EDHE ABSA ENTREPRENEURSHIP INNOVARSITY AND INNOVATION CHALLENGE 2026 CRITERIA PER CATEGORY

This document serves to provide participants with a clear understanding of the expectations, definitions, and evaluative standards for the entrepreneurship pitching competition. By outlining critical concepts, and specific judging criteria, this document aims to ensure a fair, transparent, and consistent evaluation process. Participants are encouraged to use this guidance to effectively prepare their pitches, enhance their businesses, and engage meaningfully in the competition as they present innovative solutions and existing entrepreneurial businesses. This competition is aimed at entrepreneurs who have an actively operating business that is already engaging with customers and generating revenue.

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

CATEGORY 1: EXISTING BUSINESS-TECH

EDHE designed this category specifically for existing businesses within the technology sector.

Technology encompasses the practical application of scientific knowledge, particularly in industry. It involves the development of machinery and equipment based on scientific principles, as well as the field of engineering and applied sciences.

Tech-Based Business:

A company whose core activities primarily create, develop, or significantly use innovative technology. This includes startups involved in tech development, technological solutions to existing problems, or those fostering new technological advancements in a particular sector.

Tech-Enabled Business:

A business that uses technology to enhance processes but primarily operates within traditional industries (e.g., companies utilising software for logistics but fundamentally serving manufacturing).

WHAT IT IS NOT

Please note that this category does not include businesses using technology as an add-on or integration - such as delivery apps, e-commerce platforms, website development, graphic design, or digital media services.

Here are some common misinterpretations:

- **Not Just Any Business That Uses Technology**:

  A tech-based business is specifically focused on creating technology products or services. Simply using technology to enhance operations (like CRM software) does not categorise a business as tech-based.

- **Not Limited to Software Companies**:

  While many tech businesses are in software, tech-based businesses can also include hardware, biotech, clean tech, and other fields that involve technology as a key component.

- **Not Non-profit Organisations**:

  While non-profits can leverage technology, a tech-based business typically aims for profit through the commercialisation of technological innovations.

- **Not Traditional Retail or Service Industries**:

  Businesses in traditional sectors (like restaurants or retail stores) that use technology for operations or marketing are not typically classified as tech-based unless they create tech products or services themselves.

- **Not Solely Research Institutions**:

  Research institutions may innovate in technology but are not classified as tech-based businesses unless they commercialise their research through products or services.

- **Not Basic Tech Support Services**:

Businesses focused only on providing tech support or maintenance for existing technologies are not considered tech-based unless they also develop their own tech solutions.

- **Not Legacy Companies that Use Tech**:

  Established companies in traditional industries that utilise technology to streamline their processes or modernise operations do not fall under the tech-based business category unless they create new tech products.

- **Not All E-commerce Platforms**:

  While e-commerce involves technology, a platform does not qualify as a tech-based business unless it offers innovative tech solutions or products.

- **Not Businesses with Minimal Tech Integration**:

  A company with basic tech tools (like email or spreadsheets) that don't play a significant role in its core offerings is not considered tech-centric.

Definitions

Technology-Ready Levels (TRL):

- **TRL 1:** Basic principles observed and reported – Research begins identifying fundamental principles, with no applied research yet.
- **TRL 2:** Technology concept formulated – Concept has been established; basic feasibility of applications and ideas is assessed.
- **TRL 3:** Experimental proof of concept – Branch into research, establishing whether the concept works in practice.
- **TRL 4:** Technology validated in lab – Humble R&D shows the technology's role under controlled conditions.
- **TRL 5:** Technology validated in relevant environment – Demonstrating the technology operates in a relevant environment, simulating the final product's condition.
- **TRL 6:** Technology demonstrator – The prototype works in the real-life environment; represents an intermediate step to the final solution.
- **TRL 7:** System prototype demonstration in operational environment – Prototype work conducted in the real-world operational environment (e.g., a simulation).
- **TRL 8:** Actual system completed and qualified through test and demonstration – The work is complete and undergoing full-scale tests.
- **TRL 9:** Actual system proven in operational environment – The technology is now available for commercial use after full evaluation.

Industries

Here are some of the technology industries;

- **FinTech (Financial Technology):** Refers to technology-driven innovations in financial services, including digital payments, cryptocurrency, online lending, and robo-advisory.
- **MedTech (Medical Technology):** Encompasses products and solutions used in healthcare, such as surgical robots, health data systems, COVID-19 testing kits, and digital health trackers.
- **EdTech (Education Technology):** Involves hardware and software tools that enhance teaching and learning, from smart boards and online courses to interactive videos and remote teaching technology.
- **AgriTech (Agriculture Technology):** Involves utilising technology to improve agriculture efficiency, productivity, and sustainability. Examples include automated irrigation, drones for surveillance, and weather forecasting.
- **CleanTech (Cleaning Technology):** Focuses on environmentally friendly solutions for waste management, pollution reduction, and sustainable energy sources.
- **DeepTech (Deep Technology):** Encompasses advanced technologies like artificial intelligence, robotics, blockchain, biotech, and quantum computing.
- **RetailTech (Retail Technology):** Involves innovations in retail, such as online shopping systems, inventory management systems, and personalised customer experiences.
- **RegTech (Regulatory Technology):** Aids financial institutions comply with regulations by streamlining processes related to due diligence, fraud detection, and data management.
- **LegalTech (Legal Technology):** Applies technology to legal processes, including contract management, e-discovery, and case analysis.
- **GovTech (Government Technology):** Refers to technology solutions used by government agencies to improve public services, enhance transparency, and streamline administrative tasks.
- **PropTech (Property Tech):** Involves utilising technology in real estate, covering areas like property management, smart buildings, and real estate transactions.
- **FoodTech (Food Technology):** Innovations in food production, distribution, and safety, including precision agriculture, food delivery apps, and sustainable packaging.
- **Artificial Intelligence Solutions**: Projects harnessing artificial intelligence to solve real-world problems in sectors like healthcare, education, or sustainability.
- **Blue Tech Innovations**: Ocean tech solutions promoting marine sustainability, blue economy growth, or ocean conservation.

Judging Criteria

1. **Business Innovation:**

   Describe how your business introduces innovative technology or significantly enhances existing solutions. Include details about the Technology-Readiness Level (TRL) the business currently occupies.

2. **Market Relevance:**

   Explain the target market for your technology and its potential impact. Include evidence of market research, trends, and needs that your business addresses.

3. **Technology Integration:**

   Clearly articulate how technology is integrated into the core business model, including specific technological applications and their benefits.

4. **Unique Value Proposition:** Clearly articulate the distinct advantage your business holds over competitors. Highlight your unique selling proposition, proprietary technology, or strategic strengths that differentiate your offering and strengthen your market position.

5. **Business Model:**

   Detail how the company generates revenue, including pricing strategies, distribution channels, and customer engagement practices.

6. **Scalability:**

   Outline potential growth strategies and plans to scale the business to reach a larger audience or market.

7. **Team Expertise:**

   Present a brief overview of the team members' skills, experiences, and qualifications in technology or entrepreneurship that support the business's success.

8. **Financial Viability:**

   Include insights into operational expenses, expected revenues, and overall business sustainability. Describe any funding sources or financial projections.

9. **Presentation:**

   Presentation skills, including readiness, engagement, confidence, utilisation of visual aids, effectiveness of the pitch, and time management during delivery.

CATEGORY 2: EXISTING BUSINESS - SOCIAL IMPACT

EDHE designed this category specifically for existing businesses within the social impact sector.

We are looking for social impact business that seeks to address social, environmental, or community challenges while also achieving financial sustainability. Its primary goal should be to create positive change in society, often prioritising social good alongside profit.

Social impact businesses go beyond traditional profit motives by prioritising tangible contributions to society while addressing unique challenges such as unemployment, poverty, inequality, healthcare disparities, and environmental issues in South Africa. By aligning their core business and investment with societal needs, they enhance overall well-being and sustainable development, focusing on critical areas like job creation and community development. Additionally, these businesses leverage innovation and technology to drive positive change, improve access to essential services, and promote sustainable practices.

WHAT IT IS NOT

Often Social Impact businesses are interpreted as "Charity" businesses which it is not.

Here are some common misinterpretations:

- **Not Just Charitable Organisations:**

  Social impact businesses are not solely non-profits; many seek to generate profit while achieving social goals.

- **Not Just One-time Projects:**

  They focus on long-term sustainability and systemic change rather than temporary solutions or short-term projects.

- **Not Limited to Specific Sectors:**

  These businesses can operate in various sectors, including healthcare, education, and environmental sustainability, not just social services.

- **Not Purely Mission-driven:**

  While they prioritise social goals, successful social impact businesses also emphasise business viability and market-driven strategies.

- **Not Separate from Traditional Businesses:**

  Many traditional businesses can also have a social impact component; it's not an either/or distinction.

Definitions

In the South African context, various types of social impact businesses aim to address pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. Here are some common types:

- **Microfinance Institutions:**

  Providing financial services to low-income individuals or small businesses to foster economic empowerment.

- **Social Enterprises:**

  Businesses that operate for a social purpose while generating profit, often focused on community development or environmental sustainability.

- **Cooperatives:**

  Member-owned businesses that prioritise collective benefits, such as agricultural cooperatives or worker cooperatives.

- **Impact Investment Funds:**

  Funds that invest in businesses with a measurable social or environmental impact alongside financial returns.

- **Affordable Healthcare Providers:**

  Clinics or health services that offer affordable care to underserved communities.

- **Educational Initiatives:**

  Organisations focusing on skills development, tutoring, or educational resources for disadvantaged populations.

- **Waste Management and Recycling Companies:**

  Businesses that promote environmental sustainability through recycling and waste reduction initiatives.

- **Renewable Energy Projects:**

  Companies that develop and implement sustainable energy solutions, like solar energy installations, to increase access and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

- **Fair Trade Enterprises:**

  Businesses that ensure fair compensation and ethical treatment of workers in the production of goods, often in agriculture or crafts.

- **Food Security Initiatives:**

  Organisations focusing on urban farming, community gardens, or food distribution to combat hunger and malnutrition.

These types reflect the diverse landscape of social impact businesses in South Africa, each addressing specific challenges and contributing to overall societal well-being.

Industries

Here are some of the Social impact industries;

- **Education**: Companies that support education initiatives, including scholarships, teacher training, and school infrastructure development, make a valuable contribution to social impact.
- **Healthcare**: Businesses engaged in healthcare services, medical research, and community health programmes are crucial in enhancing well-being.
- **Renewable energy**: Companies that promote clean energy solutions, solar power, and sustainable energy access to positively impact the environment and society.

- **Agriculture and food security**: Initiatives related to sustainable farming practices, food distribution, and nutrition education address critical social needs.
- **Financial Inclusion & Microfinance**: Enterprises that provide financial services to underserved populations, such as low-income individuals, small business owners, or rural communities. This includes microloans, mobile banking, savings platforms, and digital payment solutions to promote economic empowerment.
- **Environmental conservation**: Organisations working towards conservation, waste reduction, and ecosystem protection contribute to social well-being.
- **Gender Equality & Women Empowerment Ventures:** Businesses that focus on creating opportunities for women through employment, leadership development, entrepreneurship support, and access to financial resources. This includes women-owned businesses, social enterprises tackling gender-based challenges, and initiatives supporting female entrepreneurs.
- **Technology and innovation**: Companies leveraging technology for social good, such as digital literacy programs and tech-based solutions, drive positive change.
- **Rural & Underserved Community Development**: Entrepreneurial initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life in rural and marginalised areas by providing access to education, healthcare, clean water, renewable energy, and economic opportunities. These businesses often collaborate with local communities to create sustainable solutions.

Judging Criteria

1. **Business Innovation**:
   Describe how your business introduces innovative solutions or significantly enhances existing ones, emphasising both technological and social innovations.
2. **Societal Impact:**
   Clearly articulate the specific social problem your business addresses, emphasising its potential impact on the targeted community and the urgency of the issue.
3. **Market Relevance**:
   Explain the target market for your solutions and its potential impact, including evidence from market research that highlights trends and needs your business addresses.
4. **Business Model**:
   Detail how the company generates revenue, including pricing strategies, distribution channels, and customer engagement practices, while ensuring that the model aligns with the social impact mission.
5. **Scalability**:
   Outline potential growth strategies and plans to scale both the business and its social impact to reach a larger audience or market effectively.

6. **Team Expertise**:
   Present a brief overview of the skills, experiences, and qualifications of team members that support business success, emphasising expertise in both technology and social entrepreneurship.
7. **Financial Viability:**
   Provide insights into operational expenses, expected revenues, and overall business sustainability. Describe any funding sources or financial projections that support the business's growth.
8. **Operational Efficiency**:
   Describe how the business optimises operations to achieve its social impact goals while maintaining cost efficiency and resource management.
9. **Presentation Skills**:
   Evaluate the ability to communicate the business concept effectively, including readiness, engagement, confidence, the use of visual aids, and time management during the pitch.

CATEGORY 3: EXISTING BUSINESS – GENERAL

This category is open to all types of existing businesses that meet the competition's Terms and Conditions. It focuses on businesses with a track record of success, proven products or services, and a clear understanding of their market. Judges will evaluate businesses based on their alignment with the 17 global **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and their potential positive impact on society and the environment. Contestants in this category should showcase how their existing ventures contribute to achieving specific SDGs. Here is the list of the 17 SGDs to choose from;

Definitions

- **No Poverty**: The goal is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere.
- **Zero Hunger**: End hunger, achieve food security, and promote sustainable agriculture.
- **Good Health and Well-Being**: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages.
- **Quality Education**: Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- **Gender Equality**: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- **Clean Water and Sanitation**: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- **Affordable and Clean Energy:** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
- **Decent Work and Economic Growth:** Promote sustained, inclusive, sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work.

- **Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure**: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.
- **Reduced Inequalities:** Reduce inequality within and among countries.
- **Sustainable Cities and Communities**: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
- **Responsible Consumption and Production:** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- **Climate Action:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- **Life Below Water:** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.
- **Life on Land:** Protect, restore, and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, manage forests sustainably, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.
- **Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.
- **Partnerships for the Goals:** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

Industries:

Creative & Cultural Industries

- Fashion & Apparel (Sustainable & Ethical Fashion)
- Film, Media & Entertainment
- Music & Performing Arts
- Publishing & Content Creation
- Gaming & Animation

Agribusiness & Agri-Tech

- Sustainable & Regenerative Farming
- Agro-processing & Value-Added Products
- Urban & Vertical Farming
- Organic and Specialty Foods
- Agri-tourism

Manufacturing & Industrial Innovation

- Smart & Sustainable Manufacturing
- Green Manufacturing & Recycling

- 3D Printing & Additive Manufacturing
- Automotive & Aerospace Components
- Renewable Energy Manufacturing

Tourism & Hospitality

- Eco-Tourism & Sustainable Travel
- Food & Beverage Entrepreneurship
- Community-Based Tourism
- Boutique Hotels & Lodging
- Cultural & Heritage Tourism

Health & Wellness

- Alternative Medicine & Holistic Health
- Fitness & Sports Entrepreneurship
- Mental Health Solutions
- Nutraceuticals & Herbal Products
- Assisted Living & Elderly Care

Education & Edutainment

- Skill Development & Vocational Training
- Early Childhood Development
- E-learning & Educational Publishing
- Gamified Learning
- Language & Translation Services

Retail & Consumer Goods

- E-commerce & Direct-to-Consumer Brands
- Ethical & Sustainable Consumer Products
- Luxury & Lifestyle Products
- Subscription-Based Services
- Franchising & Business Expansion

Green Economy & Sustainability

- Renewable Energy (Solar, Wind, Biofuels)
- Waste Management & Recycling Innovations
- Water & Sanitation Solutions
- Carbon Capture & Climate-Tech

- Circular Economy Startups

Construction & Infrastructure

- Affordable Housing Solutions
- Smart & Sustainable Building Materials
- Real Estate Development & Management
- Modular & Prefabricated Construction
- Interior Design & Space Optimization

Sports & Recreation

- Sports Technology & Equipment
- Athlete Development & Coaching
- Adventure & Extreme Sports Businesses
- Fan Engagement & Esports
- Sports Medicine & Recovery Solutions

Judging Criteria

1. **Business description and SDG alignment:**

   Describe how your business introduces innovative solutions or significantly enhances existing ones. Clearly describe the business and specify which of the 17 global SDGs it aligns with.

2. **Solution analysis**:

   Clearly define the product or service, highlighting key features and benefits.

3. **Business Model:**

   Detail how the company generates revenue, including pricing strategies, distribution channels, and customer engagement practices.

4. **Financial Viability**:
   Provide insights into operational expenses, expected revenues, and overall business sustainability. Describe any funding sources or financial projections that support the business's growth.

5. **Essential resources and activities**: List the vital assets and resources necessary for the effective operation of the business. Emphasise the fundamental tasks the business must execute to generate and deliver value. Recognise external entities, such as suppliers, partners, and collaborators, essential to your business.

6. **Scalability:**

   Outline potential growth strategies and plans to scale both the business and its social impact to reach a larger audience or market effectively.

7. **Market Relevance:**

   Explain the target market for your solutions and its potential impact, including evidence from market research that highlights trends and needs your business addresses. Explain the go-to-market plan and tools for effectively capturing the target market.

8. **Operational Efficiency:**

   Describe how the business optimises operations to achieve its social impact goals while maintaining cost efficiency and resource management.

9. **Presentation Skills:**

   Evaluate the ability to communicate the business concept effectively, including readiness, engagement, confidence, the use of visual aids, and time management during the pitch.

CATEGORY 4: ACADEMIC RESEARCH COMMERCIALISATION

The Academic Research Commercialisation category supports postgraduate student and staff entrepreneurs at the **Master's or PhD** level who are transforming **academic research** into viable commercial ventures. It focuses on data-driven, experimental research that an authorised South African academic or research institution has approved or considered **eligible for commercialisation.**

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. Applicants must provide substantial validation data supporting their commercialisation hypothesis.

The time it takes to commercialise research can vary widely depending on several factors, including the nature of the research, the industry, and the specific market dynamics. Generally, the commercialisation process can take anywhere from a few months to several years. The criteria has been developed to take these factors into consideration.

Judges will assess businesses that translate **scientific and technological research** into innovative products or services, particularly those addressing social, economic, or environmental challenges. To qualify, businesses must submit **evidence** that an accredited university or research institution recognises their research, ensuring it meets academic and scientific credibility standards.

Definitions

- **Proof of Concept (PoC)**

  A Proof of Concept (PoC) demonstrates the feasibility of an idea, product, or technology. It provides initial validation that the proposed concept functions as intended in real-world applications.

- **Feasibility:** Confirms that the core technology or mechanism operates as expected.
- **Risk reduction:** Identifies challenges and limitations early in development.
- **Decision-making:** Offers data-driven insights for determining whether to proceed with full-scale development.
- **Technology Readiness Level (TRL**
- Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) assess the maturity of a technology from concept to market deployment. The **TRL scale (1–9)** indicates how close the technology is to commercialisation:

Industries

Yes, a research-based business can be commercialised even if it is not technology-focused. Here are some examples and considerations:

1. **Market Research and Insights**:
   - Businesses derived from qualitative or quantitative research in fields like consumer behaviour, sociology, or education can lead to commercial opportunities, such as consulting services, market analysis reports, or training programs.
2. **Social Sciences and Humanities**:
   - Research in areas such as psychology, anthropology, or cultural studies can lead to products or services like educational curricula, wellness programs, or community development initiatives.
3. **Art and Design**:
   - Research-based art or design projects can be commercialized through exhibitions, workshops, or merchandise, leveraging insights from cultural or social research.
4. **Health and Nutrition**:
   - Research findings in nutritional science or public health can lead to the development of health-focused food products, wellness initiatives, or educational campaigns.
5. **Environmental Studies**:
   - Research on environmental issues can result in sustainable practices, consulting services, or educational programs aimed at promoting eco-friendly solutions.
6. **Publishing and Content Creation**:
   - Research findings can be turned into books, articles, or online content, allowing for monetisation through sales, subscriptions, or sponsorships.

Any research that identifies a market need or offers valuable insights can lead to viable business opportunities in various sectors.

Judging Criteria

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. **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.

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.

4. **Prototype or Product Development Documentation:**

   Evidence of a prototype or initial product development stemming from the research, highlighting tangible steps toward commercialisation.

5. **Problem Identification**:

   Clearly define the social, economic, or environmental problem addressed by the research and describe how the proposed solution is unique and its benefits to customers.

6. **Market Validation**:

   Summarise market research findings, including target market, size, and potential demand.

7. **Business Model:**

   Outline how the business will generate revenue and reach customers.

8. **Financial Viability:**

   Provide an overview of operational and capital costs, along with sales projections.

9. **Scalability:**

   Assess the potential for growth and sustainability of the business.

10. **Development Status:**

    Indicate the current stage of product development and steps to commercialisation.

11. **Team Expertise:**

    Highlight the qualifications and skills of team members relevant to the venture.

12. **Presentation Skills:**

    Evaluate the clarity and effectiveness of the pitch.

13. **Additional considerations:**

    - Partnerships with Industry:
      - Evidence of collaborations or partnerships with industry stakeholders or

businesses interested in the research application, illustrating market interest and potential for commercialisation.

- Funding Applications:
  - Documentation of any grants or funding applications submitted or received that support the commercialisation of the research.
- Feedback from Market Testing:
  - Evidence of any pilot studies or market testing conducted to assess demand and viability of the product or service derived from the research.

CATEGORY 5: INNOVATIVE INDUSTRIES

This category focuses on identifying and nurturing ideas that break the mould, challenge the status quo, and demonstrate transformative thinking. We are looking for:

- Innovation and originality;
- Problem-solution fit;
- Solution-market fit;
- Transformative impact;
- Radical creativity over replication;
- Feasibility and development potential;
- Sustainable solutions to emerging or overlooked problems;
- Concepts that reimagine industries, communities, or systems;
- Future-oriented thinking, not just market readiness;
- Scalability/Replicability and impact;
- Innovation beyond technology.

This category encourages students to align their innovative solutions with **real-world challenges and opportunities.** To guide and inspire thinking, the competition draws from broad areas that reflect the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) -** offering a meaningful framework for global and local impact.

These themes are **not rigid categories,** but rather points of reference to help participants identify how their ideas contribute to solving societal problems. Solutions may cut across sectors or fall outside traditional boundaries - what matters most is the **originality, relevance, and impact potential** of the innovation.

Examples of potential focus areas include (but are not limited to):

- **Health & Wellness Innovation:** Improving health systems, access to care, mental health support, or community wellness initiatives.
- **Education & Learning Innovation:** Enhancing how people access, experience, or benefit from education, skills development, inclusive learning, and lifelong learning.

- **Environmental & Climate Innovation:** Addressing climate action, biodiversity, circular economy, sustainable living, conservation, and waste reduction.
- **Financial & Economic Inclusion:** Creating access to financial services, supporting informal economies, enabling entrepreneurship, and promoting local economic development.
- **Agriculture & Food Innovation:** Improving food systems, smart farming, food security, agri-processing, and rural livelihoods.
- **Oceans & Water-Based Innovation:** Promoting sustainability in marine and freshwater ecosystems, responsible fishing, aquaculture, and the blue economy.
- **Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH):** Ensuring access to clean water, safe sanitation, hygiene awareness, and low-cost WASH innovations for communities.
- **Housing & Infrastructure Innovation:** Developing affordable housing solutions, energy-efficient building models, transport systems, and resilient infrastructure.
- **Social Justice & Inclusion:** Promoting gender equality, disability inclusion, youth empowerment, access to justice, and addressing social inequality.
- **Creative Economy & Cultural Innovation:** Leveraging arts, design, heritage, and creative industries for economic empowerment and cultural preservation.
- **Governance, Civic Engagement & Policy Innovation:** Encouraging citizen participation, transparency tools, public policy solutions, and service delivery improvements.
- **Technology for Social Good:** Applying AI, data, mobile platforms, robotics, or blockchain to solve social, environmental, or economic problems.
- **Mental Health & Community Support:** Addressing stigma, improving access to mental health resources, and strengthening psychosocial support systems.
- **Urban Innovation & Smart Cities:** Developing solutions for urban living challenges such as waste management, energy use, mobility, and inclusive urban planning.

Judging Criteria

1. Problem Relevance & Solution Fit
2. Innovation & Originality
3. Feasibility & Development Potential
4. Scalability & Impact
5. Industry-fit
6. Team composition, Capability & Vision
7. Market Understanding
8. Financial feasibility
9. Transformative Impact
10. Investment & Partnership Readiness

11: Overall presentation & pitch
Supporting documentation Technology Readiness Level (TRL) assessments Business model IP registration or licensing Feasibility studies or pilot project reports Letters of intent from partners Testimonials from test users or industry partners Academic research results

STUDENTPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

Judging criteria:

1. **Judges' overall score**: The Studentpreneur of the Year award will be presented to the student entrepreneur who achieves the highest overall score from the judges among the winners of the Existing Business categories. This criterion carries the most weight in the evaluation process.
2. **Innovation and problem-solving:** The business must demonstrate a unique, innovative, or disruptive approach to addressing a real-world problem. Judges will assess the originality of the idea, the application of technology or novel methodologies, and its potential to transform the industry.
3. **Scalability and sustainability:** The business should exhibit strong growth potential, with the ability to expand, adapt to changing market conditions, and achieve long-term sustainability. Judges will evaluate the entrepreneur's vision for scaling the business and their strategic approach to market expansion.
4. **Impact and socio-economic contribution:** The entrepreneur must demonstrate how their business creates a positive economic, social, or environmental impact. This includes job creation, sustainability practices, community development, and addressing critical socio-economic challenges.
5. **Entrepreneurial mindset and leadership:** The studentpreneur must exhibit key personal attributes, including resilience, perseverance, creativity, leadership, and problem-solving skills. Judges will assess their ability to overcome challenges, lead a team, and remain committed to their vision despite obstacles.
6. **Market readiness and execution:** The business must present a clear roadmap for implementation, customer acquisition, and industry positioning. Judges will evaluate the entrepreneur's ability to articulate their business strategy, validate their market opportunity, and effectively execute their plans.