

2026



BUILD-UP
— BERKELEY —
BUSINESS PITCH COMPETITION

Build-Up Berkeley Business Pitch Competition orientation and educational sessions will be held in person from 5:30p.m.- 7:00p.m., with 7:00p.m. to 7:30p.m. mentor sessions in the Berkeley County Development Authority conference room located at 300 Foxcroft Avenue, Suite 201, Martinsburg, WV 25401. Pitch practice and the live presentation & award night will be held during the times listed below at the Apollo Civic Theatre located at 128 E. Martin St., Martinsburg, WV 25401. *Classes are subject to change.

Friday, May 1, 2026:

Registration opens at 8:00a.m.*

** Individuals may register by submitting their elevator pitch (up to 90 seconds) along with the Application and Participant Agreement Form on the BCDA website at www.developmentauthority.com/BuildUpBerkeley.*

Friday, August 7, 2026:

Registration closes at 5:00p.m.

Friday, August 14, 2026:

Participants notified by 5:00p.m.*

**Participants are limited to 10.*

Thursday, August 20, 2026:

Orientation: Participants will review the handbook and class schedule, meet their mentors, and network with fellow participants. Headshots will be taken during the networking session.

Thursday, August 27, 2026:

Class 1: Introduction to Small Business and Business Plan Outline Part 1. The order of presentations for the live presentation & award night will be determined during this class.

Thursday, September 3, 2026:

Class 2: Introduction to Small Business and Business Plan Outline Part 2.

Thursday, September 10, 2026:

Class 3: Legal Entity, what you need to know about business structure.

Thursday, September 17, 2026:

Class 4: Financials, what you need to know about taxes, and financial statements.

Thursday, September 24, 2026:

Class 5: Credit, how to build it and how your credit score affects your business.

Thursday, October 1, 2026:

Class 6: Personnel and Commercial Insurance information to help you build a successful business.

Thursday, October 8, 2026:

Class 7: Marketing your business.

Thursday, October 22, 2026:

Business Plan due by 5:00p.m.*

**Business Plan is to be submitted via the link provided.*

Monday, November 2, 2026: Class 8: Pitch practice, 5:30p.m-8:00p.m. Flash drive with PowerPoint Presentation due.

Friday, November 6, 2026: 2026 Build-Up Berkeley Business Pitch Competition Live Presentation & Awards (open to the public). 5:30p.m.

COMPETITION MISSION AND INTRODUCTION

Successful businesses create a better Berkeley County. Build-Up Berkeley Business Pitch Competition will allow entrepreneurs from all walks of life access to much-needed capital to take their enterprise to the next level. Entrepreneurs will be provided with the opportunity to meet and network with business educators, experts, mentors, and successful business owners. The education series is designed for business plan development and will include information vital to business ownership.

All participants who complete the education series will receive educational credits provided by Blue Ridge Community and Technical College as well as professionally edited headshots provided by Thad Reid Productions.

Following the educational series, participants will submit a business plan and pitch before a panel of judges for a chance to win grant awards as follows:



Grand Prize Award:

\$10,000 Award



Second Place Award:

\$5,000 Award



Third Place Award:

\$2,500 Award



People's Choice Award:

\$1,000 Award

Regardless of whether the entrepreneur wins or not, each participant will receive valuable education and mentoring. The Build-Up Berkeley Business Pitch Competition education sessions will introduce participants to the concepts, practices, and tools necessary for business success. Successful businesses build-up Berkeley!

ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS

- There is no fee to enter Build-Up Berkeley Business Pitch Competition.
- Applicants may compete with either a new or existing business.

New Business: A new business is defined as one that will start up within 120 days after the date of the award.

Existing Business: An existing business is defined as a business who wishes to grow their business through new products or service development and plans to implement their expansion project within 120 days after the date of the award.

- Businesses must be headquartered within Berkeley County, WV.
- Businesses must be for-profit ventures.
- One applicant per business may apply; the applicant will be the representative of the business for both the education sessions and pitch night. The pitch will have one presenter pitching the business; the presenter should have a founder/co-founder role within the business. No substituting is permitted.
- Build-Up Berkeley educators, mentors, or judges are not permitted to have their business participate in the competition.
- Previous Build-Up Berkeley participants and finalists are eligible to apply, except for previous Build-Up Berkeley Grand Prize Winners. *** Participation is limited to a 2-year maximum, regardless of winning.**
- Immediate family members of the Berkeley County Development Authority staff or Board of Directors are not eligible to participate.
- Participants who earn a spot in the competition are responsible for attending the required education sessions, meetings, and events related to the Build-Up Berkeley Business Pitch Competition (refer to the calendar details on pp. 2). **If the participant cannot attend all educational sessions, 5 points will be deducted from the Business Plan score for each missed session or any session where they are absent for 15 minutes or more.**
- Participants who earn a spot in the competition are responsible for submitting a complete Business Plan (refer to the calendar details on pp. 2).
- Individuals may register by submitting their elevator pitch of up to 90 seconds along with the Application and Participant Agreement Form on the BCDA website at www.developmentauthority.com/BuildUpBerkeley. Applications must be submitted by Friday, August 7, 2026, at 5:00p.m.

PITCH GUIDELINES

- The purpose of a pitch is to get the judges and audience's attention, let them know what you have and what you're offering, with the goal of leaving them wanting more quickly and concisely.
- PowerPoint Presentations are allowed during the pitch presentation. Goods and services can be exhibited and demonstrated.
- **Applicants** are required to submit an **elevator pitch of up to 90 seconds** along with the application and participant agreement.
- During the **Live Presentation & Awards** each presenter will have **3 minutes** to make a pitch, immediately followed by up to **5 minutes** of questions from judges.
- Time will begin when the presenter begins to speak.

PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD

- Build-Up Berkeley Business Pitch Competition will share a digital showcase page featuring all participants along with their elevator pitch video that was submitted with their application. Leading up to the Build-Up Berkeley Business Pitch Competition live awards night, this will be available for public viewing, sharing, and voting.
- Voting will end at 4:30p.m., one hour prior to the live Build-Up Berkeley Business Pitch Competition on November 6, 2026.
- All participants are eligible to participate. Participants are encouraged to share the showcase site with their networks to garner more votes.
- The participant with the most votes will be named the winner during the public awards ceremony on November 6, 2026.

In the event of a tie for the People's Choice Award, the following factors will be considered to determine the winner in the order provided.

1. **Business Plan Score:** The participant with the higher business plan score will be determined as the winner.
2. **Judge's Discretion:** If the previous factor does not determine a winner, it will be up to the discretion of the judges to determine a People's Choice Award.

- Judges will be published in advance. The panel of judges will include entrepreneurs, consultants, and other business professionals.
- Judges will use a scoring sheet and criteria that will help determine the highest-ranking pitches. Overall scoring will be based on physical business plan and pitch presentation.
- In the event of a tie for any of the three highest scores, the judges will determine the highest rank award of the two scores, and the lower rank will be placed in the next level award. If the tied scores are for the 3rd place award, the highest rank will be awarded 3rd place and the lower will not place in any of the top 3 awards. The following factors will be considered to determine the top score in the order provided.
 1. **Business Plan Score:** The participant with the higher business plan score will be determined as the higher rank award and the lower business plan score will be placed in the next level of ranking.
 2. **People's Choice:** If one of the tied participants is the "People's Choice", they will be determined as the higher rank award and the participant who is not "People's Choice" will be placed in the next level of ranking.
 3. **Judge's Discretion:** If the previous 2 factors have not determined the higher rank, it will be up to the discretion of the judges to determine the level of ranking.

WINNER REQUIREMENTS

- To be considered for award selection, the participant must attend educational sessions and pitch practice. If the participant cannot attend all educational sessions or is absent for more than 15 minutes per class, 5 points will be deducted from the Business Plan score per class. Their business plan must be submitted via the link provided by 5:00p.m. on Thursday, October 22, 2026. Participants who earn a spot in the competition will be supplied with a flash drive and must upload their PowerPoint presentation to be used with their pitch on the flash drive provided and submit at pitch practice on Monday, November 2, 2026.
- All award winners are required to implement their business in Berkeley County and collect award funds within 120 days of the award (March 6, 2027).
- Winners must provide their WV Secretary of State Business Registration, along with Business Signature Page and WV State Filing. Existing businesses must provide a certificate of good standing from the WV Tax Department.

DISCLOSURES

- The Build-Up Berkeley Business Pitch Competition will be recorded. All participants will be provided with the recording.
- The Berkeley County Development Authority (BCDA) reserves the right to use photos and videos from the Build-Up Berkeley Business Pitch Competition in publicizing and promoting the event.
- The selection of the winner(s) is at the sole discretion of the judges, and the decision of the judges is final.
- The personal and professional views of the participants do not reflect the personal and professional views of the Berkeley County Development Authority (BCDA), BCDA staff, BCDA Board of Directors, educational speakers, mentors, judges, or any people hosting or participating in the Build-Up Berkeley Business Pitch Competition.



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DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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