



**Overview**

The Governor’s Cup is a real-world entrepreneur education opportunity for college and university students hosted by ACC Capital through the Education to Develop and Grow Entrepreneurs (EDGE) Initiative. The competition is made possible through the generous title sponsorship of Dhu C. Thompson. The competition includes a 10-page written business plan, a 15-minute virtual oral presentation with 10-minute Q&A, a 15-minute in-person oral presentation with 10-minute Q&A , and a 90-second elevator pitch event.

Competitors will gain a greater appreciation of the challenges and opportunities of starting a viable business, and have access to networks of entrepreneurs, economic developers, investors, and others as they move through the Governor’s Cup process. The Governor’s Cup continues to offer one of the largest all-cash prize pools of any collegiate business competition in the country, with an all-cash prize pool in excess of \$140,000.

**Basics of the Competition**

Division	Type of Business	Tracks
High Growth/Technology	for business plans with truly unique ideas and technologies that demonstrate a potentially disruptive market impact with strong viability and high potential for growth (medtech, technology, etc.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Undergraduate</li> <li>2. Graduate</li> </ol>
Small Business/Main Street	for business plans that are more “Main Street” customer-facing operations (coffee shop, retail boutique, etc.)	Both undergraduate and graduate teams compete in the same track

## Judging Rounds

Teams will have a separate batch of judges for Rounds 1, 2, 3, and Elevator Pitch.

- Round 1 – Written Plan: Teams will electronically submit their written business plan. Up to ten teams from each track will be invited to compete in Round 2.\*
- Round 2 - Virtual Oral Presentation Semi-Finals: Semi-finalists will give an oral presentation via Zoom to a panel of judges who will determine the top six teams from each track who will advance to finals.
- Round 3 - In-person Oral Presentation Finals: Finalists will give an oral presentation to a panel of judges who will determine the top three teams from each track who will all receive a cash prize.
- Elevator Pitch: Each team will give one 90-second elevator pitch to a panel of judges the night before the awards luncheon. The top three teams from each track will give their pitch at the awards luncheon with the top prize chosen by the audience.

**IMPORTANT: Each round is completely distinct from each other.** Students competing in the oral presentation round should not assume that judges have read their written plan. All judges will receive access to Round 1 Written Plans for their reference, but judges are instructed to score solely based on the current round they are judging.

*\*NOTE: The semi-final round is contingent on receiving an appropriate number of applications from eligible institutions for each track. If there are not enough applications to a particular track to warrant a semi-final round, ACC Capital reserves the right to omit the semi-final round and invite the top six teams directly to Round 3.*

## Prize Pool

High Growth/Technology Division – Graduate Track:

First Place	\$20,000
Second Place	\$10,000
Third Place	\$7,500

High Growth/Technology Division – Undergraduate Track:

First Place	\$20,000
Second Place	\$10,000
Third Place	\$7,500

Small Business/Main Street Division:

First Place	\$10,000
Second Place	\$7,500
Third Place	\$5,000

Elevator Pitch:

High Growth/Technology - Graduate	\$1,000
High Growth/Technology - Undergraduate	\$1,000
Small Business/Main Street - Four Year	\$1,000

Advisor Awards:

\$1,500 to winning team advisors	\$13,500
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Finalist Awards:

\$1,500 to all finalist teams	\$27,000
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**Dates**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENT/ACTIVITY</b>
Monday, December 1, 2025	Applications to the Governor's Cup open in <a href="#">YouNoodle</a>
Friday, January 30, 2026 @ 4:59pm CST	Deadline to submit Round 1 Business Plan
Friday, February 13, 2026	Semi - Finalist teams are notified of selection
Wednesday, February 18, 2026, 11:59 pm CST	Semi - Finalists confirm commitment to compete
Friday, February 20, 2026	Governor's Cup announces semi-finalist teams
Monday, Feb 23 - Friday, March 6, 2026	Virtual Semi-Final Round 2
Monday, March 8, 2026	Finalist teams are notified of selection
Friday, March 13, 2026	Finalists confirm commitment to compete
Monday, March 23, 2026	Governor's Cup announces finalist teams
April 13 - 15, 2026, Little Rock, AR	Governor's Cup Oral Competition
April 15, 2026, Little Rock, AR at 11:30A CST	Awards Luncheon

## Rules

1. **Use of Competition Materials:** ACC Capital and its agents may make photocopies, photographs, video recordings, and/or audio recordings of the presentations, including the business plan and other documents, charts, media, or other material prepared for use in the presentation at the Governor's Cup. The above entities may use the materials in any book or other printed materials and any videotape or other medium that they may produce for promotional and/or educational purposes only. These entities have non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and in all media, to use or to publish the materials in any book, other printed materials, videotapes, or other medium, and to use the materials in future editions thereof and derivative products.
2. **Confidentiality:** The Governor's Cup Business Plan Competition considers all submitted business plans as confidential and treats all team matters accordingly. But, due to the nature of the event, we cannot guarantee complete confidentiality for proprietary matters. ACC Capital, Education to Develop and Grow Entrepreneurs, and the organizers of the competition are not responsible for any proprietary information and/or intellectual property included in a submitted business plan. Ultimately, the protection of sensitive materials such as intellectual property, copyright, or patent confidentiality is the sole responsibility of the individual or team participating in the competition. Non-disclosure agreements will not be signed by judges, mentors, or any staff associated with the business plan competition.
3. **Decisions Regarding the Competition and the Winners:** All decisions regarding the competition rules, procedures, and processes are at the sole discretion of the Governor's Cup organizers. Changes and/or interpretations of these rules may be made by the organizers at any time even though they may be (or may appear to be) in conflict with previously published information. The selection of the teams to compete and the selection of the winners are at the sole discretion of the judges and the organizers. Best efforts will be made to make decisions in accordance with this Official Rules document.

## Eligibility:

1. **Student Enrollment:** The competition is for students currently enrolled on a full or part-time basis (i.e., from July 2025 through June 2026) at accredited colleges or universities in an eligible region. This includes students who graduated or will graduate after July 1, 2025. Students who graduated before July 2025 are not eligible to participate.
2. **Eligible Regions:**
  - a. The Small Business/Main Street track is open to:
    - i. Any undergraduate student currently enrolled at an accredited college or university in Arkansas, including two-year and trade schools.

- ii. Any graduate student currently enrolled at an accredited college or university in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, or Texas.
  - b. The undergraduate High Growth/Technology track is open to any undergraduate student currently enrolled at any of Arkansas' accredited colleges and universities, including two-year and trade schools.
  - c. The graduate High Growth/Technology track is open to any graduate student currently enrolled at an accredited college or university in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, or Texas.
3. Team Composition: Teams may be composed of graduate and undergraduate students, students from any academic discipline, and students from more than one college and/or university. If a team has one graduate student and plans to compete in the High Growth/Technology division, it must compete in the Graduate track. Teams may include non-students, but these individuals cannot make up the majority of the team and cannot take part in any team presentations. Students cannot compete on more than one team.
4. Team Size: Each team is required to participate with at least two (2) and no more than five (5) presenting members\*. Non-students involved in the venture are welcome to attend public events connected to the Governor's Cup with the competing student team, but only students may participate in presentations and other competition activities. Faculty advisors and other team mentors are encouraged to attend.

*\*NOTE: Exceptions to team size are possible on a case-by-case basis. Teams must demonstrate why it is not possible to adhere to the required team size.*

5. Student Involvement: Students must own the majority of the business venture and serve in "C-Level" roles on the management team. The student management team and other individuals (if applicable) must own at least 30 percent of the total equity in the business venture if allocated. Teams/students cannot enter more than one business plan into the competition.
6. Faculty Advisors: Each team must have at least one faculty member as its primary advisor. Non-faculty advisors may be allowed with prior approval from ACC Capital. Teams may have more than one advisor. The advisor's role is to mentor the team leader and team members during all phases of the competition. Advisors cannot be part of team presentations.
7. IP and Permissions: Teams may compete with a student-generated idea or one that originated from another individual or entity. Licensing technologies from universities or research labs are encouraged if they have not been commercialized previously. Teams may also compete with an idea based on a technology, product, or service that has been licensed from another company, private inventor, or other source. Teams must provide

written and signed approval letters from these individuals or entities on professional letterhead.

8. Exclusions:
  - a. Ventures that include proposals for buy-outs and/or expansions of existing companies, roll-ups, real estate syndications, tax shelters, franchises, licensing agreements for distribution outside of Arkansas, spin-outs from existing corporations, and other consulting projects or analyses are not eligible.
  - b. Previous efforts to establish the business or participate in business-like activities, including but not limited to attempts to raise capital, developing and presenting the business plan to potential investors, and conducting substantial market research outside of the 2025-2026 academic year, may be disqualified. This includes business plans that were submitted in previous Governor's Cup competitions.
  - c. The business should not have received more than \$200,000 in equity-related capital (such as seed capital or institutional funding) or generated more than \$100,000 in gross revenue prior to the current academic year. Revenue generated during a test-marketing project may be excluded from this provision.
9. Attendance: To be considered for any award, all competing (presenting) team members must arrive at the Governor's Cup on Monday, April 13, 2026, and be present on Tuesday, April 14, 2026, at the appropriate time for the Oral Presentation Round and Elevator Pitch; and on Wednesday, April 15, 2026, for the Awards Luncheon and elevator pitch walk through if applicable. Teams may not add or substitute presenting members during the competition. Teams must attend the live awards ceremony on Wednesday to receive their awards. Teams should plan their return travel no earlier than Wednesday afternoon.
10. Cost: There is no cost to enter or participate in the Governor's Cup Business Plan Competition. If selected to participate in the oral competition, ACC Capital will cover lodging and most meal expenses. Teams are responsible for transportation to the competition and any additional travel costs.
11. Required Forms: To receive award payments, each team must provide appropriate documentation, including W-9 or W8-BEN, and/or EIN forms. No prizes will be awarded without the required forms submitted.
12. Rules Violations: For matters related to possible rules violations, inquiries must be submitted in writing to Maddy Stricklen at [mstricklen@ACCcapital.com](mailto:mstricklen@ACCcapital.com). ACC Capital will determine if rules have been violated and whether and how a team and/or team member should be penalized or disqualified. ACC Capital's decision is final.

## Round 1: Written Plan Guidelines

Round 1 of the competition will involve the submission of a written plan through YouNoodle at this site: [https://platform.younoodle.com/competition/acc\\_capital\\_governors\\_cup\\_2025\\_2026](https://platform.younoodle.com/competition/acc_capital_governors_cup_2025_2026). All documents must be in English.

1. Format: The business plan must be no longer than 10 pages with 6 pages of appendices. The cover page and table of contents do not count toward the page total. The format is 1.5 line spacing with 1-inch top, bottom, left and right margins, and 12-point font. This line spacing and font requirement applies to the textual content of the document and not to titles and descriptions accompanying pictures, graphs, tables or worksheets. Startup name, team members, and contact information should be listed in the document. Files must be submitted in YouNoodle in Adobe Acrobat PDF. Files should be named according to the following format: CompanyName\_School Name.pdf. The appendix is limited to 6 pages and should provide detailed financial information or include materials that support the findings, statements, and observations in the plan. Plans with fewer than 6 pages of appendices may not use the remaining pages to increase the length of their business plan beyond 10 pages. In total, the maximum number of document pages is 18: 10 for business plan, 6 for appendices, 1 for cover page, and 1 for table of contents.
2. Content:
  - a. Cover Page
    - i. Name of Company
    - ii. Name of School
    - iii. Name of Team Members
    - iv. Name of Advisors
  - b. Table of Contents
  - c. Executive Summary (1 ½- 2 pages) (10 points)
    - i. One to two-paragraph description of the problem being solved and proposed solution
    - ii. Explain how the product or service works
    - iii. Describe your customer, value proposition, and customer validation process
    - iv. Explain why your solution is better than current alternatives
    - v. Explain why the management team is prepared to lead this venture
    - vi. Explain how you expect the product or service to be financially viable/profitable
  - d. Problem (10 points)
    - i. What specific problem or need does your product or service address?
    - ii. Can you provide data on the current market size, growth rate, and potential for expansion?
    - iii. What were prior attempts at solving the problem, and why didn't they work?

- e. Solution (10 points)
  - i. What is your solution to the problem?
  - ii. What are the key features and benefits of your product or service?
  - iii. Who are your competitors and what is your competitive advantage?
  - iv. What is the unique value proposition for the customer?
  - v. What is the current state of development?
- f. Customers and Idea Validation (10 points)
  - i. Who are your specific customers?
  - ii. What initial assumptions were made leading the team to conclude there is market acceptance for your product or service and that you will generate revenue?
  - iii. What activities (interviews, surveys, presentations, prototyping, tests, etc.) did your team conduct with potential customers to validate these assumptions?
  - iv. Were your assumptions on target based on the results and feedback from these activities?
    - 1. If yes, explain.
    - 2. If no, how did your team pivot? What strategies were changed and why?
  - v. What did you learn from this validation process?
- g. Go to Market Strategy (10 points)
  - i. How will you make and/or deliver the product or service?
  - ii. How will you promote and market your product or service?
  - iii. Who will be your key partners?
- h. Management Team (10 points)
  - i. What are the backgrounds and qualifications of key team members, and how do their experiences align with the business's needs?
  - ii. How is responsibility divided among team members, and what is the structure of your leadership team?
  - iii. Are there any gaps in your management team's expertise or capacity, and how do you plan to fill these gaps?
- i. Critical risks (10 points)
  - i. What are the most significant risks that could impact your business, and what measures have you taken to mitigate them?
- j. Summary financial information (10 points)
  - i. What are your revenue projections for the next 3-5 years, and what assumptions have you used to calculate these figures?
  - ii. Can you outline your anticipated expenses, including operating costs, marketing expenditures, and capital investments?
  - iii. What is your funding strategy?
- k. Exit Strategy (High Growth Division Only) (10 points)
  - i. Amount of investment you are seeking and the proposed deal structure
  - ii. Explain potential return on investment
- l. Appendices (10 points)

- i. 3-5 years of detailed income statements (include details on cash flow and explain assumptions that impact the financial projections)
    - ii. Any applicable Intellectual Property information, including status of patents or licenses
    - iii. Any additional information referred to in the plan.
  - m. Overall Effectiveness (10 points)
    - i. Plan included all necessary topics
    - ii. Topics were clearly explained and persuasive
    - iii. The story was compelling
- 3. Plan Submission: All teams must register an account in YouNoodle using this unique link:  
[https://platform.younoodle.com/competition/acc\\_capital\\_governors\\_cup\\_2025\\_2026](https://platform.younoodle.com/competition/acc_capital_governors_cup_2025_2026)
  - a. YouNoodle Instructions:
    - i. Create an account following the prompts in the link listed above. You may use an existing account if you have one.
    - ii. Once logged in, complete the information for your team under "Application Form."
    - iii. Submit the application.
    - iv. Contact Maddy Stricklen at [mstricklen@ACCcapital.com](mailto:mstricklen@ACCcapital.com) for assistance if necessary.

## **Round 2: Virtual Oral Presentation Semi-Final Details (Guidelines Below)**

1. Up to ten semi-final participants will compete in each track. Each team will present via Zoom to a panel of judges. It is the participant's responsibility to ensure all technology is working properly. All team members and their advisor(s) must be present during the virtual presentation.
2. Each team will have 15 minutes to make an uninterrupted presentation, followed by up to 10 minutes of Q&A from the judges. Each team is encouraged to utilize a PowerPoint or similar type of visual presentation.
3. ACC Capital will coordinate the presentation time for each team and provide the Zoom information prior to the presentation, which will be held from Monday, Feb 23 - Friday, March 6, 2026.
4. Teams may not observe other team's presentations.

### Round 3: Oral Presentation Final Details (Guidelines Below)

1. Six teams will participate in each track on April 14, 2026.
2. Each team will have 15 minutes to make an uninterrupted presentation, followed by up to 10 minutes of Q&A from the judges. All team members and their advisor(s) must be present during the virtual presentation.
3. Presentations must be PowerPoint or PDF and PC-compatible.
4. NOTES:
  - a. Each team needs to supply its own PC-compatible laptop computer with materials and is responsible for assuring it works with the provided audio-visual equipment in advance of their presentation.
  - b. Teams may videotape or record their own presentations but cannot do the same for other competition teams without the express written release of all team members and the attending faculty adviser.

### Guidelines for Round 2 and Round 3 Oral Presentations

1. The virtual semi-final oral presentation round and the in-person final presentation round will have the same scoring criteria. Finalist teams are not required to use the same presentation for Round 2 and Round 3 and can refine as necessary.
2. **Each round is completely distinct.** Students competing in the oral presentation round should not assume that judges have read their written plan. All judges will receive access to Round 1 Written Plans for their reference, but judges are instructed to score solely based on the current round they are judging.
3. Presentation Content and Score:
  - a. Team Information
    - v. Name of Company
    - vi. Name of School
    - vii. Name of Team Members
    - viii. Name of Advisors
  - b. Problem (10 points)
    - i. What specific problem or need does your product or service address?
    - ii. Can you provide data on the current market size, growth rate, and potential for expansion?
    - iii. What were prior attempts at solving the problem, and why didn't they work?
  - c. Solution (10 points)
    - i. What is your solution to the problem?

- ii. What are the key features and benefits of your product or service?
- iii. Who are your competitors and what is your competitive advantage?
- iv. What is the unique value proposition for the customer?
- v. What is the current state of development?
- d. Customers and Idea Validation (10 points)
  - i. Who are your specific customers?
  - ii. What initial assumptions were made leading the team to conclude there is market acceptance for your product or service and that you will generate revenue?
  - iii. What activities (interviews, surveys, presentations, prototyping, tests, etc.) did your team conduct with potential customers to validate these assumptions?
  - iv. Were your assumptions on target based on the results and feedback from these activities?
    - 1. If yes, explain.
    - 2. If no, how did your team pivot? What strategies were changed and why?
  - v. What did you learn from this validation process?
- e. Go to Market Strategy (10 points)
  - i. How will you make and/or deliver the product or service?
  - ii. How will you promote and market your product or service?
  - iii. Who will be your key partners?
- f. Management Team (10 points)
  - i. What are the backgrounds and qualifications of key team members, and how do their experiences align with the business's needs?
  - ii. How is responsibility divided among team members, and what is the structure of your leadership team?
  - iii. Are there any gaps in your management team's expertise or capacity, and how do you plan to fill these gaps?
- g. Critical risks (10 points)
  - i. What are the most significant risks that could impact your business, and what measures have you taken to mitigate them?
- h. Summary financial information (10 points)
  - i. What are your revenue projections for the next 3-5 years, and what assumptions have you used to calculate these figures?
  - ii. Can you outline your anticipated expenses, including operating costs, marketing expenditures, and capital investments?
  - iii. What is your funding strategy?
- i. Exit Strategy (High Growth Division Only) (10 points)
  - i. Amount of investment you are seeking and the proposed deal structure
  - ii. Explain potential return on investment
- j. Supplemental Information (10 points)
  - i. 3-5 years of detailed income statements (include details on cash flow and explain assumptions that impact the financial projections)

- ii. Any applicable Intellectual Property information, including status of patents or licenses
- iii. Any additional information
- k. Overall Effectiveness (10 points)
  - i. Presentation included all necessary components
  - ii. Topics were clearly explained and persuasive
  - iii. Teams were professional and prepared

### **Elevator Pitch Guidelines**

1. One member of each team will present the team's business concept in a 90-second elevator pitch to a panel of judges on Tuesday, April 14, 2026.
2. All Governor's Cup participants will observe the elevator pitch but have no impact on the judge's score.
3. No PowerPoint presentations, audio-visuals, or props are allowed.
4. Judges will choose the top three teams from each division to give an elevator pitch at the awards luncheon.
5. The top three elevator pitch finalists will give their pitches to attendees at the awards luncheon on Wednesday, April 15, 2026. One winner from each track will be selected by audience choice and announced during the Awards Presentation.

### **Supplemental Support**

ACC Capital will host an information session on Wednesday, September 24 at 3:00P CST via Zoom. In addition, ACC Capital will host additional trainings on the following topics:

1. Business Plan Development (Tuesday, November 18 at EDGE Summit in Jonesboro, AR)
2. Elevator Pitch Coaching (Tuesday, November 18 at EDGE Summit in Jonesboro, AR)

Please visit [www.argovernorscup.org](http://www.argovernorscup.org) for registration information. Dates and times subject to change.

### **Questions**

Contact: Maddy Stricklen, [mstricklen@ACCcapital.com](mailto:mstricklen@ACCcapital.com).

### **Disclaimer**

ACC Capital reserves the right to update or change competition guidelines at any time.