate and graduate students may participate.
- Ventures can represent a wide range of industries.
- Teams should be prepared to use AI and experimentation to advance their business concepts.
- A finished product is not necessarily required to enter.

Specific eligibility and team requirements for 2027 should be confirmed when official guidelines become available.

How to Get Started

1. **Identify a business opportunity:** Start with a problem you believe could support a viable venture.
2. **Determine what needs testing:** Identify the assumptions that matter most to your business concept.
3. **Use AI to accelerate learning:** Explore AI tools for research, customer discovery, and experimentation.
4. **Document your progress:** Track what you learn and how your findings influence your business decisions.
5. **Apply:** Monitor the official website for 2027 application instructions and deadlines.

Important: Students working with potentially patentable technologies or confidential research should consult A-State's Technology Transfer office before publicly disclosing proprietary information or uploading it to AI platforms.

Learn More and Apply

Visit the official competition website for eligibility requirements, application instructions, prize details, and announcements about the 2027 competition.

AI Venture Velocity Challenge | Official Website

Heartland Challenge

Build a High-Growth Venture. Pitch to Investors. Compete for Startup Funding.

Competition Status: On Pause for 2027

The Heartland Challenge will not be held in 2027. The competition may return in 2028, although future plans have not yet been confirmed. Students interested in this opportunity are encouraged to check back for updates.

The Heartland Challenge, hosted by the University of Arkansas, is a national collegiate startup competition designed to simulate the experience of raising venture capital for a high-growth business.

Primarily intended for graduate student entrepreneurs, the competition challenges teams to demonstrate their venture's commercial potential, present compelling investment opportunities, and engage with experienced entrepreneurs and investors.

Unlike traditional business plan competitions, Heartland emphasizes **investment readiness, venture growth potential, and the ability to communicate a startup's value to prospective investors**.

Key Dates and Deadlines: Future Competitions

Although the competition is on pause for 2027, the most recent competition followed the schedule below. These dates can help students anticipate the preparation timeline if the event returns.

Milestone	2025 Reference Dates
Applications open	December 16, 2024
Application deadline	**January 17, 2025, at 11:59 PM CST**
Semifinalist notifications	February 24, 2025
Semifinalist participation confirmations	February 28, 2025
Full business plans due	March 24, 2025
Final competition	**April 3–5, 2025, in Bentonville, Arkansas**

These dates are provided for historical reference only. The competition will not be held in 2027, and future dates and requirements have not been announced.

2025 Official Competition Rules and Timeline

Why Participate?

Experience the Venture Capital Process

Learn what it takes to attract startup investment. Present your venture as a potential investment opportunity and gain experience answering the kinds of questions investors ask when evaluating emerging companies.

Compete for Significant Cash Prizes

Heartland has historically offered approximately **$100,000 in cash prizes**, including awards for the main competition, elevator pitches, and investor roundtables.

In 2025, the first-place team received $40,000. Future prize amounts will depend on the competition's return.

Connect with Investors and Startup Professionals

Engage with venture capitalists, entrepreneurs, and business leaders who can provide practical feedback on your business model, growth strategy, and investment potential.

Advance Research-Based Ventures

Explore opportunities to commercialize innovative technologies, university research, or other high-potential business concepts. The competition welcomes ventures built around promising technologies and scalable solutions.

Who Can Participate?

The Heartland Challenge has historically focused on graduate student-led ventures, although exceptional undergraduate teams may also be considered.

- Graduate students from any academic discipline may participate.
- Exceptional undergraduate teams may be eligible.
- Ventures must be substantially created, managed, and owned by students.
- Student participants must hold meaningful management roles and ownership interests.
- Teams should be developing ventures with significant growth and commercial potential.

Eligibility requirements may change if the competition returns.

How to Prepare for Future Competitions

Although the competition is currently on pause, interested students can begin developing ventures that may be competitive in future years.

1. **Identify a scalable business opportunity:** Focus on a product, technology, or service with meaningful market potential.
2. **Validate your market:** Gather evidence of customer demand, competitive advantages, and commercial feasibility.
3. **Develop your financial strategy:** Understand your venture's funding needs, revenue potential, and growth projections.
4. **Prepare an investor-focused pitch:** Practice explaining your business model, market opportunity, and investment potential.
5. **Monitor competition updates:** Check the official website for announcements regarding future competitions.

Important: Students developing potentially patentable technologies or working with confidential research should consult A-State's Technology Transfer office before publicly disclosing proprietary information.

Learn More

Visit the official competition website for historical competition information, eligibility guidelines, and announcements regarding future events.

Heartland Challenge | Official Website

Competition details are subject to change if the event resumes.