

# RICE | BUSINESS

PRESENTS THE



# RICE BUSINESS PLAN COMPETITION

Judge Networking Reception  
March 26, 2025

Hosted by:  RICE | ALLIANCE  
Rice Alliance for Technology and Entrepreneurship

And now, a word from our sponsors!

• Thank you, Hunton!

Jeff Dodd

Lee Davis

HUNTON

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# ABOUT RBPC

#RBPC25

• Thank you for being an RBPC Judge!  
Welcome to all new and returning judges!

***At the RBPC, judges will:***

- Give student startups the real-world experience of pitching to investors
- Ask good questions, give good feedback
- Mentor, support and connect with startups
- Attend as much or as little of the event as you are able
- Bring the energy for three action-packed days!

# About RBPC

- First RBPC was in 2001
- We are still the largest and richest graduate student startup competition in the world—  
25 years strong
- 42 startups compete for over \$1 million in prizes
- Over 350 judges across 3 days of competition
- Over 100 volunteers, most of whom are students
- RBPC's 868 alumni companies have gone on to raise **\$6+ billion (and growing)**

# 2025 RBPC Startup stats

- Submitted applications: 550 for 42 spots = 8% acceptance rate
- 35+ universities represented
- 10 universities competing for first time
- 3 counties represented

# What to Expect at RBPC

- Pre-seed and seed-stage student startups
- Vetted, eligible student-run businesses that are looking for funding (as well as mentoring, advice, guidance, contacts, etc.)
- Pitches of 10 minutes (uninterrupted), Q&A sessions that follow of 10-20 minutes
- 10-40 judges in each pitch room in each round
- 35+ prizes up for grabs

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# COMPETITION SCHEDULE & FORMAT

#RBPC25



# Competition Overview

WHEN	WHERE	WHAT
Thursday, April 10th	The Ion	Practice Pitch Round <b>Elevator Pitch Competition*</b> Company Showcase & Reception
Friday, April 11th	Rice University, McNair Hall	<b>Round 1*</b> + Feedback Sessions Semi-Finalist Announcement Reception
Saturday, April 12th	Rice University, McNair Hall	<b>Semi-Final Round/Wildcard Round*</b> <b>Final Round*</b>
Saturday, April 12th	Hilton Americas Hotel Downtown	<b>Company Showcase*</b> Awards Banquet

# Thursday, April 10

## Practice Pitch Sessions (not scored)

- All 42 startups give a practice pitch in sector-specific flights. There are 6 startups in each flight
- After the pitch, judges offer **feedback** and suggestions on how to do well at the RBPC; judges will take notes on a feedback form and give it to the startup after the pitch
- Pitches are 10 minutes; feedback with judges is 15 minutes
- Judges in the Practice Pitch Sessions will not see the same startups in Round 1 (this is to avoid any biases forming before the competition)

# Thursday, April 10

## Elevator Pitch Competition

- Watch all 42 startups give their **60-second elevator** pitch
- Judges follow along and rate each startup on their presentation:  
**1 = excellent to 5 = poor**
- Submit scores on the competition platform: <https://rbpc.poetic.io>
- The Elevator Pitch Competition is separate from the full-length pitch rounds at the RBPC; it does not factor into the overall scoring of the RBPC
- The startups with the best scores will win the Elevator Pitch Competition Prizes, presented at the RBPC Awards Celebration on Saturday evening

# Friday, April 11

## Round 1

- All 42 startups pitch in sector-specific flights. There are 6 startups in each flight
- Pitches are 10 minutes; Q&A with judges is 20 minutes
- At the end of the flight, judges rank the startups they see from **1 (excellent, most investment potential)** to **6 (poor, least investment potential)**
- Submit scores on the competition platform: <https://rbpc.poetic.io>
- After the last pitch, each startup returns for a 15-minute feedback session with judges
- The top 15 startups from Round 1 advance to the Semi-Final Round

# Saturday, April 12

## Semi-Final Round & Wildcard Round

- The top 15 startups from Round 1 advance to the Semi-Final Round. There are 3 flights
- The remaining 27 startups from Round 1 advance to the Wildcard Round. There are 6 flights
- The Semi-Final Round and Wildcard Round happen simultaneously
- Pitches are 10 minutes; Q&A with judges is 10 minutes
- At the end of the flight, judges rank the startups they see from  
**1 (excellent, most investment potential) to  
4 or 5 (poor, least investment potential)**

Submit scores on the competition platform: <https://rbpc.poetic.io>

# Saturday, April 12

## Final Round

- The 2 top-scoring startups from the 3 Semi-Final Round flights (6 startups total) and the overall best-scoring startup from the 6 Wildcard Round flights advance to the Final Round (7 startups total)
- Pitches are 10 minutes; Q&A with judges is 10 minutes
- At the end of the flight, judges rank the startups they see from **1 (excellent, best investment potential) to 7 (poor, least investment potential)**
- Submit scores on the competition platform: <https://rbpc.poetic.io>

# Saturday April 12

All winners will be announced at the **Awards Banquet** on Saturday, April 12, 6:00 PM – 9:30 PM at the Hilton Americas Hotel in downtown Houston.

All active judges have been invited to the banquet and noted their guest (if any) in the registration form. Please send any change requests to [rbpc@rice.edu](mailto:rbpc@rice.edu) by April 4.

**We cannot accommodate walk-ups or additional guests at the Awards Banquet.**

There is a Velvet Rope Policy at the 2025 RBPC:  
**If you are not on my list, you are not getting in**

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# HOW TO JUDGE AT THE RBPC

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# Scoring is Done by Ranking the Pitches

Judging is done in ranking format in the online competition platform by Poetic  
**RANK** the startups in order of their investability or investment potential:

**1 = excellent, best** investment potential, to  
**6 = poor, lease** investment potential

The exception is the Elevator Pitch Competition on Thursday, where judges RATE each startup on their presentation (1 = excellent to 5 = poor)

**You must watch all pitches in the round and flight you are assigned in order to rank them and for your scores to count!**

When scoring, think of which startup gets your Gold Medal = ranking of 1, Silver Medal = ranking of 2, etc.

# Judge Expectations

- **Arrive on time** (we start on time. To the minute. Really!)
- **Watch all pitches in the flight** to be able to submit scores (if you miss a pitch, your scores will be invalidated)
- Be **courteous, quick and concise in your questions** (and allow other judges to ask their question in the Q&A sessions)
- Ask questions in Q&A sessions and offer feedback in the scheduled feedback sessions
- **Treat all participants respectfully** and equally and be conscientious of potential biases
- **Follow directions** of the room Moderator and Timekeeper in each pitch room

# Q&A Sessions

## In the Q&A Sessions after each pitch

- Only judges can ask questions
- Ask questions; don't make statements or provide feedback
- Be concise and constructive in your questions
- Don't dominate the Q&A period; ask your question and move on
- Don't debate other judges or answer other judges' questions

# Feedback Sessions

**In the Practice Pitch Sessions (Thursday) and Round 1 (Friday), judges will offer written feedback:**

- Please provide written, qualitative feedback via the feedback form provided for each startup
- Please note the strengths and areas for improvement of the plan and presentation
- Be constructive and tactful
- Provide advice, not criticism
- Students will receive the feedback forms at the end of each day

# How to Judge

**Judges act as early-stage investors, evaluating startups with the most potential of successfully launching and providing an investment return.**

## **Ask yourself:**

- Is there a real need? What problem is being solved?
- Is the market big? Will customers will pay for this?
- Is there evidence the technology works?
- Is there sustainable, significant differentiation?
- What is the competition? Competitive differentiation?
- Is the management team qualified and coachable?
- How long will it take to generate revenue?
- **Would I invest in this business? Would I fund this business?**

# How to Judge

## Startups may talk about potential deal terms:

- Some teams will present their pre-money valuation and % of company being offered, while others may choose NOT to offer this
- Some will disclose during Q&A; others not
- Some VCs suggest the founder's view of pre-money valuation is not critical at this stage
- Startups are not required to reveal the exact desired terms of the deal (i.e., their proposed company valuation and percentage of company being offered to investors)
- We recommend that teams be prepared to address questions about their terms and valuation, but it is up to the team to decide how they want to answer these questions

# How to Judge

If a judge finds they have a conflict of interest with a startup at the RBPC, at any point during the competition, let the RBPC Director know ASAP and we will address the conflict by assigning you to a different flight . . . or you can recuse yourself from voting.

A conflict of interest would include:

- You are a mentor or advisor to the company
- You are an investor in the company
- You are an advisory board member of the company
- You are a board member of the company
- You have interacted substantially with the company prior to the competition
- If you have any doubts, please talk to the RBPC Director.

# See you in 2 weeks!

Engage our startups

Expand their network

Meet new people

Promote Houston's entrepreneurial ecosystem

Have a great experience



# Thank you!

Please direct questions to:

[csantamaria@rice.edu](mailto:csantamaria@rice.edu)

• 713-348-3190 office  
rbpc.rice.edu -> Judges

**TOGETHER  
WE WILL  
SPARK INNOVATION**

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# One More Request

If anyone is interested in judging an online, student business plan competition in the Energy space, please see me!

## **DoE EnergyTech University Prize Competition**

Watch 10 pre-recorded video pitches, talk amongst yourselves,  
pick a winner, sometime between April 7 and April 15

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