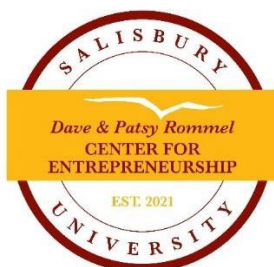




2026 - 2027 Guidelines



Introduction

The First Wave Pitch Competition is a high school business pitch competition for the Delmarva Peninsula. Students will complete an online application and record a 2 - 3 minute commercialized pitch video to enter the competition. Students will develop and pitch a business idea that provides a solution to a problem. This could be a personal every-day problem, a problem in business, a local issue, or a social or environmental issue. Submissions will be judged by a panel of business and community leaders. Teachers can incorporate the competition as a curricular or co-curricular activity to meet state requirements for many economics, business, and engineering classes.

Eligibility Requirements

- All competitors must be high school students (grades 9-12) located in one of the following counties: (MD) Wicomico, Worcester, Somerset, Dorchester, Caroline, Talbot, Queen Anne's or Kent Counties, (DE) Kent or Sussex Counties, or (VA) Accomack or Northampton Counties.
- Students can compete individually or in a team of up to 3 total students.
- Students winning the top prize cannot compete again in the competition. Other winners may compete again, but must pitch a different idea. Top prize winners are encouraged to compete in various other regional and national pitch competitions to advance.

Awards & Prizes

Cash awards will be provided to competition winners according to Table 1. Award announcements will be made by email to the points of contact identified in the student's application. Cash payments will be paid out as checks. Winners or a parent or guardian must complete the required paperwork within 60 days of the award announcement in order to receive their award. Non-claimed awards will be redistributed in a future round of the competition or to runners up in the existing competition at the discretion of the program administrators.

Table 1: Award Structure

Award	Cash	Other
1 st Place	\$3,000	Invite to Spring Idea Factory
2 nd Place	\$1,500	Invite to Spring Idea Factory
3 rd Place	\$750	Invite to Spring Idea Factory
Honorable Mention	\$750 (\$250 x 3)	
Top STEM	\$1,000	Invite to Spring Idea Factory
STEM Merit Awards	\$1,500 (\$500 x 3)	
Teacher/School	\$1,000	Press Event (optional)
TOTAL	\$9,500	

The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners (and their sponsoring teachers/mentors) and the Top STEM winner will be invited to attend our collegiate Idea Factory Poster Competition held at the end of the Spring semester at Perdue Hall. Attending students will learn more about entrepreneurial education and see the collegiate competitors in action. This is an optional activity. An RSVP is required, participants will be assisted by a guide during their visit, and attendees must make their own arrangements for transportation to/from the event. More information will be provided directly to winners.

The STEM awards will be assigned to the top scoring teams pitching a solution that is substantially based on Science, Technology, Engineering or Math (STEM). STEM solutions typically rely on data or apply new technology to automate processes as a core component of their offering. Student teams can win both a STEM award and a place or honorable mention award.

As indicated in Table 1, the first-place winner's school will also receive \$1,000. This funding is intended to be given to the sponsoring teacher(s) listed in the winning team's application for use in purchasing educational supplies and equipment, attending professional development courses related to entrepreneurial education, or covering costs associated with attending the Spring Idea Factory event with their student(s). As possible, an in-person photo/press event will be held at the first-place winner's school with appropriate representatives from the competition program, school, and student team participating. More information will be provided directly to the winner's school.

For a winning team submission, the cash prize or scholarship will be divided equally among the members. For example, a third-place winner consisting of a team of three students would result in each team member receiving \$250 in cash.

Deadlines

Application Opens: September 14, 2026

Final Deadline for Submissions: March 24, 2027

Students can submit or update their materials at any point during this period. The system will be closed at 11:59 PM on the final deadline date. Students are encouraged to submit well before the final deadline to avoid internet connectivity or system problems. Late, mailed, or emailed submissions will not be accepted for any reason.

Submission Requirements

- **Online Application:** Students will complete an online application that includes a background profile, contact information, and some key elements of their business idea.
- **Video Pitch:** Students will record and upload a 2 – 3 minute commercial pitch of their business idea.
- **For-Profit and Nonprofit Ideas:** Not all problems students encounter have a for-profit solution. While the focus of this competition is on traditional business startups, students may submit a nonprofit business idea or a social enterprise in their pitch. However, nonprofit models will still be evaluated for sustainability via grants, donations, or other funding sources.
- **Electronic:** All submissions must be made via the provided web-based information system. Submissions sent by email, mail, or other methods will not be reviewed.

Scoring

Applications and pitches will be evaluated by a panel of industry experts. A scoring rubric will be used to rank submissions. The top-ranking submissions will be evaluated further by the judging panel in a second round of evaluation and the winners selected. Some consideration may be made by the panel to ensure winners reflect a diversity of ideas, competitors, and geographies. All decisions made by the panel are final and scored rubrics will not be shared with competitors.

For Teachers and Clubs

Teachers are able to incorporate this competition in the classroom as a curricular or co-curricular activity. The competition is designed to fit within a high school business, marketing, entrepreneurship, or engineering course. Table 2 displays Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) created for this activity. These SLOs align with a variety of state standards and example curriculum gathered from Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia. Teachers may use these SLOs to match the activity to already-existing course requirements.

Table 2. Student Learning Objectives

Area	Student Learning Objectives
Economics	Define how business and entrepreneurship play a role in society.
Written and Verbal Communication	Communicate a clear, concise, and persuasive business pitch that effectively conveys key ideas, addresses potential concerns, and engages the intended audience.
Curiosity and Perseverance	Design a business model by asking questions, making sense of problems by interpreting and analyzing data, and constructing and critiquing explanations.
Critical Thinking and Problem Solving	Design a solution to a complex real-world problem by developing and using models, managing resources, and evaluating the impact of decisions through computational thinking.
Information Literacy and Research	Complete appropriate research to apply to their understanding of a business model.
Effective Reading Comprehension	Analyze and comprehend informational texts to apply to their business model.



To assist you with meeting these SLO's, teachers may request access to Junior Achievement curriculum resources provided by **Junior Achievement of the Eastern Shore**. The ***JA Be Entrepreneurial curriculum*** provides students with foundational skills to develop a business idea, from identifying a need and creatively solving a problem to building an actionable business plan. See Attachment A for the Learning Experience Overview.

Educators are strongly encouraged to implement the Junior Achievement (JA) curriculum during this year's competition, as it will be required beginning in 2027–28. Participating this year will help educators and students become familiar with the content, expectations, and resources before the requirement takes effect. All materials are provided digitally through D2L and require enrollment through JA. To get started or ask questions, contact Chelsea Katzaman at chelsea.katzaman@ja.org or 410-742-8112. We look forward to another great year of First Wave!



Organizations such as community centers or clubs can also work with **Dare to Dream**. Dare to Dream Inc., is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to empowering underserved youth through entrepreneurship. Their Dream Chaser Academy offers a flexible, identity-centered program to help students turn their passions into real-world ventures through hands-on learning. The Academy gives youth the tools they need to succeed in opportunities like the First Wave Pitch Competition and beyond. Learn more about how to bring the Dream Chaser Academy to your school, center, or club at www.idaretodream.org.

Other Competition Rules

- Generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, may be used as part of a student's creative process. However, all submitted text and narrative must be the student's own self-generated content. Stealing of other people's ideas or pitches is prohibited. Plagiarism (i.e. using someone else's written material without proper citation) or any form of intellectual property theft is prohibited.
- Parents and teachers can provide instruction, assistance, and aid for competitors. This should not include generating startup business ideas, writing content for text submissions, using video software to edit content, or other activities which are critical tasks to be completed by student competitors. The ideas and expressions must be created by the students themselves.

Violations of these rules will result in a rejection of the application, and all involved competitors will be permanently barred from competing in all future competitions for which the student would otherwise be eligible. This will apply to all team members on a team found to be in noncompliance even if an individual student team member was not directly involved in the violation. In some instances, teachers or parents may also be barred from participating in the competition for a period of time or permanently if the violation is particularly egregious or a pattern of repeated violations is found. The competition administrator has sole discretion in making a determination without a right by the student or other stakeholders to appeal. By submitting an application, all competitors and their supporters agree to abide by these terms and conditions.

ATTACHMENT A: JA Be Entrepreneurial - Learning Experience Overview

In this modular learning experience, students will develop an entrepreneurial mindset and skills they can use in everyday life that will also make them assets to future employers as intrapreneurs. They will gain foundational skills and knowledge needed to launch a business, from recognizing a need and creatively solving a problem to developing an actionable business plan.

JA Be Entrepreneurial offers three modules ([Overview of all linked here](#))

1. JA Creative Problem Solving
2. JA Think Like an Entrepreneur
3. JA Rapid Business Planning

Each module contains multiple classroom sessions that, when combined, provide a cohesive experience; a student who participates in all three will receive cumulative benefits through the exploration of creative problem solving, the entrepreneurial mindset, and business planning. *However, each module is also intended to be used as a stand-alone experience or as an add-on to other programs.*

JA Creative Problem Solving	Participants learn and apply Design Thinking, an innovative process for problem solving used by entrepreneurs (and intrapreneurs) to brainstorm customer-centric ideas. This process focuses on the user needs and experience through the creation of empathy maps, problem statements, high-level solutions, prototypes, and testing plans to validate a design solution	→ 5 sessions (45 mins each) → Teacher-led → Content found on D2L learning platform
JA Think Like an Entrepreneur	Students explore the traits of an entrepreneurial mindset needed by both entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs when solving problems and evaluating opportunities. An entrepreneurial self-assessment supports students in identifying their strengths and setting personal and professional goals.	→ 3 sessions (45 mins each) → Teacher-led → Content found on D2L learning platform
JA Rapid Business Planning	Students learn how to put their product or service idea into action by creating a concise yet effective one-page business plan. This iterative approach to business planning enables students to develop, test, and validate their plan with customers while filling an unmet market need.	→ 6 sessions (45 mins each) → Teacher-led → Content found on D2L learning platform

Please contact Chelsea Selby at chelsea.selby@ja.org for questions.

ATTACHMENT B: First Wave Pitch Competition Rubric

<i>Category</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Points</i>
Problem	Thoroughly explained the problem being solved. Cited evidence from a secondary source.	15
Solution	Thoroughly explained their solution to the problem. Explained the differentiation or uniqueness of their product/service compared to their competitors.	15
Market	Thoroughly explained the market the business will enter with evidence from a secondary source projecting the market's expected growth. Identified target customer/audience through textual evidence. Product testing – Completed 10 interviews with potential customers. Documentation should include interview notes and both positive and negative results.	20
Written Communication	Description of business in one sentence. Cited sources are in APA 7 or MLA 8 format. Overall quality of written material in the problem/solution and market fields.	10
Video Content	Thoroughly explained your business idea (i.e. target audience, problem, solution, product/service, market, competition, pricing, feasibility). Expressed knowledge of the market the business will enter. Expressed extensive knowledge of the problem they are trying to solve.	20
Video Presentation	Use of storytelling and visuals to enhance video production. Body language and clothing choice are professional. Clear pitch, tempo, and volume were used during the video. Correct grammar, word choice, and pronunciation.	20