

RULES, REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES FOR COMPETING TEAMS

STAGE UP is an initiative of the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship at the University of Bern and is carried out in cooperation with the Bern University of Applied Sciences, be-advanced AG and other institutions in the Canton of Bern. The Department of Management and Entrepreneurship of the University of Bern, as the leading institution of **STAGE UP**, manages this initiative with the goal to inspire people for entrepreneurship in general (i.e., fostering the entrepreneurial mindset) and provide support when they consider to set their ideas in motion (i.e., taking first steps into self-employment).

1. Competition Procedure

The competition is divided into different phases. Various qualification criteria apply in the different phases of the competition.

1. Kick-Off Event «**Pitch & Punsch**» - Thursday, November 20th, 2025, in Bern.
2. **STAGE UP** «**Elevator Pitch**» in front of the jury - Tue, Jan 27th, 2026, between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.
3. **Workshops & Coaching** - March to April 2026.
4. **STAGE UP** «**Q&A-Session**» in front of the jury - Tue, May 19th, 2026, between 1:00 pm and 5:00 pm in Bern, Switzerland.
5. **STAGE UP** «**Award Night**» in front of the jury and audience - Tue, May 19th, 2026, from 6:00 p.m. in Bern.

The set dates can be changed at any time by the organizers and adapted to the conditions of the competition.

1.1 Pitch & Punsch

«Pitch & Punsch» is the kick-off event of the **STAGE UP** competition and is designed to promote the competition, inspire entrepreneurship, and provide networking opportunities. As the number of participants for the event is limited, online registration is required. Attendance at this event is not mandatory in order to obtain entrant eligibility for the competition.

1.2 STAGE UP Application and Elevator Pitch

The **STAGE UP** competition starts with the Elevator Pitch where 25 “slots” for presenting ideas (projects) are offered. The application for the Elevator Pitch can be done online through our website www.stage-up.ch. Individuals/teams are required to provide a description of their business idea and - if available - information of the individual/team. **The application deadline is Monday, December 1st, 2025, 11:59 p.m.** Applications sent by postal mail will not be considered. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

The 25 starting ideas (projects) will be selected on the basis of an expert assessment of the information provided in the application. **Information on the qualification decision and admission to the Elevator Pitch will be provided on Monday, January 12th, 2026.**

During the Elevator Pitch, participants will present their business idea (project) to the jury on **Tuesday, January 27th, 2026 within a maximum of three (3) minutes** (time will be stopped).

Based upon a jury decision, approximately 12-15 ideas (projects) will be selected for further consideration in the competition. **The decision will be communicated to the participants by mail on the evening of January 27th, 2026.**

The pitches are not open to the public except for a few invited guests (representatives of our sponsors and partners) and the participants will not see the pitches of the other participants.

1.3 Workshops and Coaching

The selected participants will have the opportunity to attend workshops and receive individual coaching. These offers aim to provide support in the development of the business model and have predominantly a business focus. A time and thematic framework is defined for the coaching and the coaches are assigned by the organizers. The use of the coaching and the participation in the workshops is on a voluntary basis. A binding registration within the communicated deadlines is expected.

1.4 Q&A-Session and Award Night

The participants who qualified through the Elevator Pitch are invited to apply online on our website (platform Evalato) by April 10th, 2026. A documented business model for their project is required as this document will be the basis for selection to the final round of the best five ideas/projects at the STAGE UP Award Night. Evaluations will be made by the panel of experts. The «Top Five» will be announced no later than five business days prior to the STAGE UP Award Night.

Prior to the STAGE UP Award Night, the «Top Five» will participate in a presentation and Questions & Answers session with the jury and members of the expert panel.

During the Award Night, the individuals/teams have five minutes to present their project and business model to the audience and the jury. The audience will have an opportunity to engage in a live voting. The live voting result will be disclosed to the jury who makes the final decision on the prize winners. The jury will announce the winners and will award them on stage thereafter.

No correspondence and no specific information about the competition will be provided. However, all STAGE UP participants who have submitted a business model are entitled to receive oral or written (depending on the participants' wishes) feedback on their business idea from the STAGE UP Expert Panel or a person from the STAGE UP Staff.

2. Eligibility

Eligible participants are:

- 2.1 Individuals who are a resident in Switzerland and who are at least eighteen years old.
- 2.2 Teams who have their residence in Switzerland and are at least eighteen years old.

Not eligible to participate are:

- 2.3 Individuals or teams who, on the basis of the business idea or business plan, **have registered a company in the Swiss Commercial Register or founded an association before June 30th, 2024**. If this cannot be clearly identified, a decision will be made on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.4 Individuals or teams with a business idea which is a project / part of a project of an existing company with foundation before the above-mentioned date.

Other conditions:

- 2.5 Individuals/teams can apply repeatedly for the Bernese Business Creation Competition **STAGE UP** with the same business idea, provided that the business idea has been significantly developed since the last participation.
- 2.6 We recommend to apply for the competition **with only one business idea**. However, it is allowed to submit several different business ideas per person and/or team.
- 2.7 Participation in **STAGE UP** and the directly related events is free of charge. Participants are responsible for any expenses incurred in the course of their participation.
- 2.8 The number of participants in the individual events/qualification rounds is limited.
- 2.9 There is no legal claim to admission or participation in the competition. The Department of Management and Entrepreneurship and the participating partners decide on admission to the competition at their own discretion.
- 2.10 Participants may terminate their participation at any time with a written notice. There is no right to the return of the submitted documents and papers.

3. Jury, expert panel and awarding of prizes

- 3.1 The jury and the expert panel shall consist of people selected on the basis of their professionalism and entrepreneurial track record.
- 3.2 The jury and the expert panel will evaluate the business ideas and the teams' business models in two evaluation rounds. In the first phase, all business ideas are evaluated at the Elevator Pitch. In the second phase, the resulting business models are evaluated. In order to guarantee transparency and fairness during the evaluation process, the evaluation will take place according to predefined guidelines and criteria.
 - (i) The evaluation criteria are available to the participants.
 - (ii) If no business idea/business model convinces the jury, it is possible that no prize(s) will be awarded.

- 3.3 The winner will receive a prize money of CHF 10,000. The runner-up will receive CHF 5,000 and the third-place CHF 3,000.
- 3.4 The prize money will be paid out after the **STAGE UP** Award Night to the account indicated by the participants.

4. Data protection and liability

- 4.1 All documents and materials submitted will be treated confidentially by the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship and its partners and will be used exclusively for the preparation and implementation of the competition. No data will be disclosed or published without the consent of the participants, except for inventory data intended for the public (names of team members, institutional affiliation, photos, logo, project name and brief description of the business idea (text release by participants)).
- 4.2 The participants agree that photos taken during the competition can be used for documentary and inspiring reasons by the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship of the University of Bern. The photos can be used for media coverage. Hence, no relevant information about the project (e.g. presentations) should be provided on the photos.
- 4.3 The participants agree that the submitted documents and materials will be forwarded to the coaches, the expert panel and the jury. By countersigning the confidentiality agreement, the coaches and jury members commit themselves to treating the findings and information obtained in connection with **STAGE UP** as confidential. Confidential findings and information are considered to be all contents shared by the participants in the course of discussions and demonstrations, in particular documents on the business idea and model, prototypes and further developments.
- 4.4 The Department of Management and Entrepreneurship and its partners exclude any liability for damages that could be caused by employees, auxiliary people or third parties within the scope of articles 100 and 101 of the Swiss Code of Obligations. In particular, the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship and its partners disclaim all liability for the accuracy of statements made by employees, auxiliary people and other people participating in STAGE UP.

5. Legal process

The legal process is excluded.