Judging at the 2020 Rice Business Plan Competition

Celebrating 20 years in 2020!

June 17-19, 2020
The 2020 Rice Business Plan Competition
is now a virtual event!

Thank you for your patience and flexibility as we move the 2020 Rice Business Plan Competition to a virtual event! While the format and “location” of the event have changed, many of the guidelines, rules, roles and schedules for judges have stayed the same.

What follows is a general review of judging at the RBPC, and will continue to be updated as we get closer to Jun 17-19.
Thank you for serving as a judge at the 2020 Rice Business Plan Competition!

You are part of a 20-year tradition of evaluating the best student startups in the country and beyond, and you play an integral role in our success as the world’s largest and richest student startup competition.

And you know how to pick them! Alumni from the RBPC have:

• Raised more than $2.3 billion in funding
• Successfully launched more than 229 startups
• Helped create 32 successful exits
What to Expect at the RBPC

You may know that the RBPC has . . .

• 3 days of competition
• Over 250 judges (investors, corporate venture, sector specialists, Rice University and Jones School alums)
• 42 student startups
• Over $1.5 million in prizes
• Early-stage student companies in Energy, Life Science, Tech Innovation
• Over 100 volunteers from MBA programs, staff and Jones/Rice

. . . We are the largest and richest graduate student startup competition in the world!
You may not know that we . . .

• Awarded $2.9 mil in 2019
• Have 7 other countries represented in 2020: Canada, Germany, India, Mexico, Norway, Singapore, United Kingdom
• Invited 39 universities (9 for the first time)
• Accepted 21 startups with female founders or management team members
• Have more women judges than ever before
• Track all our RBPC alumni companies--they have raised $2.3bil in funding to date!
We are here because we:

• Offer an unparalleled experience to student startups of pitching, competing, networking, mentoring—all in the name of growing, refining and launching their company

• Impact startups for years to come with knowledge, support and contacts gained at RBPC

• Model our competition as a real-life pitch event (to investors!)—long before that was common—that has grown and solidified our reputation of the premiere place for student-led ventures to present their companies and prepare for launch

• Give students an opportunity to put into practice what they’ve learned and experienced; they apply their education to real-world situations

• Drive student entrepreneurs to adapt to a changing environment through their experience at the competition
We want our judges to:

• Be inspired, learn about new technologies, methods and research
• Feel confident in identifying innovative startups and technologies to advance through our competition
• Meet student startups, give valuable advice and constructive feedback to them, offer to help and connect them to your contacts
• Have fun, network, walk away with an awesome experience
• Be positive, be a role model, be impactful
Before We Begin

Judges play a very important role in the RBPC, and their time reviewing, scoring and interacting with each startup is limited. We ask that judges:

• Notify the competition director immediately if, at any time, you find that you have a conflict of interest, or vested interest, in any startup competing in the 2020 Rice Business Plan Competition.
  ➢ We will make every effort to reassign you or make other accommodations to allow you to judge in a way that avoids the conflict.

• Not disrupt the proceedings (pitches, presentations) of the RBPC with verbal protests about the integrity of the teams or accusations of rule infringement.
• Not harass any teams or presenters with repeated questions, challenges, or other interjections.
  ➢ All parts of the competition—the pitches, Q&A sessions, feedback sessions, conversations related to the competition—are for questions, not opinions, about the startup, the company, structure, and any relevant, related aspect of the company.

• Recognize that they will see a wide range of startups at the RBPC. Some are very early stage and building their business; some have already launched and are raising capital.
  ➢ All of them have been invited to the RBPC for their unique technology, ability to compete, and expected potential.
We want to foster an environment at the RBPC that is inclusive, non-discriminatory, harassment-free and of equal opportunity.

• Judges’ evaluations should not be influenced by gender, race, sexual orientation, or national origin.

• Judges should not comment on a startup team member’s appearance or clothing. We know there can be wide differences in startup attire, and it is the responsibility of the startups at the competition to determine for themselves how they want to present themselves.

• We expect all judges to treat all participants respectfully and equally.

• If you observe anyone acting in a way that appears to be a violation of these principles, please contact Catherine Santamaria, RBPC director, Brad Burke, Executive Director of the Rice Alliance, or Lina Bell, Director of Diversity and Inclusion for the Jones School.
All startups at the RBPC have been vetted and confirmed before competing. They will:

• Have between two and four students who participate in the pitch
• Have at least one graduate-level student pitching
• Have only student members pitching, all who are current student or very-recently graduated students (Sept. 1 onward)
• Be seeking outside capital
• Not have more than $100,000 in revenue in a 12-month period prior to July 1, 2019
• Not have raised more than $250,000 in equity funding in the 12 months prior to July 1, 2019. (Equity funding from founders, friends, and family is acceptable and excluded from this rule.)
If you feel a startup does not comply with the rules of the competition, or that something appears to be against the rules:

- Inform the Room Moderator with a written protest after the pitch; the Moderator will contact the competition director
- Continue to score and evaluate the team as usual
- Do not disrupt the proceedings (pitches, presentations) of the RBPC with verbal protests about the integrity of the teams, accusations of rule infringement or focus on the issue.
- The competition director will evaluate the issue and make a decision. If necessary, we will consult PKF Texas, the official accounting firm of the RBPC.
For every judging round of the RBPC, please:

- Arrive before the start of presentation
- Identify yourself as a judge with your nametag and the tent name card provided in your packet
- Attend and listen to all pitches in the flight--your scores will be invalid if you do not
- Wait until you have heard all the pitches to submit your score, or ranking, of the startups
- Be conscious of the limited break time between pitches—in some cases 5 minutes, in some cases 10 minutes
- Enter rooms only between presentations; you won’t be allowed to enter or leave the room once a pitch has started
- Special Prize Judges may move throughout the competition to see specific startups who meet their prize criteria, and who will not vote in a specific flight
For every judging round of the RBPC, please:

• All judging and scoring of startups at the RBPC is done online

• All judges have a profile or account in our custom-built mobile-friendly web-based judging platform (it’s a website, not an app): https://rbpc.poetic.io

• Once in your account, judges will see the rounds they are assigned to judge

• Click on the round name to begin judging

• At the end of each round, you will rank teams in each flight using the online scoring platform – rank from 1 (best investment potential) to 6 (poorest investment potential)

• Judges will have less than 5 minutes to input their scores in the judging platform before the judging period closes. Please work quickly!

• Judges are asked to take their own notes throughout the event
For every judging round of the RBPC, please:

- Let only judges ask questions (not attendees, students, advisors, volunteers, observers)
- Ask questions only during Q&A period (don’t make statements or provide feedback)
- Be concise and constructive with your questions
- Don’t dominate the Q&A period, don’t debate other judge’s questions, don’t answer other judges questions
- Please minimize the use of electronic devices (mobile devices, laptops, emailing and texting) during the pitches
- Follow and respect the room moderator’s instructions, directives and decisions during the flight
For every round of the RBPC, judges will rank the startups they see in order:

1 = excellent investment potential or opportunity
2 = great investment potential or opportunity
3 = good investment potential or opportunity
4 = average investment potential or opportunity
5 = fair investment potential or opportunity
6 = poor investment potential or opportunity

(The number of startups in each flight will be different on Saturday (4, 5 or 7 startups)

The exception is the Elevator Pitch Competition; rate each startup on its own merits:
1= excellent pitch, 2 = good pitch, 3 = average pitch, 4 = fair pitch, 5 = poor pitch
During Round 1 on Friday, and Round 2 on Saturday morning, judges will fill out a feedback form for each pitch.

Please provide written, qualitative feedback via the feedback forms provided in your judge packet, including:

- Strengths of the business plan, presentation and startup
- Constructive suggestions
- Tactful advice, and
- Ways the startup can improve

Startups will receive the feedback forms at the end of each day, to use to improve their pitches.

And they do use it—from a 2019 team: "We looked at the feedback from Round 1, revised our pitch, and were able to make it out of the Wildcard round to the Finals!"
Feedback for Startups

Metrics used on the feedback forms:

**Presentation Quality**
Materials were presented in a clear, logical fashion. All relevant topic areas were covered.

**Market Opportunity**
There is a clear, sizable, market need, and customers would be willing to pay for the proposed product/service.

**Technology / Intellectual Property**
The technology and/or IP appears to have economic value, has evidence it works, and has IP protection, if needed.

**Competitive Environment / Differentiation**
The team provides something unique that gives it a sustainable, significant, competitive advantage over other solutions.

**Management Team Capability / Advisors**
This team has the skills and/or understands the gaps needed to successfully launch this venture.

Judges will fill out the feedback form for each startup they see in Round 1 and Round 2.

Judges may use the feedback form as a guide to what questions they should ask, what information they should be looking for, etc.

The feedback for is for the team’s benefit, and not for determining which startup advances.

Rating for each criteria on the feedback form:
1 – Excellent
2 – Good
3 – Average
4 – Fair
5 – Poor
Our Judges are crucial to our competition, and every vote matters.

If you have any questions or concerns during the event, please:

• Speak to one of our many volunteers – they are wearing an RBPC t-shirt
• Contact a staff member of the Rice Alliance
• Visit the registration desk – it will be staffed throughout the competition
• Contact Catherine Santamaria, the competition director
Round 1 (Friday 8:45 AM – 4:30 PM)

• All startups compete

• 42 startups are divided into 7 flights of 6 startups each

• The flights are sector-specific

• Pitches are 15 minutes followed by 20 minute Q&A with judges, and time limits are strictly enforced

• There is a 10-minute break between pitches

• Judges rank the startups on their performance from 1 (best investment potential) to 6 (poor investment potential)

• A feedback session for each startup takes place after all startups have pitched (2:30 – 4:00 PM)

• The top 2 startups from each flight, plus the next highest-scoring startup across all flights, will advance to the semi-finals (15 startups total); the remaining 27 startups will advance to the Wildcard Round
Round 2 – Semi-Final and Wildcard (Saturday 8:00 – 11:00 AM)

• All startups compete in either Semis or Wildcard

• Semi-Final: 15 startups are divided into 3 flights of 5 startups each

• Wildcard: 27 startups are divided into 6 flights of 4 to 5 startups each

• Flights are not sector sector-specific

• Pitches are 15 minutes followed by 10 minute Q&A with judges, and time limits strictly enforced

• Judges rank the startups on their performance from 1 (best investment potential) to 4 or 5 (least investment potential)

• Top 2 startups from each Semi-Final each flight, highest-scoring startup from all the Wildcard flights, will advance to the Finals (7 startups)
Final Round (Saturday Noon – 4:00 PM)

- 7 finalists startups compete
- Pitches are 15 minutes followed by 10 minute Q&A with judges (time limits strictly enforced)
- There is a 5 minutes break between pitches, and a 30 minute break in the middle of the round
- Judges rank the startups on their performance from 1 (best investment potential) to 7 (least investment potential)
- Winners announced at Awards Banquet
How to judge

Judges will listen to the pitches, review the business plans, and rank the startups they see in each round of competition. But how does one judge?

• Judges act as early-stage investors. They are determining which startups, if given funding, would have the best chance of success.

• Judges rank or score the startups where they would most likely invest their money

• Give top ranking to the startups that gave the most compelling pitch on why they will be successful and why they are committed to take this startup to market

• Look at the startups that have a large potential of return on investment

• For each startup, ask yourself—would I put my money behind this company, these founders?
Consider a number of questions when judging the technology, the startup, the team:

• Is there a real need? What problem is being solved?
• How big is the market? Is there evidence customers will pay for this?
• Is there evidence the technology works?
• Is there sustainable, significant differentiation?
• Is there IP? Exclusive license? Or ability to obtain license? (Note--most university startups at this stage have not yet fully executed the license with their university.)
• Does the team understand the milestones and capital needs?
• If regulatory approvals are needed, does the team have realistic expectations?
Consider a number of questions when judging the technology, the startup, the team:

• Most management teams at this stage are not complete, but does the management team understand its strengths and any gaps in the current team?

• Is the founding team coachable?

• How much investment and time will the startup need in order to reach breakeven cash flow?

• Does the startup understand key milestones and value inflection points relative to their fund raising strategy?

• And importantly--while not all members of the presenting team may plan to stay with the startup, are at least SOME of the team members committed to this venture full time upon graduation?
A few words on Deal Terms, Financials and IP

Deal terms
Some teams will present their pre-money valuation and % of company being offered; others may choose NOT to offer this—deal terms are not required.
  • Some will disclose during Q&A; others may not. They may want to hold this for the negotiation stage.
  • Some VCs suggest the founder’s view of pre-money valuation is not critical at this stage.
As an investor, you must assess whether you think you could reach a viable agreement on a deal

Financials
• Most of these companies are pre-revenue and pre-funding
• Most early stage deals do not have detailed financial projections, so don’t expect detailed financials.
• Not the same as a later-stage, revenue-producing, positive cash flow company
How to judge

A few words on Financials, Deal Terms and IP

IP/Intellectual Property
• It is fine to ask about IP. But recognize that if they are licensing university technology, many universities won’t complete the license agreement until the students graduate and startup is launched.
• And it is very typical that patents may be in a provisional stage
• From experience, we also know that there are differences of opinion about competitive patents. Different IP experts will take different positions on these.
• We suggest you not draw too many conclusions based on preliminary information.
Questions and Support during RBPC

Our Judges are crucial to our competition, and every vote matters. If you have any questions or concerns during the event, please:

• Speak to one of our volunteers – they are wearing an RBPB shirt!
• Contact a staff member of the Rice Alliance – look for the small white nametags
• Visit the registration desk – it will be staffed throughout the competition
• Email the competition director – csantamaria@rice.edu
Thank you again for judging the 2020 Rice Business Plan Competition!

See you June 17-19!

If your plans change, or if you have any questions regarding the RBPC, please contact:

RBPC Director Catherine Santamaria

rbpc@rice.edu