

# ABOUT THE FAULKNER CHALLENGE

## ELIGIBILITY

The Faulkner Challenge is made possible by the generosity of FHSU alumnus Kevin Faulkner. It is a business plan competition for new ventures in the conceptual, seed or startup stage. The competition is open to students in Kansas: high school, technical school, community college, or university. Entry is FREE.

## CRITERIA

The Faulkner Challenge takes place in three stages:

Written Proposals Submitted: February 6 through **March 6, 2026**

Finalists Selected: March 13, 2026

Presentations: March 28, 2026

While all submissions are encouraged, particular emphasis is placed on **creative and innovative concepts** that reimagine products, processes, systems, services, or business models. Priority will be given to ideas that demonstrate economic sustainability and show strong potential for positive social and/or environmental impact. This focus reflects the direction of entrepreneurship at Fort Hays State University—**forward-thinking and world-ready**.

Business Plans that incorporate ideas across economic, social, and environmental areas are encouraged and may receive greater consideration. Various examples of these concepts may be found at these links:

UN SDGs: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

UNGC: <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/>

UN CEO: <https://ceowatermandate.org/>

## FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS

**Written business plans are limited to 5 pages of text** (typed, 12-point font, and 1" margins on all sides). The cover page and table of contents are not included in the 5-page limit. Detailed spreadsheets and appropriate appendices should follow the text portion of the business plan; 5 additional pages are allowed for this section. Plans that do not use all 5 pages allotted to the appendices and spreadsheet section may NOT be used to increase the size of their 5-page business plan. **In total, the maximum number of pages is 12.**

### Information to Include in Your Business Plan

#### SUGGESTED BUSINESS PLAN FORMAT

**\*An executive summary is not necessary because the written plan for this competition has a maximum of 5 pages of text and the following ten areas should be addressed.**

**Problem:** Entrepreneurs Start with a Problem. How serious is it? What is the level of PAIN experienced by those who suffer from this problem? How many people have this problem? How much money does it cost the average person experiencing it? How expensive is the problem nationally? Answer the previous questions to answer this question: Is this problem worth solving? The more desperate the problem, the more people are searching for a solution and the more likely they are willing to buy your product.

**Business Model:** Describe the product or service you are creating. How does it solve the problem of your potential customers? Is it the right solution to address the problem? What are the features and more importantly, the benefits of the product or service? What is its value proposition, meaning to the customer: why is it worth the price you would like to charge?

**Market Characteristics/Approach (Customer):** Who is the group of people experiencing this problem? Describe them (age range, gender, income range, etc.). The more fully you know the people with the problem, the better you can understand them and speak to them about their issues. It is necessary to learn from the people experiencing the problem. They are your future customers. You do not have a business until you have paying customers. It is important to focus on a particular target customer because not everyone needs your product or will be interested in it.

**Competition:** If you claim you have no competition, you have not conducted any research. There are direct competitors and indirect competitors. Direct competitors are selling products similar to yours. Indirect competitors are trying to solve the same customer problem you are, but their products are not the same as yours. It is important to know who your competitors are in order to succeed in spite of them. It is important to know who your competitors are so you can be different and stand out from the others. What facts and details can you provide about your competitors, in order to explain how you will be better or different?

**Intellectual Property:** Does your idea or venture have some elements that could potentially be protected by a patent, copyright or trademark? Does your idea have any original designs, processes or systems?

**Founding Team:** What skills and experience do you need to make this product or service, start and run this company? Usually, more than one person is better because it is easier to acquire a wider range of skills. To operate a business, it is necessary to have people who know about accounting, finance, marketing, and operations. Depending on the type of products you are creating, you may need engineering, computer, and design experience. Once you know what skills you need, how do you get the right people to become involved in your company? How do you find advisors with these skills to offer advice to you for starting and running your business? Who have you acquired as advisors and what is their expertise?

**Industry:** In which industry will your company operate? How big is it in dollars? How many customers are in this industry? Is this industry growing or declining? How much is it growing? It is better to get into a growing industry because it increases the amount of time you can operate a business in it and grow as the industry grows.

**Sales and Marketing:** How will your customers learn about your product or service? This will depend upon your product and your customers. Not all products or services are successfully advertised in the same manner. Radio, TV, billboard, newspaper, Google AdWords, Facebook, YouTube videos, of these which will work best for your product or service. Which of these do your particular customers pay attention to? Not every product will sell because of a Facebook ad. Not every target customer will watch a YouTube video. Learn about your customers. Talk to your customers to learn which types of advertising are important to them, for your product. Regarding sales, address how the product will be sold by the company (retail, direct sales force to wholesalers or retailers, direct sales force to end users). How large of a sales force is needed? What will this sales team cost?

**Operations:** Explain how you will create your product. Will you make it yourself or contract a third party? From whom will you acquire necessary supplies (what supplier relationships have you developed). What kind of facility and equipment will you need? Explain your staffing needs. Where will the customer purchase the product (retail store, third-party website, your store or website, direct salesperson at customer's location, etc.)? How will the product reach the customer (retail store, delivered UPS, delivered by you, etc.)?

**Growth:** After you have gained success with this first product or service, how will you scale (grow) the business for the long-term future? There are many ways to grow the company. You need to research and decide which is the best way to grow your company? This can be different for every company. Should you expand by creating additional products? Should you expand by selling to other areas of the country or world? Should you expand by targeting new groups of customers?

**Finances:** It is necessary to understand how much money it will take to get your company started. It is necessary to know how you will acquire this money (from your savings, borrow from family, take a bank loan, have someone invest in the company, etc.). It is important to know how much customers will pay for your product and how much it will cost to manufacture your product. Can you sell it for a profit? Is this profit high enough to keep the company in business and pay yourself and other founders/employees? In order to know this, you need to understand all of the costs (manufacturing, supplies, marketing, distribution, labor, etc.). How many

products can you sell each year? Can you increase the number of products you sell each year? Be able to provide projected total: sales (revenue), expenses, and profits for an entire year (up to 3 years). And, what is the anticipated percentage of growth from year to year? It is important to understand and provide these numbers.

The rubric used to evaluate the written plan can be found here: [cob/entrepreneurship/faulkner-challenge/faulkner-challenge-written-plan-score-sheet.pdf](#)

The rubric used to evaluate the oral presentation can be found here: [cob/entrepreneurship/faulkner-challenge/faulkner-challenge-oral-presentation-judging-form-sp19-for-website.pdf](#)

#### **ORAL PRESENTATION:**

Of all the submissions, up to eight (8) of the best business plans are selected as finalists for oral presentations. Presentations can be performed by an individual or a team of up to five (5) people, but only a maximum of three (3) are allowed to present their plan at the competition.

Presentations must include visuals, such as PowerPoint slides or product demonstrations. Each individual or team will be given an uninterrupted 10 minutes to present the business plan, followed by a 5-minute question/answer session between the presenting team and the judges.

**TIME LIMITS WILL BE STRICTLY ENFORCED.**

For More Information:

Please direct questions to [faulknerchallenge@fhsu.edu](mailto:faulknerchallenge@fhsu.edu)