

>>venture>>

THE >>VENTURE>> COMPETITION PLAYBOOK

Everything you need to know before participating and how to win
in the Social & Environmental Impact vertical

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.





“
*Without impact,
innovation is just an
idea with promise.*
”

JUDITH RODIN



I consider myself an early stage startup: I have an idea for an impact-driven or nonprofit organization, or already run one



My idea or organization is innovative



My idea or organization contributes to one or more of the UN sustainable development goals



My (proposed) operating model is financially sustainable and doesn't depend on individual philanthropists after an initial startup phase



I'm based in Switzerland and run (or plan to run) my organization in the country

If you've checked these boxes, then settle in.

This competition just may be what you're looking for.

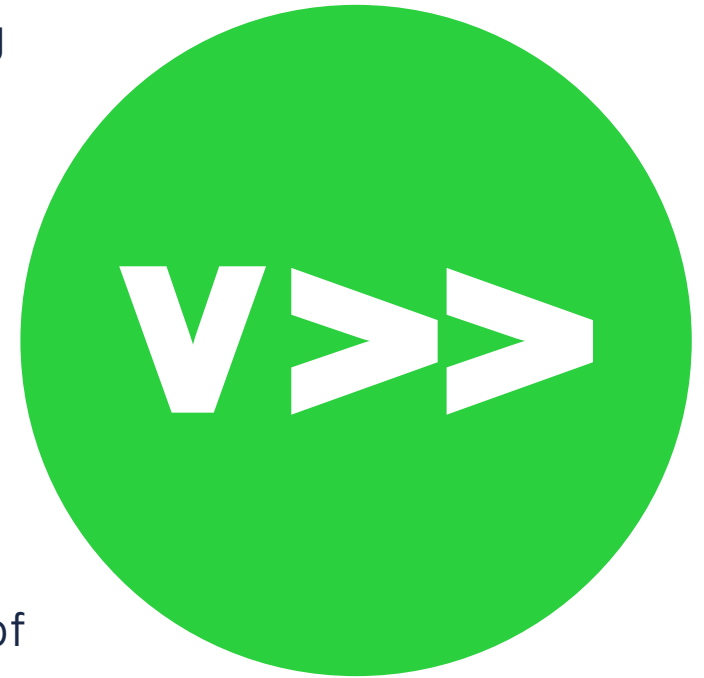
ABOUT >>VENTURE>> SUPPORTING INNOVATIVE BUSINESS IDEAS

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

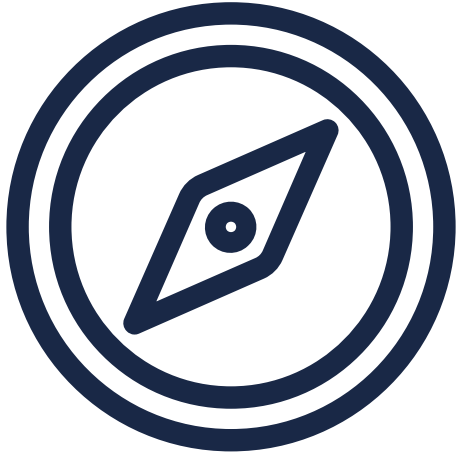
Founded in 1997, >>venture>> was one of the first major players in the budding Swiss startup ecosystem and has become the leading startup competition in the country.

As a not-for-profit foundation ourselves, we are convinced that impact-driven and nonprofit organizations are an indispensable force to address the challenges of our times. Our goal is to help them get their jumpstart to create social and environmental impact across Switzerland and beyond.

The perks of participating? Finalists get access to mentorship from our network, and if you're crowned as one of our winners, you'll also get non-dilutive cash prizes. Every year, we give out nearly CHF 600,000 to the most innovative Swiss startups to jumpstart their journey! The Grand Prize winner wins CHF 150,000 to jumpstart their journey!



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



>> **Six verticals:**

One Social & Environmental Impact, and five business verticals:

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

>> **Prize money breakdown:**

1st Place - CHF 50,000

2nd place - CHF 20,000

3rd place - CHF 10,000

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

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

>> **Jury** 150+ jurors and the Advisory Board evaluate pro bono in a three-stage process. See who they are on our website 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. Also, 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. Keep an eye on our website or sign up for the newsletter to find out about upcoming events.

WHY >>VENTURE>>? GOOD QUESTION.

For starters, we're rooting for you. Our goal is to foster innovation in the social & environmental sector by providing 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 leaders and 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.

>>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

“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

HOW THE COMPETITION WORKS

A 5-STEP PROCESS



SUBMIT

October to March
Step 1: Submit your startup plan



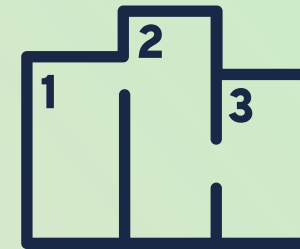
JURY ROUND 1

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



Put your idea on paper and organize it into a Startup Plan (10-20 pages in English, and in PDF format).

Register on venture.ch/participate and upload your plan to our platform – don't worry, you can update your plan right up until the submission deadline.

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



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!

**SELECTION OF 10 FINALISTS
PER VERTICAL**

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.

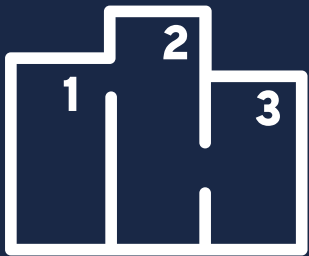
Congratulations you're officially a >>venture>> Winner!

>> 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



This is it! It will be a big day for you; you get to pitch in front of top-level leaders of established 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.

RANKING THE 18 WINNERS PER VERTICAL

1st place: CHF 50,000 + McKinsey consulting package

2nd place: CHF 20,000

3rd place: CHF 10,000

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

Let's delve into the details.

What do you need to 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.
- >> Your idea/startup must focus on an impact-driven or nonprofit purpose.
- >> If you've already established your organization, it cannot be older than five years. If you haven't registered or established your startup yet, that's no problem, you can still participate.
- >> Your initiative addresses one or more of the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDG's).
- >> Legal residence in Switzerland. Residence of one team member is sufficient.
- >> A minimum of one team member is at least 18 years old.
- >> Your organization can be active in Switzerland or abroad, but it must be headquartered in Switzerland, or the team must intend to do so.

The >>venture>> competition is not for organizations that:

- >> Focus on a religious purpose. Benefits must be offered to stakeholders regardless of their religion.
- >> Focus on political lobbying or direct exercise of political rights (i.e. no initiative committees, election campaigns etc.).

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:

>> Impact 20%

Tell us how your startup contributes to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and in doing so creates an impact and sustainable change to better our planet, our society, or our lives.

>> Innovation 20%

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

>> Team 20%

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.

>> Feasibility 20%

Explain how your idea or startup will grow into a successful organization at scale. Describe the milestones that are important along your journey in order to maximize your impact.

>> Sustainability of funding model and funding strategy 20%

Show us the numbers. This gives our jurors a sense if you really understand the business side of running an organization. Explain how you plan to sustainably finance your organization by generating own revenues and/or broadening your funding model.

ROUND 1

A few insider tips: Your startup plan 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 papers which can be quite unappealing when trying to sell a startup plan.

>> Explicitly state your impact, ideally along the five dimensions of impact established by the [Impact Measurement Project](#). Show why you do it better than anyone else: Demonstrate your innovation in the space.

>> Be realistic when it comes to estimating the size of your impact and reach. Experts will be reading your startup plan, and they'll clearly see if your numbers are inflated.

>> Be clear as to how you will attract funding and why investors/donors will feel compelled to support your initiative. Show how you will get from a handful of early supporters to a broad base and generate some revenues of your own.

>> Show that you understand the needs of your stakeholders, adopting their perspectives whenever necessary, and why you're well placed to work together with them.

>> We live in a very crowded and noisy world, and your marketing will play a key role in the success of your organization. Explain your outreach strategy, but also show us firsthand that your storytelling is up to par and clearly explain how you will create an impact in an innovative way. Use numbers/statistics whenever possible.

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

ROUND 2

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 innovation solution to drive societal impact, your USP, fundraising / revenue generation strategy, team description, and roadmap.

>> We know it's a competition, but be honest about where you stand. You're in the early stages and our jurors know this.

>> Highlight the benefit to your stakeholders. 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.

>> We can't stress innovation enough. How is your initiative different - and better - than others?

>> Why do you think YOU can make this happen? What knowledge, skill set, expertise do you and your team have to make this a success? 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.

ADVISORY BOARD JURY ROUND

This is the third and final round and you'll be pitching in front of top-level leaders of established organizations 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 members 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 startup. 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!

THE >>VENTURE>>
PLAYBOOK FOR NPOS

APPLY 23

You made it all the way to the end of this Playbook!

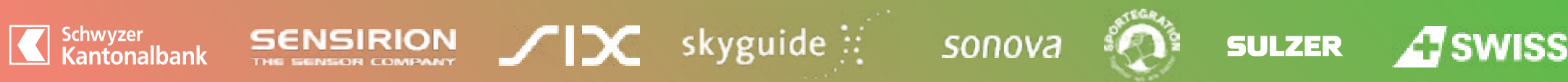
We hope that this has provided some insight into the >>venture>> process and experience and that you're inspired to participate.

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

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



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DARE TO VENTURE FORWARD.


Join Switzerland's leading
startup competition

venture.ch

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