HSECA
High School Entrepreneurship Clubs of America

THE UPSTART YOUTH PITCH COMPETITION

Judging rubric.

Every pitch is scored on six weighted criteria. Judges rate each criterion from **1 to 10**, and scores are weighted to a **100 point total.** Read the full pitch before scoring, and use the band descriptions below to anchor each rating.

Problem & Opportunity — 20%

Clarity and significance of the problem being solved. Is it urgent, and is the opportunity real?

- **9-10 Exceptional.** Problem is urgent and clearly proven with data; massive, well-scoped opportunity.
- **7-8 Strong.** Problem is clear and relatable; opportunity is credible and reasonably sized.
- **4-6 Developing.** Problem exists but feels vague or generic; market sizing is unclear.
- **1-3 Needs work.** Problem is not compelling or poorly articulated; no market context given.

Solution & Innovation — 20%

Creativity, feasibility, and differentiation of the solution. Does it actually fit the problem?

- **9-10 Exceptional.** A creative, novel solution that doesn't currently exist, while still being feasible to build and launch.
- **7-8 Strong.** Solid solution with meaningful differentiation; addresses the core problem effectively.
- **4-6 Developing.** Solution is logical but not particularly differentiated; limited competitive analysis.
- **1-3 Needs work.** Solution is unclear, unoriginal, or doesn't match the problem described.

Market & Customer Understanding — 10%

Who it's for, and evidence of real demand. Is the target market well researched?

- **9-10 Exceptional.** Deep understanding of a well-defined customer, backed by research and real conversations.
- **7-8 Strong.** Clear customer validation through interviews, surveys, or beta users; market research is solid.
- **4-6 Developing.** Some evidence of validation but limited; market research is surface level.
- **1-3 Needs work.** No customer validation; target market is vague or assumptions are unsupported.

Business Model — 15%

How it makes money or sustains itself. Is there a clear, scalable path to revenue?

- **9-10 Exceptional.** Revenue model is fully defined with pricing, unit economics, and realistic projections.
- **7-8 Strong.** Revenue model makes sense; growth potential is evident and well reasoned.
- **4-6 Developing.** Revenue model exists but lacks specifics; scalability is assumed but not explained.
- **1-3 Needs work.** No clear business model; how money is made is not explained.

Traction or Validation — 15%

Any progress, research, or early results so far. Has the idea moved beyond paper?

- **9-10 Exceptional.** Strong traction: paying customers, LOIs, pilots, or significant user growth backed by data.
- **7-8 Strong.** Meaningful early progress, such as a working prototype, early users, or promising test results.
- **4-6 Developing.** Some early steps taken, but results are limited or anecdotal.
- **1-3 Needs work.** No progress or evidence beyond the idea itself.

Pitch Delivery — 20%

Storytelling, clarity, confidence, and quality within the time limit. Was it engaging and easy to follow?

- **9-10 Exceptional.** Captivating delivery: crisp narrative, excellent visuals, and a poised, confident presence.
- **7-8 Strong.** Clear and engaging; well structured with good pacing and solid visuals.
- **4-6 Developing.** Gets the message across but delivery is inconsistent; slides are cluttered or unclear.
- **1-3 Needs work.** Hard to follow; reading from slides, unclear structure, or ran well over time.

Scoring. Multiply each criterion score by its weight, then add them up. A pitch that earns 8s across the board lands at 80 points. Ties are broken by Problem & Opportunity, then Solution & Innovation.

1-3 Needs work   4-6 Developing   7-8 Strong   9-10 Exceptional

Score the idea, not the polish.

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Pitch format.

Everything you need to put together a complete entry. Keep it simple: **one video, one optional deck, submitted through the website by September 15.**

5:00 **max video length,** judges stop at five minutes	**12** **slides max** if you use a deck, and it's optional	**6** **rubric criteria** your pitch needs to cover

THE VIDEO

Record a pitch of five minutes or less. Anything past the five minute mark won't be scored, so plan your time. A phone camera is completely fine; clear audio matters more than production quality.

Present it yourself. We want to hear you explain your idea, not a voiceover reading slides. Screen sharing your deck while you talk works great.

THE DECK (optional)

Up to 12 slides if you choose to use one. Show it in your video or attach it as a PDF with your submission. Clean and readable beats flashy; one idea per slide is a good rule.

WHAT YOUR PITCH MUST COVER

Judges score every entry against the full rubric, so make sure your pitch touches all six criteria:

20%	Problem & opportunity	**20%**	Solution & innovation	**10%**	Market & customers
15%	Business model	**15%**	Traction or validation	**20%**	Pitch delivery

SUBMITTING

Submit through the competition website by September 15. You'll register, upload your video (or paste an unlisted YouTube or Drive link set to viewable), and attach your deck if you have one.

Keep it original. The idea and the pitch must be your own work. Your idea can be a concept, an early prototype, or a running business; every stage is welcome.

AFTER YOU SUBMIT

Judging runs from September 15 to October 15. Every entry is scored by our judges against the rubric, no entry gets skipped. Winners are announced October 15 and recognized on our website and social channels.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

YC Startup Library ycombinator.com/library
Free guides on pitching, finding problems worth solving, and talking to customers.

Canva canva.com
Free pitch deck templates, so you can spend your time on the idea, not the design.

SCORE score.org
Free business mentoring and templates for business models and market research.

SBA Learning Center sba.gov
Short free courses on market research and the basics of starting a business.