



Rice Business Plan Competition

POWERING FOUNDERS. SHAPING THE FUTURE.

Judge Instructions & Guidelines
APR. 9-11



The 2026 RBPC

Thank you for serving as a judge at the 2026 Rice Business Plan Competition! You are joining a 26-year tradition of choosing the nation's and the world's best student startups to compete and win.

We hope you have fun, are inspired, learn about new technology startups, network with other investors and individuals, and have an outstanding experience.

We want you to meet student startups, provide constructive feedback and advice, offer to connections to your network, and be a positive role model for other judges, students and volunteers.

RBPC Judges

You are joining over 350 judges participating in the 2026 RBPC to review 42 student-led startups!

We are very excited you are here for our 26th event, supporting some of the world's most promising startups on their entrepreneurial journey. Judges play a key role in our success. You have a big impact on our event, and we thank you.

Over the next few minutes, we will review the instructions for judging. These are critical to ensure a fair and well-run event.

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Judging Instructions

#RBPC26

RBPC Judging Platform

All scoring is done in the online judging platform by Poetic Systems. For returning judges, this is the platform you've used the past 6 years. All registered judges have been given access to the judging platform in advance of the competition.

You can log into the judging platform on your mobile phone, tablet, laptop or desktop:

rbpc.poetic.io

Morning Start Times

Your attendance each morning of the competition is crucial. All rounds begin promptly at the time stated on the schedule:

8:45 AM on Friday

8:30 AM on Saturday

Please be on time so you can watch each pitch in full and watch all the pitches in the flight. Your scores will be invalid if you do not. We will be taking attendance in each pitch.

Judging Format

- Throughout the competition, each pitch is **10 minutes**, uninterrupted, followed by a Q&A session with the judges. The length of each Q&A session is noted on the schedule.
- Judges should ask questions by first raising their hand and then being called on by the Startup Team members or the Room Moderator.
- Time is limited for Q&A. Please ask your question quickly and fully. Be concise and constructive with your questions. Do not offer opinions, feedback or lengthy build-up to your question. Follow and respect the Room Moderator's instructions and decisions during the flight.
- There are 10-minute breaks between pitches throughout the competition.
- Only registered judges can ask questions.

Scoring

After the last pitch and last Q&A session in the flight has concluded, judges will enter their scores in the online judging platform.

Judges will **rank** the startups they see in their flights, rank them from:

1 = best investment potential or opportunity

through

6 = poorest investment potential or opportunity

Wait until you have heard all the pitches to submit your ranking of the startups.

Judges will have roughly 10 minutes to enter their scores after the last Q&A has concluded. Please be conscious of the time and work quickly!

Round 1 Feedback Session

In Round 1, all judges have feedback forms to fill out for each of the 6 startups they see. Please use the feedback forms as a guide on how to review the startups.

Write feedback on the forms which will be given to the startups at the end of the day. This feedback is crucial to helping startups refine their pitch for future rounds of competition.

In Round 1, after the last pitch and Q&A session, we will have a 15-minute break before starting the **Feedback Sessions**. The feedback sessions are 15 minutes long, with judges reviewing the startup pitch and presentation and offering feedback and advice.

Advancing through the RBPC

The two top-scoring startups from each of the seven Round 1 flights, plus the next overall top-scoring startup from all seven flights, will advance to the Semi-Final Round. That's **15 startups** total in the **Semi-Finals**.

The remaining 27 startups will advance to the **Wildcard Round**.

In the Semi-Final Round, there are 3 flights of 5 startups each. In the Wildcard Round, there are 6 flights of 4 to 5 startups each. Both rounds take place simultaneously Saturday morning.

The two top-scoring startups from each of the three Semi-Final Round flights, plus the overall top-scoring startup from the Wildcard Round, will advance to the **Final Round**. That's **7 startups** in the Final Round.

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How To Judge

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How to Judge at the RBPC

Our judges act as early-stage investors. They are determining which startups represent the best investment opportunity.

Judges should rank the startups where they would most likely invest their money, or where they expect the best potential return on investment.

Your highest (top) ranking should go to the startups that give the most compelling case on why they will be successful and provide evidence they are committed to this startup.

For each startup, ask yourself—If I were an investor or funder in early-stage companies, would I put my money behind this company and these founders? Which company would I fund?

How to Judge at the RBPC

All teams have been vetted and confirmed that they are eligible. They all meet the requirements to compete at the RBPC. However, if you see or hear something from a team that appears different from the RBPC rules, email me, Catherine, the RBPC Director, at rbpc@rice.edu with your concerns. We will assess the issue and will consult PKF Texas, the official auditing firm of the RBPC, if needed.

Do not challenge the startup or disrupt the session by focusing on that issue and not interrupt the pitch. Continue to score and evaluate the startup as usual.

Code of Conduct

We are committed to fostering an educational and impactful environment for everyone at the RBPC.

We expect all participants to treat each other respectfully.

If judges or startups observe anyone acting in a way that is not consistent with these principles, please contact me at rbpc@rice.edu or contact Lina Bell, Executive Director of Belonging and Engagement for Rice Business, at lybell@rice.edu.

Have a Great Experience

We want our judges to be excited, learn about new technologies, meet innovative startups, give valuable advice and constructive feedback, and offer to help our student ventures.

We want you to be positive, be a role model, and be impactful!

Have a wonderful competition and get ready to watch some innovative and impactful pitches from high-caliber startups!

Let's Get Started

Judges, please make sure you can log on to the judging platform by Poetic Systems:

rbpc.poetic.io

Click on today's round, see the list of startups and confirm you are in the right room. The startups are listed in the same order as they are presenting in the flight.

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Let's Get Started

At the end of the flight, rank the startups you have seen in order of:

- 1 = best investment opportunity
- 2 = great investment opportunity
- 3 = good investment opportunity

... And so on, down through the number of startups.

When finished, click Submit. You will get a confirmation screen. And you are done!

Scoring will close 10 minutes after the end of the last Q&A session, so please submit your scores by that time.



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THANKS FOR JOINING US!

