



Rice Business Plan Competition

POWERING FOUNDERS. SHAPING THE FUTURE.

Judge Networking Reception
and Event Preview



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Welcome!

#RBPC26

And now, a word from our sponsor!

Jeff Dodd
Lee Davis

HUNTON

Thank you for being an RBPC Judge!
Welcome (and welcome back) to all judges!

At the RBPC, judges will:

- Give student startups the real-world experience of pitching to investors and entrepreneurs
- Ask good questions, give good feedback
- Mentor, support and connect with startups
- Be present and engaged with the competition, competitors and other judges
- Bring the energy for three action-packed days!

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About RBPC

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About RBPC

- First RBPC was in 2001
- We are still the largest and richest graduate student startup competition in the world—26 years strong
- 42 startups in 5 sectors compete for over \$1 million in prizes
- Over 350 judges across 3 days of competition
- Close to 100 volunteers, most of whom are students
- Our 910 alumni companies have gone on to raise **\$6.9 billion (and growing)**

2026 RBPC Startup Stats

- 550 applications submitted for 42 spots = less than 8% acceptance rate
- 39 universities represented
- 7 universities represented for first time
- 4 countries represented (Canada, England, Germany, US) and even more nationalities



What To Expect at RBPC

- Pre-seed and seed-stage student-led startups
- Vetted student-run businesses looking for funding (as well as mentoring, advice, guidance, contacts, etc.)
- Pitches of 10 minutes (uninterrupted), Judge Q&A sessions that follow of 10-20 minutes
- 10-40 judges in each pitch room/flight in each round
- 35+ prizes up for grabs = \$1mil+
- **Judging startups on their investment potential**

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Competition Schedule & Format

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Schedule

WHEN	WHERE	WHAT
Thursday, April 9th	The Ion	Practice Pitch Round Elevator Pitch Competiton* Company Showcase Reception
Friday, April 10th	Rice University, McNair Hall	Round 1* + Feedback Sessions Semi-Finalist Announcement Reception
Saturday, April 11th	Rice University, McNair Hall	Semi-Final Round/Wildcard Round* Final Round*
Saturday, April 11th	Hyatt Recency Hotel Downtown, 1200 Louisiana St.	Company Showcase* Reception Awards Banquet

Thursday, April 9

Practice Pitch Sessions (not scored)

Startups give a practice pitch in sector-specific flights

- After the pitch, judges offer **feedback** and suggestions on how to improve the pitch to do well at the RBPC
- Judges will take notes on a **feedback form** and give it to the startup after the pitch
- 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)

Elevator Pitch Competition

All 42 startups give their **60-second elevator** pitches back-to-back

- 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>
- EPC does not factor into the overall scoring of the RBPC

Friday, April 10

Round 1 pitches and Q&A

Startups pitch in **sector-specific** flights (7 flights of 6 startups each)

- Pitches are 10 minutes; Q&A with judges is 20 minutes
- Judges will take notes on a **feedback form** and give it to the startup after the feedback sessions
- 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>

Feedback Sessions

After the afternoon break, each startup returns for a 15-minute feedback session with judges. Please participate in this important session for the startups!

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Saturday, April 11

Semi-Final Round & Wildcard Round pitches and Judge Q&A

The 15 top-scoring Round 1 startups advance to the Semi-Final Round (3 flights) and the remaining 27 startups advance to the Wildcard Round (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>

Final Round pitches and Judge Q&A

The 6 top-scoring startups from the Semi-Final Round and the overall best-scoring startup from the Wildcard Round advance to the Final Round

- Pitches are 10 minutes; Q&A with judges is 10 minutes in a packed auditorium
- 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>

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Saturday April 11

All winners will be announced at the **Awards Banquet** on Saturday, April 12, 6:00 PM – 9:30 PM at the **Hyatt Regency Hotel** in downtown Houston, 1200 Louisiana.

All active judges have been invited to the awards banquet through a separate registration form this year. **RSVP is due March 20.**

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

There is a Velvet Rope Policy at all parts of the 2026 RBPC:

If you are not on my list, you are not getting in

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How to Judge

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Scoring is Done by Ranking the Pitches

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

You are judging which startups would be the best investment

Rank the startups on their investment potential **based on what you see in their pitch** and judge Q&A and **submit your scores**

Ranking scale: **1** (excellent, best investment) **to 6** (poor, worst investment)

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

You must watch all pitches in the round and flight you are assigned in order to rank them and submit scores

Judge Expectations

- **Arrive early because 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)
- In the Q&A sessions, be **courteous, quick and concise in your questions**; allow other judges to ask their questions; do not dominate the Q&A sessions
- Offer **constructive feedback** in the scheduled feedback sessions; note the strengths and areas for improvement of the presentation
- **Treat all participants respectfully** and equally and be conscientious of potential biases
- **Follow directions** of the room Moderator and Timekeeper in each pitch room

Make an Impact with the Startups

Give them a business card, connect on LinkedIn (get your QR code ready)

If you say, “let’s stay in touch”, give the startup a way to contact you

Offer to make connections to people in your network

Show them how awesome the Houston ecosystem is

Reminders

RSVP to the awards banquet by March 20 (Friday)

Round 1 judges will be invited to review/offer feedback to business plans starting this weekend

Check your judging schedules, send me updates

Later this week judges will be added to the platform; log on to see your schedule before April 8

Check the RBPC website -> Judges for resources

See you in 3 weeks! Thank you in advance for:

Engaging our startups

Expanding their networks

Connecting with new people

Promoting Houston's entrepreneurial ecosystem

Keeping RBPC and the world's #1 business plan competition!

And now . . .

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Brad Burke

**MANAGING DIRECTOR
RICE ALLIANCE**





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See you April 9-11!

