HOUSTON CITY COLLEGE | Business Plan Competition

2027 HCC Business Plan Competition Contestant Requirements and Competition Rules

Business Idea

An idea for a proposed business or for the expansion of a startup or an existing business in the Greater Houston Metropolitan area.

Steps to Apply for the 2027 HCC Business Plan Competition:

- **Proposed & Startup Entrepreneurs –** 3 Steps: Financial Pre-requisite Workshop, Class/Program and Apply.
- **Existing Entrepreneurs –** 2 Steps: Financial Pre-requisite Workshop and Apply.

Who Should Apply?

Proposed - A business that is in the planning stages or has opened but has not yet produced revenue. Founder is planning to start the business within 12 months following the competition.

Startup - A startup is considered any business that has opened in the last two years AND/OR has produced revenue under $50,000 in the last fiscal year. Businesses that have been launched/opened but are still in the process of proving the business model and management.

Existing - An existing business can range from a small business to a large enterprise. The business should be open at least two years and, in the last fiscal year, produced revenues ranging from over $50,000 up to millions. The primary focus of the company is planning for the company's next level of growth, including positioning to adjust to the past five years of economic challenges through today and moving forward, articulating a well thought out plan to grow the business profitably. The HCC Business Plan Competition is for existing business entrants who:

- Own a business embarking upon a growth plan; or
- Own a business that needs a new course of action; or
- Own a business that needs a new business direction and/or new product line.

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Take Steps to Apply:

Proposed and Startup Entrepreneurs - You may have already taken the required pre-requisite workshop and class/program but, if you have not, you can still sign up for the required financial pre-requisite workshop and pre-requisite class from now until 2:00pm CST January 25, 2027 and you must submit your completed HCC Business Plan Competition Application by 2:00pm January 25, 2027. **More information available on our Homepage.**

Existing Entrepreneurs - Take just the Financial Pre-Requisite Workshop - You can still sign up for the required financial pre-requisite workshop (no class required) from now through the HCC Business Plan Competition Application Deadline by 2:00pm CST January 24, 2027. (Workshops are on 1/13/27, 1/20/27 and 1/28/27). **More information available on our Homepage.**

Each contestant team must submit a fully completed application with their business idea within this time frame: January 4, 2027 through January 25, 2027 at 2:00 pm CST. Upon notification of acceptance, each team will be paired with their advisors and can begin working at once.

Teams

- ***Team Leader must be an owner of the proposed, startup or existing business and have taken the pre-requisite financial webinar. If the team is applying to develop a proposed business or further develop a startup business, then the team lead should also complete one of the prerequisite classes or programs, in the past or prior to the start of this year's competition group training sessions, which begin in late February. Team leaders for those teams applying to grow an established existing business need only take the required webinar. All team members must 18 years or older.***
- Team may include from one to five persons, all of whom should be affiliated with the operations of the proposed, startup or existing business.
- Teams may not include outside business consultants or other individuals who are not involved in the actual on-going business as an employee. Teams may, however, consult with outside parties in research for their plan.

More about Applying

- Each contestant team must submit a fully completed application with their business idea within this time frame: January 4, 2027 through January 25, 2027 at 2:00 pm CST. Upon notification of acceptance, each team will be paired with their advisors and can begin working at once.
- Any HCC students applying must be in good academic standing. Students on academic probation are not eligible.
- All plan content must be the original work of the contestant team.

- Owners, partners, etc. are considered employees if they perform a substantial role in the operation of the venture.
- The business plan should be for a proposed business venture or for a startup or existing business that is embarking on a growth plan or a needed new course of action.
- Both for profit and non-profit organizations are eligible to apply for acceptance into the HCC Business Plan Competition.
- *The business must be located in the Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area; or more specifically, the area called The **Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land Metropolitan Statistical Area** (Houston MSA) consists of nine counties: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery and Waller.*
- If for a proposed business, the plan must address the entire business concept, including implementation.
- If for a startup or an existing business the plan must fully justify the change in direction and/or the planned growth.
- The venture may show intentions to license technology from or to another company for manufacturing and/or distribution purposes. Revenue streams from the venture should not be based solely on deriving revenues from the licensing of its own technologies.
- Proposals for the buy-out of an existing company, tax-shelter opportunities, real estate syndications, and other consulting projects and analyses are not eligible.

Participant Expectations

Contestant team commits to attend all six training sessions in the 2027 HCC Business Plan Competition. Training Sessions dates are listed on the website. It is mandatory that one member from each contestant team must attend and actively participate in all six training sessions. All team members are strongly encouraged to attend as well.

All teams selected as finalists must be available to present on Judges on May 26 and attend the award ceremony on June 03. All graduating contestants should plan to attend the award ceremony on June 03.

Participant commits to:

1. Each team can meet with their advisors in between the training sessions to discuss and get feedback on their business concept. Many teams plan their own virtual and/or in-person meetings, phone calls and/or exchange emails at times convenient for all involved; including advisors. Teams spend no more than 4 hours per month getting advice and feedback from their advisors. If you cannot attend a meeting you have scheduled with your advisor, you must let your advisor know in advance to reschedule. This is good business practice! In light of the pandemic, most one-on-one Advisor team meetings are conducted virtually. However, the team and advisors can meet face to face at a place and time of their choosing only if all involved want to do so. We expect all to respect individuals' decisions regarding the planning of one-on-one meetings with advisors, if any one member prefers to meet virtually.

2. Provide one accurate email address and cell phone number;

3. Check email and phone messages on a daily basis;

4. Meet suggested interim benchmark dates

Your advisors will review your progress and guide you, but they will NOT write portions of your plan nor do any part of your research. You should allocate sufficient time during the period from February 18 through May 10 to meet interim benchmark dates which will be given to you at the first training session. The interim benchmark dates are designed to progress you towards the completion of your written plan due on May 3, 2027 and slide presentation and video due on May 10, 2027.

Failure to meet these requirements can result in disqualification from the competition. By applying to the Business Plan Competition, every applicant agrees to meet the conditions of the contestant requirements.

HCC students applying must be in good academic standing. Students on academic probation are not eligible. Teams can include from one to five persons, all of whom should be affiliated with the operation of the proposed, startup or existing business. Teams cannot include outside business consultants or other individuals who are not involved in the actual on-going business as an employee. Teams may, however, consult with outside parties in research for their plan. Nevertheless, all plan content must be the original work of the contestant team. Owners, partners, etc. are considered employees if they perform a substantial role in the operation of the venture.

If for a proposed business, the plan must address the entire business concept, including implementation. If for a startup or existing business the plan must fully justify the change in direction and/or the planned growth.

Proposals for the buy-out of an existing company, tax-shelter opportunities, real estate syndications, and other consulting projects and analyses are not eligible.

Competition Rules

1. Each team and its team members may submit only one business plan to the competition.

2. Team size cannot exceed five (5) persons.

3. There is a required written Business Plan Format and all contestants are required to conform to it. The format will be supplied at the start of the competition in February.

4. The business plan and associated material must stand for the original work of each entrant. A signed statement shall accompany each submission indicating that the materials submitted are the original work of the author(s). Any team whose work is deemed not original by the judges will be disqualified from the competition and will be obligated to return any prize money (if awarded).

5. Due to the nature of the competition, we will not ask judges, reviewers, sponsors, staff or the audience to agree to or sign non-disclosure statements for any participant. By participating in the competition, entrants agree that neither Houston City College, nor members of the judging panel, sponsors nor their designate organization, assume any liability whatsoever for any disclosures of business plan information which may be made (whether inadvertently or otherwise) by any judge, reviewer, staff member, audience member or other individual connected with, participating in, viewing, hearing, or receiving information from the competition.

6. New proposed ventures cannot have generated sales revenues prior to the competition. Startup and Existing businesses must define and justify all growth and incremental revenues.

7. The venture may show intentions to license technology from another company for manufacturing and/or distribution purposes. Revenue streams from the venture should not be based solely on deriving revenues from the licensing of its own technologies.

8. The business plan and associated material may not contain fabricated information about (but not limited to) the following: backgrounds, experience and educational level of members of the management team, stage of product development, product performance claims, or market survey results. Plans describing business considered by the reviewers to be potentially immoral or unethical will be disqualified.

9. The Submitted business plan is limited to 30 pages of typed text, which includes the Executive Summary and financials but excludes appendices (see item 10 below). Cover sheets are not counted in total number of pages.

10. Summary financial data should include “pro forma” financial statements: a cash flow statement, income statement, balance sheet, break even analysis and funds required/used. These statements should include the year of inception and three subsequent years. Include an explanation of the offering to investors indicating how much money is needed, the expected ROI, and the proposed structure of the deal, i.e. stock, debentures, etc. Also, delineate the possible exit strategies.

11. Appendices should be included only when they support the findings, statements and observations in the plan. Because of the number of teams/plans entering the competition, reviewers and judges may not be able to read all of the material in the appendices. Therefore, the text portion of the plan should include up to 30 pages

(including financials but excluding appendices) and must contain all pertinent information in a clear and concise manner.

12. Electronic submissions are required in a pdf format.

13. Plans will undergo an independent review after which the five Finalist teams will be chosen and notified.

14. A maximum of the 5 highest scoring Business Plans will be chosen for the final competition. The finalists will present their Business Plans to a panel of judges in June. Each finalist team will be given a maximum of fifteen (15) minutes to present their plan followed by a maximum of ten (10) minutes for a question-and-answer session between the presenting team and the panel of judges. Each presenting team will have ten (10) minutes prior to its presentation for setup/preparation and five (5) minutes after the presentation for goodbyes and exiting.

15. Advisors will be assigned to work with the entrant teams. Each team must meet with its advisor(s) at least once a month, and no more than four hours per month. Advisors and entrants will be required to verify that all business plan content is the original work of the entrants, not the advisors. Advisors may advise, but not participate in, the creation or presentation of the business plan.

16. Training sessions will be available to entrants. Such sessions will cover the basics of business plans, financial indicators (e.g. ROI) and statements, obtaining capital and other relevant topics. Each team must be represented at all training sessions.

Business Plan Competition Application

After you have read the above rules for the competition and have confirmed that you and your team members are eligible, you can proceed to the online application.