



EDHE ABSA ENTREPRENEURSHIP INNOVARSITY AND INNOVATION CHALLENGE 2026 TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The purpose of this document is to establish a clear framework for an entrepreneurship pitching competition for university students, ensuring a fair, transparent, and well-organised event. It specifies the rules and eligibility criteria for participants, details the submission and evaluation processes, and outlines the rights and responsibilities of both participants and organizers. This document also clarifies intellectual property rights and sets procedures for resolving disputes, fostering an environment that encourages innovation and highlights entrepreneurial talent.

1. CATEGORY 1: EXISTING BUSINESS – TECH
2. CATEGORY 2: EXISTING BUSINESS – SOCIAL IMPACT
3. CATEGORY 3: EXISTING BUSINESS – GENERAL
4. CATEGORY 4: ACADEMIC RESEARCH COMMERCIALISATION
5. CATEGORY 5: INNOVATIVE INDUSTRIES

By entering the Competition and/or accepting any prize, all contestants and winners agree to be bound by the terms and conditions below ("Rules").

This competition is open to entrepreneurs who have an actively operating business that is already engaging with customers and generating revenue. Only businesses that are running and providing products/services to real customers will be considered.

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**This document outlines the Terms and Conditions related to the definitions of
Category 1 - 5 of the EDHE Absa Entrepreneurship InnoVarsity and Innovation Challenge**

CATEGORY 1: TECH

CATEGORY 2: SOCIAL IMPACT

CATEGORY 3: GENERAL

CATEGORY 4: ACADEMIC RESEARCH COMMERCIALISATION

CATEGORY 5: INNOVATIVE INDUSTRIES

SECTION 1: KEY DEFINITIONS

1.1 “Existing” and “running”, businesses

- 1.1.1 An “existing business” is an already operational or legally established for-profit or non-profit organisation, whether formally registered with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC) or the Department of Social Development or operating informally. Additionally, it includes businesses that are well-established or relatively new. An existing business is any business that is currently operational, regardless of its age, size, or level of success. It could be a startup, a small business, or a growing enterprise. The key characteristic is that it is actively running and engaging in business activities.
- 1.1.2 A “running business” is an enterprise that is actively operating, generating revenue, and engaging in regular business activities such as production, sales, service delivery, or customer engagement. The business should be earning an income from its operations, even if it's not yet profitable.
- 1.1.3 An “established business” is an existing business that has reached a level of maturity, stability, and recognition in its industry or market. It typically has a proven track record, loyal customers, consistent revenue, and structured operations.

SECTION 2: ELIGIBILITY FOR CATEGORIES

2.1 Eligible businesses competing in Categories 1 to 3: “Existing businesses” are defined as (and with consideration of the other terms in this document)

- 2.1.1 Either formal or informal businesses;
- 2.1.2 Operating with a legal business model (e.g., not pyramid schemes);
- 2.1.3 Trading in legal products or services;
- 2.1.4 Actively operational and conducting business;
- 2.1.5 May still be in early growth stages;
- 2.1.6 Could be a startup, SME, or a larger company;
- 2.1.7 May or may not have financial stability or a strong market presence;
- 2.1.8 Are majority owned and operated by registered students at a South African public university;
- 2.1.9 Have been in operation for one year or more based on the submitted business model;
- 2.1.10 Are operating at least within the South African borders.

2.2 Eligible businesses competing in Category 2: Social Impact and Category 3: General are already earning customer-derived revenue.

- 2.2.1 “Earning customer-derived revenue” refers to generating income directly from sales or services provided to customers. It means the business earns revenue through transactions with its customers, such as selling products, providing services, or offering subscriptions, rather than relying on external funding sources like investments or grants. This type of revenue indicates market validation and customer demand for the business's offerings.

2.3 Eligible businesses competing in Categories 4: Academic Research

Commercialisation are defined as (and with consideration of the other terms in this document)

- 2.3.1 Businesses that translate **scientific and technological research** into innovative products or services, particularly those addressing social, economic, or environmental challenges.
- 2.3.2 This category aims to bridge the gap between research and industry by supporting early-stage, research-focused businesses that have established proof of concept and are in either the pre-commercialisation or commercialisation phase.
- 2.3.3 **Academic research accreditation** - To qualify, businesses must submit evidence that an accredited university or research institution recognises their research, ensuring it meets academic and scientific credibility standards. Such evidence include:
 - 2.3.3.1 **Research Proposal or Thesis Documentation:** Submission of the original research proposal, thesis, or dissertation that outlines the foundational research underlying the business concept.
 - 2.3.3.2 **Letter of Support from Faculty:** A formal letter from a faculty member or research supervisor attesting to the research's validity and its relevance to the business idea.
 - 2.3.3.3 **Patents or Intellectual Property Registration:** Documentation of any patents filed or intellectual property rights established based on the research, demonstrating an effort to commercialise the findings.
 - 2.3.3.4 **Prototype or Product Development Documentation:** Evidence of a prototype or initial product development stemming from the research, highlighting tangible steps toward commercialisation.
- 2.3.4 **Entries are open to students in South Africa who are currently studying at the Masters and Doctoral level in the year of application, as well as to staff members employed at the 26 public universities. Applicants must;**
 - 2.3.4.1 Must have proof of registration for the enrolled qualification;
 - 2.3.4.2 Mention the key collaborators;
 - 2.3.4.3 Provide evidence of collaborations or partnerships with industry stakeholders or businesses interested in the research application, illustrating market interest and potential for commercialisation;
 - 2.3.4.4 Provide documentation of any grants or funding applications submitted or received that support the commercialisation of the research.
 - 2.3.4.5 Provide evidence of any pilot studies or market testing conducted to assess demand and viability of the product or service derived from the research.
 - 2.3.4.6 Submit entries individually or as a group;
 - 2.3.4.7 Own, or have sufficient permission to use, any intellectual property that is or will be used by the business or as part of the business. Contestants will be responsible for any consequences or losses arising from the business using intellectual property without permission. The Organiser will not accept responsibility for any such consequences or losses.
 - 2.3.4.8 Present a concept developed from academic research with experimental data.

2.4 Eligible businesses competing in Categories 5: Innovative Industries

2.4.1 Entries can consist of an early-stage or established business.

2.4.2 Entries must be original and must not infringe on any third-party intellectual property.

SECTION 3: GENERAL CONDITIONS RELATED TO THE COMPETITION

3.1 Competition ownership

3.1.1 The EDHE and Universities South Africa (USAf) is the owner and Organiser of the Competition.

3.2 Responsibility of the Student Entrepreneurship Coordinators

3.2.1 It is jointly the responsibility between the student and coordinator to ensure that students enter the **correct category**, that all participants read the terms and conditions, and specifically the entry criteria to ensure the accuracy of their submission.

3.2.2 The Student Entrepreneurship Coordinator from each university is responsible for conducting due diligence on contestants proceeding to the regionals, including obtaining necessary company registration documents and proof of majority shareholding.

3.3 Competition entries

3.3.1 Contestants are permitted to be Directors in **more than one business** in the competition. However, the businesses should be in different categories and under different applicants.

3.3.2 There **is no entry fee payable** for the competition. No payment to the Organiser or any third party is required for purposes of entering the competition.

3.3.3 Contestants are responsible for ensuring that their submission is complete, **complies with the competition criteria**, is legible, and is submitted on time. The Organiser cannot be held responsible for any disqualification resulting from incomplete, non-compliant, illegible, or late submissions.

3.3.4 The Organiser will not be liable for any technical failure that may result in an entry not being successfully submitted.

3.3.5 By entering the competition, contestants agree to represent the business or entity that is entered and automatically accept and agree to abide by the rules, terms, and conditions of the Intervarsity Entrepreneurship Competition, on behalf of themselves and the business they represent.

3.4 Category 1-3 from existing businesses

3.4.1 The competition accepts entries in Category 1-3 from existing businesses only.

3.4.2 Only businesses registered with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC) and non-profit businesses registered with CIPC or the Department of Social Development will be eligible for participation in the regional rounds.

3.4.3 Contestants in Category 1-3 must submit their business registration certificate, proof of academic registration for the competition year, and a letter or certificate confirming that the majority shareholders of the business are students to be eligible for

participation in the national finals. This excludes the Academic Research Commercialisation and the Innovative Industries categories (see separate criteria).

- 3.4.4 Category 3: Social Impact is the only category that accepts submissions from both non-profit and for-profit entities.

3.5 University student and staff participation

- 3.5.1 All Contestants must be **registered students for a full-time or part-time qualification or alumni who completed their studies between 2024 and 2026** at one of the 26 public universities in South Africa, and submissions can be made by individuals or groups.
- 3.5.2 Contestants must be South African citizens with Identity Number.
- 3.5.3 Employees/staff of the universities may only participate in Category 4: Academic Research Commercialisation and are not eligible to enter the competition in any other category.
- 3.5.4 All **contestants** in category 1 – 5 must be **18 - 35 years** old or turning 18 within the year of the competition, this includes category 4. If a registered student at a South African university is younger than 18, parental consent for participation should be provided to the relevant university's Organiser and EDHE. The auditor should verify the age of the winners using the company registration certificate.

3.6 Majority shareholding

- 3.6.1 Contestants in the **Tech, Social Impact, General and Innovative Industries** Category must confirm that they are the majority **shareholder** of the business. Alternatively, the combined student shareholding must be at least 51%. Proof of such shareholding must be provided by the university.
- 3.6.2 Contestant may enter individually or in teams of up to 5 members.

3.7 Intellectual property of the business

- 3.7.1 Contestants must confirm that all **intellectual property** used in their entry is owned by the business or used with permission from the owner and indemnify the Organiser and the South African Government against any third-party claims related to the unauthorised use of intellectual property. Contestants must confirm that all the information provided is true and accurate.

3.8 Virtual participation

- 3.8.1 Virtual participation will not be permitted in the regional rounds, except in cases where evidence has been submitted to show that a contestant cannot pitch in person, or in the case of UNISA contestants.
- 3.8.2 Only physical participation will be allowed during the finals.

3.9 Disqualification of contestants

- 3.9.1 Any contestant who wilfully and/or negligently misrepresents information will immediately be disqualified.
- 3.9.2 Any contestant, after winning a prize is identified as having misrepresented any information, will be required to return any prizes so won and may be subjected to the Disciplinary Code for his/her university.
- 3.9.3 Existing businesses operating in the tobacco, firearms (excluding for sporting use), alcohol, adult (sex), and gambling/wagering industries are not eligible for the

competition due to potential harm associated with these substances and regulatory considerations. Competition does not endorse or condone substance abuse of any kind, and businesses that promote these industries are also prohibited.

3.9.4 The Organiser reserves the right to withdraw any submission from the competition if it is found to be in violation of the pre-established conditions and rules outlined in this document.

3.9.5 Contestants are required to submit their presentations prior to the event date and not on the evening before the events. Late submissions will be disqualified.

3.10 Monthly turnover of the business

3.10.1 Contestants must submit business entries with a **maximum monthly turnover** of R100 000.00, excluding external funding and investments.

3.11 Representation by the business

3.11.1 Each business must appoint **one representative** to participate in the competition who will be the **main point of contact** with the Organiser. While all team members will be featured in marketing materials, only the designated representative may present the business throughout the competition.

3.11.2 In the event of an emergency where the designated representative cannot participate, another team member may be allowed to take their place with prior approval from the Organiser.

3.11.3 The Organiser reserves the right to remove entries from the competition if the designated representative is not adhered to.

3.11.4 One business representative must be presenting on stage. The same representative must remain throughout the competition.

3.12 Winners of the competition

3.12.1 Organiser's decision is final and binding. No correspondence and/or other forms of communication will be entered into by the Organiser in this regard.

3.12.2 The winners will be notified via email, by the latest seven working days after the competition.

3.12.3 The Organiser may require the winner (at no payable fee to such winner) to be identified, photographed, filmed, and or the foregoing to be used in EDHE advertising campaigns and/or published in any media including but not limited to brochures, marketing material, social media site(s)/platform(s).

3.12.4 By entering into the Competition, the contestant provides consent that EDHE may use his/her names and images in any and all such EDHE-related publicity material.

3.12.5 The contestant understands that he/she may withdraw consent at any time, although it may not be possible to remove images or videos from certain types of publications, for instance, pamphlets or newsletters that have already been distributed.

3.12.6 The contestant cannot withdraw consent retroactively. This means that the EDHE is authorised to use the contestant's image or recording as indicated above until consent is withdrawn.

3.12.7 Contestants, though, Student Entrepreneurship Coordinators, are only permitted to request their own judges' scores from the organiser.

- 3.12.8 Prizes will be awarded based on merit and the Organiser and adjudicators do not prescribe how the prize money should be spent.
- 3.12.9 The prizes awarded in the competition are non-negotiable.
- 3.12.10 The winning entry will be publicly accessible and will be publicly associated with the winner's name. The contact information of the winners will be available upon request by contacting the Senior Student Engagement Officer at EDHE, Mr Sandile Shabalala at sandile@usaf.ac.za.
- 3.12.11 The university Student Entrepreneurship Coordinator is responsible for monitoring the interaction between the winner and anyone who requests information of the winner. The information will only be provided to requesters for legitimate reasons, such as follow-up interviews, potential investment opportunities, and other relevant matters related to the competition. This measure is in place to ensure the privacy and personal information of the winners are protected, and that the interaction is professional and appropriate.

3.13 Judging of the competition

- 3.13.1 Judges and auditors should only engage with contestants and coordinators once EDHE announces the winners. The contestant or Student Entrepreneurship Coordinators found interacting with a judge or an auditor during breaks or in any way during the pitching day will be disqualified or disqualify all contestants from the Coordinator's university.
- 3.13.2 Judges must be closely monitored to ensure adherence to the category criteria during deliberation.
- 3.13.3 If the auditor or the judges identify that a contestant is in the wrong category during the internal- and regional rounds, the auditor must reallocate the contestant to the correct category and allow the judges to evaluate the business presentation using the appropriate criteria. The auditor should promptly communicate this decision to EDHE.
- 3.13.4 The contestant with the highest score in the correct category will be declared the category winner. If the top two contestants achieve the same score, the judges are authorised to deliberate to determine the winner.
- 3.13.5 An EDHE member should participate in deliberations as an advisor when necessary.
- 3.13.6 Judges should receive the business presentations prior to the event date for review.
- 3.13.7 Judges should not express any interest in investing in, sponsoring, or supporting a contestant's business while on stage. We encourage judges to communicate such interests privately with the contestant's Student Entrepreneurship Coordinator. This approach ensures fairness and helps avoid discouraging other contestants.

3.14 Confidentiality

- 3.14.1 The Organiser will make reasonable efforts to respect and protect any clearly labelled confidential information provided by contestants; however, due to the nature of the competition, they cannot guarantee the confidentiality or be held responsible for any confidential information submitted. Contestants should use their discretion when deciding what information to provide to EDHE.
- 3.14.2 The use or reference to EDHE by contestants for commercial or promotional purposes is prohibited unless EDHE has provided prior written consent.

- 3.14.3 The personal data of contestants and winners will be used in accordance with data protection legislation and will not be disclosed to third parties without their prior consent.
- 3.14.4 Any personal data relating to the winner(s), or any other contestant(s) will be used solely in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act, No. 4 of 2013, as amended.
- 3.14.5 By entering and participating in the competition, the contestant agrees that the Organiser may collect and process his/her personal information for the purposes of this competition and for communication or statistical purposes.

3.15 Organiser's decision-making

- 3.15.1 EDHE reserves the right to withdraw any submission to the competition at any time if it is found to be in breach of any of the pre-established conditions and/or Rules laid out in this document.
- 3.15.2 The Organiser reserves the right to modify, without prior or any notice other than on the competition website the competition's entry forms and requirements, dates, criteria, categories, adjudication process, or any other aspect of the competition as deemed necessary in the interest of fairness, transparency, or operational circumstances, after consultation with the university coordinators of the competition.
- 3.15.3 If EDHE is unable to contact the winner, alternatively, should the winner not provide EDHE with banking details within 14 (fourteen) days of having been notified thereof. EDHE reserves the right to withdraw the prize and elect a replacement winner.
- 3.15.4 The judges' decision is final. However, if EDHE discovers that the winner has breached any terms and conditions, the competition Organiser reserves the right to reconsider the judge's decision. Should a majority consensus not be reached among the judges, **the Director of Entrepreneurship at USAf will have the deciding vote.**
- 3.15.5 EDHE alone should be responsible for creating the scoring sheet and judging pack.

3.16 Reference to the Organiser

- 3.16.1 Contestants must ensure that any reference to the Organiser is factually accurate and no defamatory statements about the Organiser or the competition may be made public.

3.17 Termination of the competition

- 3.17.1 EDHE reserves the right to terminate the competition with immediate effect; alternatively, to amend the competition and/or the Rules out of convenience or in the event of circumstances beyond its control, including but not limited to an act of God, civil or military disturbance, a catastrophe, the Covid-19 pandemic, or any actual or anticipated break of any applicable law or regulation.
- 3.17.2 EDHE will notify contestants of any changes to the competition and/or the Rules as soon as reasonably possible.
- 3.17.3 Should the competition be terminated; alternatively, should the competition and the Rules be amended by EDHE, all contestants hereby waive any rights which they may have against EDHE and/or its employees and acknowledge that they will have no resource or claim of any nature against EDHE and/or its employees.
- 3.17.4 The Period of the competition may also be extended or curtailed at the sole discretion of EDHE.

3.18 Post-Intervarsity Mentorship

3.18.1 Winner who is unavailable for post-competition mentorship must declare their unavailability and the mentorship opportunity be offered to the runner-up. Additionally, winners who miss more than three mentorship sessions without rescheduling with the mentor will be disqualified from the mentorship programme, and the opportunity will be extended to the runner-up.

3.19 Conditions relating to business feedback and commentary from adjudicators

- 3.19.1 The competition and its authorised adjudicators may provide contestants with certain comments and feedback on certain parts of my/our entry and acknowledge and agree that:
- 3.19.2 Feedback and comments on presentations will be provided by the authorised adjudicators, in their personal capacities, and not those of the Organiser or the South African Government or its agents.
- 3.19.3 The feedback and comments are based on the information provided and are given in good faith to assist contestants in improving their business concept, model, performance, processes, and competitiveness.
- 3.19.4 The feedback and comments do not constitute professional financial, legal, or technical advice.
- 3.19.5 Contestants should not under any circumstances make any decisions, or take any action, whether legal, financial, technical or of any other kind, without full and thorough consideration and without first obtaining appropriate financial, legal, technical, and other professional advice.
- 3.19.6 In view of the fact that business models, plans, processes, and performance are dynamic and subjective, no correspondence will be entered into regarding the adjudicators' comments and the adjudicators will not be identified individually.

3.20 Competition prizes

3.20.1 Category Prizes:

Category prizes:

- **Category 1: Existing Business - Tech** – R100 000.00
 - Category 1: Existing Business - Tech 1st Runner Up – R40 000.00
 - Category 2: Existing Business - Tech 2nd Runner Up – R20 000.00
- **Category 2: Existing Business - Social Impact** – R100 000.00
 - Category 2: Existing Business - Social Impact 1st Runner Up – R40 000.00
 - Category 2: Existing Business - Social Impact 2nd Runner Up – R20 000.00
- **Category 3: Existing Business - General** – R100 000.00
 - Category 3: Existing Business – 1st General Runner Up – R40 000.00
 - Category 3: Existing Business – 2nd General Runner Up – R20 000.00
- **Category 4: Academic Research Commercialisation** – R100 000.00
 - Category 4: Academic Research Commercialisation 1st Runner Up – R40 000.00
 - Category 4: Academic Research Commercialisation 2nd Runner Up – R20 000.00
- **Category 5: Innovative Industries** – R100 000.00
 - Category 5: Innovative Industries 1st Runner Up – R40 000.00
 - Category 5: Innovative Industries 2nd Runner Up – R20 000.00

3.20.2 Overall Prize:

- Studentpreneur of the Year 2026 – R400 000.00

Total prize money: R1 200 000.00

3.21 Time allocation

Each contestant has a **15 minute** time slot to pitch their business or idea and answer the judges' questions. The time allocation applies to all categories, with the following breakdown:

- **2 minute** for setting up and testing the presentation.
- **3 minutes** for presenting their business idea.
- **5 minutes** for answering judges' questions.
- **5 minute** for judges to finalise scoring the contestant on the stage.