

>>venture>>

# THE >>VENTURE>> COMPETITION PLAYBOOK

Everything you need to know before participating and how to win  
in the business verticals

**ETH** zürich

McKinsey  
& Company

**knecht**



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Innosuisse – Swiss Innovation Agency

**EPFL**

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**Hi there. We're >>venture>>, the leading startup competition in Switzerland. Nice to e-meet you.**

If you're here, it's because you have an idea. An innovative one at that. So, before we tell you more about ourselves, let's talk about YOU.

You're probably asking yourself, "can I even participate in this competition?" We'll give you a checklist of where you should be in terms of your startup to give you a sense if you're in the right spot. We'll get into the details of the competition soon enough. Promise.

# ABOUT YOU

## THE PRELIMINARY CHECKLIST



First and foremost, I have an innovative business idea



I consider myself an early-stage startup



I have a business idea, but I haven't figured out the details yet, or I already have a startup, and maybe even some first customers and external funding



I'm based in Switzerland and plan to (or have already) open my business in the country

**If you've checked these boxes, then settle in.  
This competition just may be what you're looking for.**

## **ABOUT >>VENTURE>>** **SUPPORTING INNOVATIVE BUSINESS IDEAS**

### **Now that we know a little about you, let us introduce ourselves.**

Founded in 1997, >>venture>> was one of the first major players in the budding Swiss startup ecosystem and has become the leading startup competition in the country.

Over the last 25+ years, >>venture>> has built a vast network of knowledgeable industry experts eager to share their guidance with early-stage entrepreneurs such as yourself.

In addition to access to mentorships from our network, you also get non-dilutive cash prizes. Every year, we give out nearly CHF 600,000 to the most innovative Swiss startups. The Grand Prize winner wins CHF 150,000 to jumpstart their journey!



## ABOUT >>VENTURE>> HERE'S A QUICK OVERVIEW



> **Five business verticals, and one impact-driven vertical:**

Finance & Insurance, Health & Nutrition, ICT, Industrials & Engineering, Retail & Consumer Services and Social & Environmental Impact (see Impact Playbook)

> **Total prize money nearly CHF 600'000,** with CHF 150'000 for the Grand Prize winner, and CHF 10'000 for the Audience Award winner

> **Organizers** ETH Zurich, McKinsey & Company, Knecht Holding, Innosuisse, EPFL

> **Participants** >300 teams per edition

> **Support** Mentoring for finalists, pitch training workshops, industry contacts, all free of charge

> **Jury** 150+ jurors and the Advisory Board evaluate pro bono in a four-stage process. See who they are on our website [venture.ch](https://venture.ch)



### Did you also know we have events open to everyone?

Every year, we host a Kickoff event to mark the opening of the competition. We also host events in collaboration with the Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property to help you navigate the world of IP. Lastly, you'll have the chance to sit down one-on-one with jurors and your startup plan to ask your burning questions before the submission deadline.

## WHY >>VENTURE>>? GOOD QUESTION.

For starters, we're rooting for you. Our goal is to foster innovation and entrepreneurship by providing startups access to experts in your particular field and who work in your industry. Not to mention, a nice boost with cash prizes and visibility in the ecosystem and media.

Most of our alumni will also agree on one thing about their >>venture>> experience. The quality of the network they got access to was unparalleled.

Bottom line, at >>venture>> you get validation by Switzerland's most successful C-Suite executives that YOUR idea is the next great idea! That, in itself, is priceless. Oh yeah - you'll be pitching live in front of them too.

## WHY >>VENTURE>> OUR ALUMNI



*>>venture>> was an excellent way to kickstart our business. It allowed us to get in contact with the first set of investors, and the extensive media coverage allowed us to reach a large audience.*



**ANDREAS SCHMOCKER**  
CEO and Co-Founder of Lumendo,  
2017 >>venture>> winner



*We don't think we would be where we are without >>venture>>. With every step of the competition, and every contact we've made, whether through the pitch training, live pitches, mentor sessions, or our meetings with McKinsey & Company, our idea has been refined at every step into something we're really proud of.*



**CARMEN ESCAÑO SERRANO AND  
SILVIA MARQUEZ CALVET**  
Co-Founders of Nuniq,  
2020 >>venture>> winners





*Applying to the >>venture>> competition meant that – for the first time – we wrote the business idea for novoMOF AG down on a piece of paper. The feedback that we received from the >>venture>> jury during the competition was incredibly valuable and helped us to improve our business model. After winning the business idea track, our entrepreneurial spirit and confidence was skyrocketing. We had a consolidated business plan and 10'000 CHF prize money in your hands and we were ready to take the next step. We invested the prize money to exhibit our business idea at the leading industry conference, where we generated our first leads. Furthermore, the >>venture>> credential gave us enough credibility/visibility to be noticed by seed investors. Exactly 6.5 months after the competition, we closed the seed financing round and founded the company two months later.*



**DANIEL STEITZ**  
CEO & Co-Founder novoMOF,  
2016 >>venture>> winner

## WHY >>VENTURE>> OUR ALUMNI



*During the >>venture>> competition we were able to meet people who would otherwise not have been reachable for us as a start-up.*

*Participating in »venture» gives you the support you need as a young entrepreneur.*

*You meet the people and coaches that challenge you based on their experience and finally you get money without any obligation.*

*>>venture>> gives you a boost: you still need to do all the hard work, but it provides you with the necessary support and network.*



**DR. YANN TISSOT**  
Co-Founder of L.E.S.S.,  
2014 >>venture>> winner



*I think the >>venture>> competition helped us to build up our network, to learn how to write a business plan because we were scientists before, to get in contact with our first customers, and to learn how to do business. This helped us accelerate as a startup.*



**FELIX MAYER**  
Co-Founder and CEO, Sensirion,  
1998 >>venture>> winner

“  
*The way to get  
started is to quit  
talking and begin  
doing*

WALT DISNEY

”

# HOW THE COMPETITION WORKS

## A 5-STEP PROCESS



**SUBMIT**

**October to March**  
Step 1: Submit your startup plan



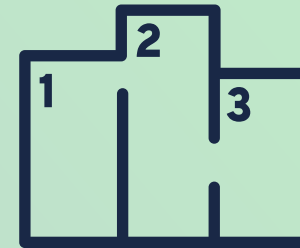
**JURY ROUND 1**

**April**  
Step 2: Online Evaluations



**JURY ROUND 2**

**April**  
Step 3: Live Pitches



**WINNER RANKING**

**June 23, 2025**  
Step 4: Live pitches to Advisory Board



**GRAND PRIZE**

**June 23, 2025**  
Step 5: Live pitch for first ranked teams

It's a 5-step process which we'll delve right into, but if you want to skip the reading, you can also watch this quick [video](#).

STEP 1

# SUBMIT



## FIVE BUSINESS VERTICALS

Turn in your written startup plan (10-20 pages in English and PDF format) on our website, [venture.ch/participate](https://venture.ch/participate)

TIP: This document will be doing the pitching for you, so keep this in mind when choosing what to include for the jury to review.

> Every single participant will receive highly valuable written feedback from 3 different jurors.

>> The application process is completely free, and the feedback is invaluable.

STEP 2

# JURY ROUND 1



**SELECTION OF 10 FINALISTS  
PER VERTICAL**

**Our Jury Round 1 pores over the startup plans and chooses the top 10 finalists in each vertical (you'll find details on the grading criteria below and on our submission platform).**

**If you are among our Top 10 Finalists in your vertical you will get access to mentorship and pitch training:**

>> Interested in mentorship? You've earned it! As a finalist, you get access to the >>venture>> [mentors](#), who bring deep expertise and years of experience to the table.

>> Refine your pitching skills for Round 2 by participating in a pitch training session held by communications experts and investors.

**You're one step closer!**

STEP 3

# JURY ROUND 2



**Pitch in front of our Jury Round 2, where only 3 startups per vertical will be selected from the finalists to move on.**

**TIP:** Check out the juror profiles on our website to know who you'll be pitching to and tailor-make your live pitch.

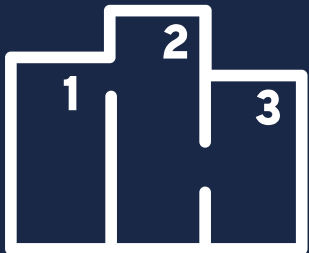
**Congratulations you're officially a >>venture>> Winner!**

>> As a >>venture>> winner, you've already won non-dilutive prize money of at least CHF 10,000!

**SELECTION OF 18 WINNERS FROM THE  
60 BUSINESS & IMPACT VERTICAL FINALISTS**

## STEP 4

# WINNER RANKING



### RANKING THE 18 WINNERS PER VERTICAL

1<sup>st</sup> place: CHF 50,000 + McKinsey consulting package

2<sup>nd</sup> place: CHF 20,000

3<sup>rd</sup> place: CHF 10,000

**This is it! It will be a big day for you; you get to pitch in front of top-level leaders of established not-for-profit organizations from our Advisory Board AND celebrate the Award Ceremony all in one day. Bring your A-game and be ready to impress.**

**The Advisory Board determines how you rank amongst the winners. Your ranking will be unveiled during the Award Ceremony.**

TIP: Learn from any mistakes/questions during Jury Round 2 and apply them to your pitch in front of our Advisory Board.

TIP: Know your jurors! Study again who you'll pitch to and prepare accordingly.

TIP: Share your long-term vision alongside your practical short-term next steps that will steer you in the right direction. Don't neglect your numbers, they paint an essential picture of your venture.



STEP 5

# GRAND PRIZE



**The first-place winners in each of the 6 verticals now pitch again to the entire Advisory Board. Each startup gives everything they have for their shot at an additional CHF 100,000 and to be crowned >>venture>> Grand Prize winner!**

**TIP: Don't be afraid to think really big here. Describe how your idea can change the world.**

>> The Grand Prize winner wins a total of CHF 150,000 and a business consulting package from McKinsey & Company.

# PARTICIPATION CRITERIA

## THE DETAILS

**Now that we know more about each other, let's delve into the details. What do you need to successfully participate in this competition?**

>> An innovative idea – can't stress the importance of this enough!

>> 10–20-page startup plan written in English – details on this in a bit

>> Legal residence in Switzerland of at least one team member.

>> Intent to operate your business in Switzerland

>> If you've registered your business with the Commercial Registry, it must have been within the past two years. If you haven't registered your business yet, that's no problem, you can still participate.

**The following is a list of elements that are not required, but are accepted in your startup plan submission:**

>> A prototype – you can send us a video/pictures of how it works

>> An MVP

>> Customers/pilot projects

>> Sales

# YOUR STARTUP PLAN

## GRADING CRITERIA

A detailed breakdown of the content that must be included in your startup plan can be found [here](#). But, you're extremely busy and your time is valuable so here are the highlights of the grading criteria:

### >> Technology/ Product 12%

Present your product: a product development roadmap and status.

### >> Innovation 12%

Tell us why you're different. Where does your innovation lie?

### >> Market 12%

Discuss market trends, your positioning, USP and marketing strategy. If you have any market validation/traction, mention it here.

### >> Business Model 12%

This is a big one! Explain how you'll make money with your innovative concept.

### >> Sustainability 12%

Tell us how your startup contributes to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

### >> Team 12%

A startup is only as strong as its team. Show off your starting lineup and the positions you know you need to fill to complete your all-star team.

### >> Sales Strategy 4%

You have a great product/service, discuss how you will convince your customers to make a purchase and keep purchasing.

### >> IP 4%

Have you protected your intellectual property? If so, how? If you haven't, what are your future plans to do so?

### >> Financials 4%

Show us the numbers. Although it's only 4% of the entire submission, this gives our jurors a sense if you really understand the business side of things.

### >> Funding 4%

Let us know what funding you've received to date and how you plan to acquire funding in the future to support your business model.

### >> SWOT & Risks Analysis 4%

Demonstrate that you have looked at your business from as many angles as possible with a SWOT and risk analysis. How are you addressing the gaps?

### >> Roadmap 4%

Concisely illustrate a timeline with milestones where you demonstrate what goals you want to achieve, how, and by when.

### >> Document 4%

The overall startup plan should be well thought out and well structured, allowing the jurors to follow your reasoning easily and logically.

# ROUND 1

>> Allow jurors to evaluate you. Don't hide information that may be key for a juror to understand your business. This is a highly professional and confidential process, and your privacy is of utmost importance.

>> Mention your development plan. What stage of testing are you in? Highlight your technological advantage against competitors (or explain why there is no need to have one).

>> Be specific when describing your business model. Make sure to demonstrate how it is scalable, and what advantages you have with respect to what's currently on the market.

>> Lastly, validate a clear demand for your solution on the market.

**A few insider tips from the jury themselves:**

**Your startup plan submission should pitch for you. The first round is by written submission only. That means, your submission should be clear, concise, and inviting to read for the 3 jurors who will review your case. Beware of long, wordy academic-style papers which can be quite unappealing when trying to sell a business idea.**

>> Explicitly state your competitive advantage. Be clear as to why your customers would choose you and not the competition or alternative solutions.

>> Be realistic when it comes to estimating your market size. Industry experts will be reading your startup plan, and they'll clearly see if your numbers are inflated.

>> Refrain from adopting the "if I build it, they will come" mentality. We live in a very crowded and noisy world, and your marketing strategy will play a key role in the success of your business. Clearly explain how you will acquire customers and retain them. Use numbers/statistics whenever possible.

# ROUND 2

>> We can't stress differentiation enough. Why is your solution better than the status quo? Convince us why your customer would incur switching costs or would adopt your solution as opposed to others out on the market.

>> Why do you think YOU can make this business happen? What knowledge, skill set, expertise do you and your team have to make this a success? You don't have the all-star team in place yet? That's totally fine. Demonstrate that you're aware of the gaps in your team and don't gloss over it. The jurors will be happy to know that it's on your radar.

**In this round, you'll have 5 minutes to pitch in front of our jurors. This will be followed by a short Q&A session. Make the most out of this round by preparing a clear summary of your solution and USP, business model, marketing strategy, team description, and roadmap.**

>> We know it's a competition but be honest about where you stand. If you have a potential customer, then just share with us an action plan for conversion. You're in the early stages and our jurors know this.

>> Do you already have real customers? Then be specific. Meaning, are you in a pilot phase, testing phase, or are they paying customers?

>> Highlight the benefit to your customer. If you can quantify it, even if it's an estimate, please do. It's extremely helpful for our jurors to understand the impact of your innovation. This is even more true for B2B businesses.

# ADVISORY BOARD JURY ROUND

**This is the final round and you'll be pitching in front of C-Suite executives who will determine your ranking in the competition. Here are a few tips to shape your final pitch accordingly:**

- >> It's imperative you capture their attention immediately. The Advisory Board receive proposals all day, every day. Make sure yours stands out.
- >> Don't forget to paint the big picture about what you're doing and the "why" behind it. They want to see the next big thing and stand behind something with a cause.
- >> Storytelling is great, but don't overdo it.
- >> Numbers are definitely needed here, but the kind that you can easily digest in a minute.
- >> Lastly, have a roadmap. Show your short and long-term vision for your business. It's great to focus on the here and now but show the Advisory Board that you also have big plans and a way to achieve them.

APPLY TODAY

# BEST OF LUCK!

You made it all the way to the end of this Playbook! You've accomplished the first step, bravo. We hope that this has provided some insight into the >>venture>> process and experience and that you're inspired to participate.

**Now, the work begins.**

Use that inspiration, go polish up your startup plan, and register for the >>venture>> competition!

**Where, you ask?**

**Right here [venture.ch/participate](https://venture.ch/participate)**



# >> VENTURE >> IS GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY OUR 2024 ADVISORY BOARD





>>venture>>

# DARE TO VENTURE FORWARD.


Join Switzerland's leading  
startup competition

**venture.ch**

**ETH** zürich

McKinsey  
& Company

**knecht**

 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
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