Rules & Guidelines

John P. Ellbogen $50K Entrepreneurship Competition
University of Wyoming College of Business

2026 – 2027 COMPETITION CYCLE

Questions? ENTR@uwyo.edu · ellbogen50k.org

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SECTION 01

Overview

The John P. Ellbogen $50K Entrepreneurship Competition (EEC), hosted by the University of Wyoming College of Business, is the largest student entrepreneurship competition in the state, run in an accelerator-style format that develops teams from early idea to final pitch. Open to UW undergraduate and graduate students, it challenges participants to turn innovative ideas into ventures that fuel economic growth and create local impact.

Since its launch in 2000, the EEC has supported 332 teams and awarded $918,750 in cash prizes, alongside mentorship and resources to help Wyoming's future entrepreneurs thrive. The competition welcomes new, independent ventures at the seed, startup, or early-growth stage, and encourages multidisciplinary teams that bring diverse skills to the table.

What You'll Gain

- Networks of entrepreneurs, investors, and potential partners
- Mentorship from experienced professionals
- Education in business planning and entrepreneurial skills
- Team-building and collaboration opportunities
- Support for refining customer insight and business models
- Funding and resources to help launch the winning ventures

Whether you're exploring a new idea, building momentum on an existing project, or simply curious about entrepreneurship, we're glad you're here. This is your opportunity to take bold steps toward launching something meaningful, backed by a community invested in your success.

> **We'd love to hear from you**
> Questions or want to learn more? Reach out any time at ENTR@uwyo.edu. We can't wait to see what you build.

AT A GLANCE

2026–2027 Schedule

All deliverables below are due by midnight MST on the date indicated, unless otherwise specified.

All in-person events take place in the Venture Studio (BU 359, 3rd floor, east wing of the Business Building), unless otherwise noted.

Fall Semester 2026

Key deadline
Round 1 Applications are due Wednesday, November 4.

Tue, Sep 29	$50K EEC Info Session
Wed, Nov 4	Round 1 Applications Due
Wed, Nov 11	Round 2 Qualifiers Announced
Tue–Wed, Nov 17–18	Round 2 Qualifiers Workshop
Mon, Nov 23	Round 2 Written Business Concepts Due
Thu–Fri, Dec 3–4	Round 2 Live Pitch Presentations
Fri, Dec 11	Round 3 Qualifiers Announced

Spring Semester 2027

Mark your calendar
The final competition is Friday, April 9. Dress rehearsal is the day before, Thursday, April 8.

Wed, Jan 20	Workshop 1: Who Is Your Customer?
Wed, Jan 27	Workshop 2: What Can You Do For Your Customer?
Wed, Feb 3	Workshop 3: How Does Your Customer Acquire Your Product?
Wed, Feb 10	Workshop 4: How Do You Make Money Off Your Product?
Wed, Feb 17	Workshop 5: How Do You Design & Build Your Product?
Wed, Feb 24	Workshop 6: How Do You Scale Your Business?
Wed, Mar 3	Practice Pitch 1: Slide Content & Storytelling
Wed, Mar 10	Practice Pitch 2: Slide Design & Clarity
Wed, Mar 17 & 24	*No Class: Spring Break & Facilitators Away*
Wed, Mar 24	Ethical Startup Award Submissions Due
Wed, Mar 31	Revised Executive Summaries Due
Wed, Mar 31	Practice Pitch 3: Q&A & Delivery
Sun, Apr 4	Pitch Deck PowerPoints Due
Thu, Apr 8	Competition Dress Rehearsal
Fri, Apr 9	John P. Ellbogen $50K Entrepreneurship Competition

SECTION 02

Eligibility & General Information

The following rules are binding throughout the entire $50K EEC. Participating indicates acceptance of, and agreement to abide by, these rules.

Eligibility

Age

Team members must be 18 years of age or older.

Student Involvement

The competition is for student-created and student-managed ventures, including new ventures launched by licensing university technology. Students are expected to:

- Be the driving force behind the new venture
- Have played the primary role in developing the business plan
- Hold key management roles in the venture
- Own significant equity in the venture

Because this is a student competition, the student(s) must be at the core of the submitted business plan. A student member should be CEO, COO, or President of the venture, or students should occupy 50% or more of the functional management positions reporting to the CEO, COO, or President. No UW faculty or staff are eligible to compete.

Team Composition

- Teams must be led by currently enrolled UW students (undergraduate or graduate) who are the primary drivers of the idea and its execution. Eligible students must be enrolled full- or part-time through at least Spring 2027 (including Spring 2027 graduates).
- Individuals may apply and compete alone in Round 1. To advance beyond Round 2, a solo applicant must add at least one partner. Teams that reach Round 2 without a second active member won't be eligible to advance to Round 3.
- All competitors must be based in Laramie and attend all workshops and practice pitches in person.
- Each team may include up to 4 official members. Teams of 4 must include at least 2 current UW students; the remaining spots may be filled by specialized non-student contributors, such as technical experts, advisors, or collaborators.
- Students may work with additional individuals beyond this limit, but only the official team members (up to 4) are recognized as competitors eligible to participate in competition events.
- If entering as a team, one student must be designated Team Leader and primary point of contact. All official members must be listed on the entry forms.

> **Note**
> All submitted work must be the original work of team members, or appropriately licensed work of others. Submissions that don't meet this requirement will be eliminated from the competition.

Before You Apply

Entry Fees

None. Participation is free.

Class Requirement & Time Commitment

- There's no class requirement to participate. Round 3 finalists may enroll in **ENTR 5800: Entrepreneurship Practicum**, a 3-credit course offered Spring 2027 for undergraduate and graduate students, aligned with the competition's expectations and deliverables.
- Round 3 includes weekly 3-hour workshops, practice pitches, a dress rehearsal, and the final competition, all held throughout the spring semester.
- Anyone presenting at the final competition must attend all workshops, pitch practices, and the dress rehearsal, regardless of whether they're enrolled for credit. Teams may also include additional contributors who aren't formally enrolled or competing.
- Round 3 participants are expected to be physically present for all required activities; virtual participation isn't available. If an emergency arises, contact organizers as early as possible so accommodations can be discussed.

> **Why it matters**
> These sessions aren't just prep for your written plan and pitch; they deliver high-value mentorship, resources, peer feedback, and access to UW's entrepreneurial network.

SECTION 03

Auxiliary Awards & Award Structure

Semifinalist Venture Award Every team that advances to Round 2 but not Round 3 receives this award, to support continued venture development beyond the competition.	$1,250 / team
John P. Ellbogen Finalist Award Presented to each of the 5 Round 3 finalist teams, to help fund their preparation for the final event.	$2,500 / team
The Benson Impact and Innovation Award Honors Dr. Jon Benson, who joined UW in 2005 to launch the state's first tech-focused incubator. Celebrates innovation and forward-thinking problem-solving.	$2,000
Small to Medium Enterprise Award Recognizes a venture with strong growth, sustainability, and innovation potential: a clear market need, viable solution, and promising traction.	$2,000
First Interstate Audience Choice Award Goes to the team earning the most votes from attendees, independent of the judges' rankings.	$2,000
The Micale Community Award Honors a venture dedicated to positive social change or community development in Wyoming. Named for the Charles A. Micale Foundation.	$2,000
Ethical Startup Award An additional prize from the Daniels Fund Ethics Initiative Collegiate Program at UW. Submit a 2-page ethical culture strategy. Contact: Kent Noble, knoble@uwyo.edu.	$2,500

The 3-Tiered John P. Ellbogen Awards

1st Place: John P. Ellbogen Award Given to the team with the most convincing idea and pitch: clear market opportunity, distinctive competence, financial understanding, and viability.	$24,000
2nd Place: Runner Up Award	$12,000
3rd Place: Honorable Mention	$6,000

> **How prizes are paid**
> Prizes may be taxable and are paid only after UW Supplier Registration is complete. Please visit our website to learn more about our structure and policies for awards.

SECTION 04

Helpful Resources

These resources can support you throughout the competition and beyond.

Venture Support & Mentorship

Venture Studio

A co-working space for UW entrepreneurs in the College of Business (BU 359), featuring open workspace and private phone booths. Open to any UW student working on a venture, startup, or entrepreneurial idea.

Silicon Couloir TEAMS (Teton Entrepreneurs & Mentors Service)

A mentorship program modeled on MIT's Venture Mentor Service. Accepted ventures are matched with a team of 3–5 mentors for free, 90-minute in-person sessions on a monthly-to-quarterly basis. Admission is competitive.

Disciplined Entrepreneurship Resources

Disciplined Entrepreneurship (d-eship.com)

The official hub for the Disciplined Entrepreneurship framework used in our workshops, with tools and resources for each of the 24 steps.

Disciplined Entrepreneurship: 24 Steps to a Successful Startup, Expanded & Updated · Bill Aulet

The foundational book behind our workshop curriculum, walking founders step by step from idea to a successful startup.

Disciplined Entrepreneurship Startup Tactics: 15 Tactics to Turn Your Business Plan into a Business · Paul Cheek

A tactical companion to the original framework, focused on turning a validated business plan into an operating business.

Disciplined Entrepreneurship for Climate and Energy Ventures: 24 Steps to Build Solutions for People and the Planet

Applies the Disciplined Entrepreneurship framework specifically to climate and energy ventures.

Orbit

Register for Orbit | **Log In to Orbit**

MIT's companion platform to Disciplined Entrepreneurship. Register with your UW email, then log in to complete your profile.

Other Recommended Reading

The Hard Thing About Hard Things · Ben Horowitz

A candid look at the tough calls that come with building and running a company, with no easy answers.

Zero to One · Peter Thiel

Notes on startups and how to build genuinely new things, from forming a company to building lasting competitive advantage.

SECTION 05

FAQs

How are teams selected to compete?

Teams are selected based on scoring of their submitted work each round. A small panel of judges with varied expertise reviews and evaluates each submission against the published judging criteria.

Can I change my team after submitting my application?

Yes, up until the end of the fall semester. Any change must still result in a team that meets the eligibility requirements, and you must notify the $50K EEC of the change.

Can I enter more than one idea?

Yes, enter as many ideas as you'd like. However, you may only present one idea in the final round.

Can I see examples of past winning plans?

A past winner has offered to share their Round 1, 2, and 3 entries.

How is the confidentiality of intellectual property protected?

Mentors, judges, staff, volunteers, and teams may be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. That said, the final round is public and may be recorded, and the $50K EEC can't guarantee that business plans and presentations won't be accessed by outside individuals. When in doubt, protect your ideas and IP.

Who are the judges, and what are their backgrounds?

A diverse group of individuals with experience across a variety of professional backgrounds. No team member may, under any circumstances, attempt to contact a judge before or during the competition; this will result in disqualification. If you have concerns about a potential conflict of interest with any judge, notify ENTR@uwyo.edu.

Do I get my full prize right away?

Most awards, yes. The top two prize-winning teams (over $10,000) receive half following the competition, and the other half after submitting a satisfactory Progress Report in the fall.

If I win, do I have to invest the prize money in my business?

Yes. To accept $50K EEC prize funds, a team must apply for a UW Supplier number, which requires the business entity to have a Tax ID Number on file with UW.

Questions not covered here? Try our Procedures & Policies document at **ellbogen50k.org**, or reach out any time: **ENTR@uwyo.edu**

APPENDIX A

Round 1: Executive Summary & Pitch Video

How to Enter

Apply through the application page at ellbogen50k.org. The landing page includes additional details about Round 1, and applications are submitted through a Qualtrics form where you'll upload your materials.

Only one team member needs to submit the application on behalf of the team.

Please refer to the timeline page for deadline information. We will only accept on-time, complete applications.

> **Before you begin**
> Have both your Executive Summary and your pitch video ready ahead of time. The application will ask you to upload or link both.

What You'll Submit

Executive Summary

Up to 2 pages (front and back of a single sheet), single-spaced, 12-point font, 0.75" margins. Charts, graphs, or other visuals are welcome, but must fit within the 2-page limit; no additional pages for graphics. File name: `ES_CompanyName.pdf`

Address the following:

1. **Problem & Solution:** the problem you're solving and how your solution addresses it. There's no expected stage at Round 1: an early concept, a prototype, or something further along are all fine. If applicable, note your IP status (patents, licenses, etc.)
2. **Customer & Market Opportunity:** your target customer, and the size of the opportunity
3. **Business Model & Go-to-Market:** how you make money, and how you'll reach and acquire customers
4. **Competitive Landscape:** who else solves this, and what's different about your approach
5. **Team:** who's on the team, their roles, and relevant experience or competencies

Pitch Video

About 90 seconds, featuring the founder(s) on camera. This is your chance to make the case for the people behind the business. Answer “Why this? Why us? Why now?” You can upload a video file or submit a link, whichever the application allows. File/link name: `PV_CompanyName`

Round 1: Scoring Rubric

Team/Company Name: ____

This rubric is a guide for comprehensive judgment, not a checklist. Weigh both what's on the page and how equipped this team seems to compete at full scale; commitment, momentum, and energy count as much as the fundamentals.

Criteria	1 (*Strongly Disagree*)	2	3	4	5 (*Strongly Agree*)
Problem, Solution & Market Fit: The problem is real, and the solution addresses it convincingly.					
Customer & Market Opportunity: There's a viable market and a clearly identified customer.					
Business Model & Differentiation: A plausible path to revenue, and a clear stand-out from alternatives.					
Founder Drive & Readiness (from the video): The video conveys real conviction, coachability, and grit to go the distance.					
Overall Potential: Weighing everything together, this venture is ready to advance.					

Total Score: ________ / 25

Feedback Notes

APPENDIX B

Round 2: Written Concept & Live Pitch

Only one team member needs to submit the deliverables on behalf of the team.

Please refer to the timeline page for deadline information. We will only accept on-time, complete submissions.

What You'll Submit

Written Business Concept

Think of this as your Executive Summary with room to breathe. Same structure, now with up to 6 pages (single-spaced, cover page included, 12-point font, 0.75" margins) to go into real depth. Charts, graphs, or other visuals are welcome, but must fit within the page limit. File name: `BC_CompanyName.pdf`

Address the following:

1. **Cover Page:** company name, school, presenting team members, team leader contact info
2. **Problem & Solution:** the problem you're solving, how your solution addresses it, and your current development status. If applicable, note your IP status (patents, licenses, etc.)
3. **Customer & Market Opportunity:** your target customer, and the size of the opportunity
4. **Business Model & Go-to-Market:** how you make money, and how you'll reach and acquire customers
5. **Competitive Landscape:** who else solves this, and what's different about your approach
6. **Team:** who's on the team, their roles, and relevant experience or competencies
7. **Financial Highlights:** your unit economics: pricing, costs, estimated revenue, and margins

Live Pitch

A 5-minute presentation followed by a 5-minute live Q&A with judges, held in person. See the timeline page for the location.

All team members are expected to attend and be a part of the presentation.

Your pitch should touch on the same ground as your paper: the problem, your solution, the opportunity, but don't get into the technical weeds. Move through the what quickly, and spend most of your time on the why: why this problem matters, why your approach is the right one, why your team is the one to build it. Tell a story. Be creative with how you use the time. This is your chance to show the judges your ability to think and communicate on your feet. Make it memorable.

Email your slides in advance, either a downloadable file or a shareable link, and we'll have them ready to go when you present.

Round 2: Scoring Rubric

Team/Company Name: ____

This rubric is a guide for comprehensive judgment, not a checklist. Weigh both what's on the page and how equipped this team seems to compete at full scale; commitment, momentum, and energy count as much as the fundamentals.

Written Concept (scored after reading, in advance of pitch day)

Strongly Disagree … *Strongly Agree*

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5
Problem, Solution & Market Fit: The problem is real, and the solution addresses it convincingly.					
Customer & Market Opportunity: There's a viable market and a clearly identified customer.					
Business Model & Differentiation: A plausible path to revenue, and a clear stand-out from alternatives.					
Execution Readiness: Product status, IP, team, and financials suggest this venture can actually be built.					
Overall Potential: Weighing everything together, this venture is ready to advance.					

Live Pitch (scored immediately after the team presents)

Strongly Disagree … *Strongly Agree*

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5
Storytelling & Clarity: The pitch brings the business to life, going beyond what's already on the page.					
Team Presence & Dynamics: The team is confident, coordinated, and comfortable presenting together.					
Q&A Responsiveness: The team thinks clearly and answers well under real questions.					
Persuasiveness & Appeal: The pitch makes the case: judges want to back this team.					
Overall Potential: Weighing the live performance, this team is ready to compete at full scale.					

Total Score: ________ / 50

Feedback Notes

APPENDIX C

Round 3: Final Executive Summary & Live Pitch

Only one team member needs to submit the deliverables on behalf of the team.

Please refer to the timeline page for deadline information. We will only accept on-time, complete submissions.

What You'll Submit

Final Executive Summary

Up to 5 pages total: a cover page, 2 pages of content, and up to 2 pages of appendices. Single-spaced, 12-point font, 0.75" margins. File name: `FES_CompanyName.pdf`

Address the following:

1. **Cover Page:** company name, school, presenting team members, team leader contact info
2. **Problem & Solution:** the problem you're solving, how your solution addresses it, and your progress since Round 1. If applicable, note your IP status (patents, licenses, etc.)
3. **Customer & Market Opportunity:** your target customer, and the size of the opportunity
4. **Business Model & Go-to-Market:** how you make money, and how you'll reach and acquire customers
5. **Competitive Landscape:** who else solves this, and what's different about your approach
6. **Team:** who's on the team, their roles, and relevant experience or competencies
7. **Financial Highlights:** your unit economics: pricing, costs, estimated revenue, and margins, and how you'd use the $50K EEC prize if awarded

Live Pitch

A 7-minute presentation followed by a 5-minute live Q&A with judges, held at the Marian H. Rochelle Gateway Center (222 S 22nd St, Laramie, WY 82070). A dress rehearsal takes place the night before; see the timeline page for the date.

All team members are expected to attend and be a part of the presentation. Dress is business professional, or attire that matches or promotes your venture.

Your pitch should touch on the same ground as your paper: the problem, your solution, the opportunity, but don't get into the technical weeds. Move through the what quickly, and spend most of your time on the why: why this problem matters, why your approach is the right one, why your team is the one to build it. Tell a story. Be creative with how you use the time. This is your chance to show the judges your ability to think and communicate on your feet. Make it memorable. More detailed guidance will be provided during your required workshops and pitch practices.

Email your slides in advance, either a downloadable file or a shareable link, and we'll have them ready to go when you present.

Round 3: Scoring Rubric

Team/Company Name: ____

This rubric is a guide for comprehensive judgment, not a checklist. Weigh both what's on the page and how equipped this team seems to compete at full scale; commitment, momentum, and energy count as much as the fundamentals.

Final Executive Summary (scored after reading, in advance of pitch day)

Criteria	1 (*Strongly Disagree*)	2	3	4	5 (*Strongly Agree*)
Problem, Solution & Market Fit: The problem is real, and the solution addresses it convincingly.					
Customer & Market Opportunity: There's a viable market and a clearly identified customer.					
Business Model & Differentiation: A plausible path to revenue, and a clear stand-out from alternatives.					
Execution Readiness: Product status, IP, team, and financials suggest this venture is ready to launch with real funding.					
Overall Potential: Weighing everything together, this venture is ready to advance.					

Live Pitch (scored immediately after the team presents)

Criteria	1 (*Strongly Disagree*)	2	3	4	5 (*Strongly Agree*)
Storytelling & Clarity: The pitch brings the business to life, going beyond what's already on the page.					
Team Presence & Dynamics: The team is confident, coordinated, and comfortable presenting together.					
Q&A Responsiveness: The team thinks clearly and answers well under real questions.					
Persuasiveness & Appeal: The pitch makes the case: judges want to back this team.					
Overall Potential: Weighing the live performance, this team is ready to compete at full scale.					

Total Score: ________ / 50

Feedback Notes