DRAPER DATA SCIENCE BUSINESS PLAN COMPETITION 2026-2027

College of AI, Cyber and Computing



Be Part of the Data Economy and Help Transform the World!

"Data science will drive the greatest transformations of the next few decades. Business plan competitions tend to encourage and attract those people who are going to make those transformations. Melissa and I have found these competitions to be a magnet for progress and change."

– Timothy Draper, October 2020

The University of Texas at San Antonio reserves the right to postpone, reschedule, or cancel the Draper Data Science Business Plan Competition for any circumstance under their discretion. In the event of cancellation, all materials submitted for the competition will be destroyed and will remain the intellectual property of the submitter.

The Draper Data Science Business Plan Competition at UTSA is designed for student entrepreneurs to advance business ventures that use data science to create value, with the potential to change the world in which we live and work. The competition considers data science broadly as a field of inquiry and application encompassing computing, mathematical, statistical methods, and technologies in synergy with domain expertise. It utilizes big data sets to solve unmet problems.

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

October 19, 2026	Draper website updated and live
November 2, 2026	Online applications open
November 19, 2026	First Draper information session for prospective competitors
December 4, 2026	Second Draper information session for prospective competitors
January 3, 2027	Online applications close
Jan 13, 2027	Announce teams that advance to next phase of competition
Jan. 23, 2027	ACOB mandatory workshop
February 7, 2027	Pitch video and BMC due
Feb. 22, 2027	Selected finalists are notified
Feb. 26, 2027	Intent to compete due by each team
Mar 29, 2027	Finalist check-in session
April 5, 2027	Finalists submit executive summaries and pitch decks.
April 9, 2027	Pitch Day/Post on Socials

Draper Data Science Business Plan Competition teams can win cash investments for use in their ventures, with up to $100,000 in prize money:

1st place: $35,000
2nd place: $25,000
3rd place: $15,000
Fan Favorite: Prize amount varies
Most Data-Science Driven: Prize amount varies
Judges' Choice: Prize amount varies

First, second, and third place awards are fixed at the amounts listed above.
Supplemental awards, including Most Data-Science Driven, Judges' Choice, and Fan Favorite, may be awarded at the discretion of competition judges and organizers.
The amounts allocated to supplemental awards may vary, provided total competition awards do not exceed $100,000.

**Winners may be subject to tax laws, where applicable.

ELIGIBILITY

To participate in the competition, all teams must apply for the first phase of the competition between **November 2, 2026, to January 3, 2027**. Any application submitted after this period will NOT be accepted.

Venture Teams interested in competing in the Draper Competition must meet the following criteria:

- Be currently enrolled at an undergraduate level (two- or four-year institution) or be a current graduate student (Master's or Ph.D. program) at an accredited, not-for-profit college, in the US, Canada, or Mexico. Recent graduates, having been awarded their degrees in December 2026,are eligible to participate.
- All ventures must have at least two and no more than six members.
- The competition is for new, for-profit, independent ventures in the seed, start-up, or early growth stages. Ventures with a social impact focus are eligible if there is a revenue-generating component to the venture. Ventures that qualify for **501(c) status are NOT eligible**.
- Former winning teams are ineligible to enter the competition unless they pitch an **entirely** new business idea.
- The team leader serves as the primary point of contact and is responsible for completing the team's application and is looked upon to make final decisions for their team.
- Ventures must be **student-created** and **student-managed**. All participants must verify student status at the time of application. Current students can provide an unofficial copy of their transcript or a current class schedule showing the enrollment term. Recent graduates can provide a copy of their diploma, original transcript, or other document proving their eligibility as of **December 31, 2026**.
- Team members must:
  - demonstrate commitment in moving venture forward.
  - play a primary role in developing the business strategy.
  - have key management roles in the startup venture.
- If a member opts out of the team for any reason after an application has been submitted, the team leader must notify the Draper Steering Committee by **March 26, 2027**. After this deadline, the team composition – as listed on the application form - will be considered final and each member will receive their equal share of any prize money the team might win.
- Each team is required to submit contact information for a faculty advisor or mentor at their institution who is knowledgeable about the team and its venture. The Draper Competition Steering Committee will confirm the advisor's support.
- Any faculty advisor/mentor is welcome but is not required to be present at the in-person

final pitch competition.

- Ventures must be wholly owned by the team.
- An existing business is eligible only if, as of 11:59 p.m. on December 31, 2026, it has
  - received less than $25,000 in funding, **and**
  - earned less than $100,000 in gross revenue.

Travel Eligibility and In-Person Participation

The Draper Competition requires all finalist team members to attend the in-person competition in San Antonio, Texas.

At the time of application, any participant who is not a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident must already possess the valid immigration status, travel authorization, or other documentation necessary to attend the competition without needing to obtain a new U.S. visa.

Participants are responsible for ensuring they meet all applicable travel and entry requirements through the competition dates. The competition does not provide visa sponsorship, immigration assistance, or support for obtaining travel authorization.

Teams unable to meet these requirements may be deemed ineligible to participate in the final competition.

Prize Payment and Tax Identification Requirements

Cash prizes are awarded directly to individual members of winning teams.

To be eligible to receive a cash prize, all participants, regardless of citizenship or residency status, must possess a valid U.S. Social Security Number (SSN) or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) at the time of application.

Participants must be able to provide all required tax and payment documentation if selected as prize recipients. The competition does not provide assistance with obtaining an SSN or ITIN. Participants who do not meet these requirements are not eligible to receive cash prizes.

All prize payments are subject to applicable university procedures and tax reporting or withholding requirements.

Disclaimers

- The competition organizers reserve the right to disqualify any entry/team at any time, that in their judgment, violates the letter or spirit of the competition.
- UT – San Antonio's College of AI, Cyber and Computing and the Draper Competition Planning Committee assumes no responsibility to ensure the confidentiality of any information disclosed by teams before, during, or after the competition.
- Applications submitted to the competition are considered public. The documents may be shared with judges, advisors, future students, posted on websites, used for marketing purposes, etc.
- Participating teams should ensure that their documentation does not contain trade secrets or proprietary information.

- Participants agree to be photographed and recorded and allow UT – San Antonio free use of these images and a summary description of all executive summaries.
- All decisions regarding the competition rules, procedures, and processes are at the sole discretion of the competition organizers.
- The selection of the teams to compete on competition day and the selection of the winners are at the sole discretion of the Draper Competition Planning Committee and competition judges.
- Any team who intentionally initiates contact with any judge prior to competition day will be disqualified from the competition.

APPLYING TO COMPETE

- All team ventures who wish to compete in the Draper Competition must complete the online application forms.
- The application does not have to be completed in one sitting. Partially completed applications are saved and can be submitted by the stated deadlines.
- Applicants can go back and forth between questions; however, all must be answered to submit. If an answer does not apply, please select "N/A."
- The application consists of two phases. The first phase includes the submission regarding general information about the team and its business proposal. The second phase requires a business model canvas and 90-second pitch video.

PHASE I

Section I: Team Details

Questions 1 – 7: Student team member information must include full names, email addresses, education level, race, gender identity, university/college, city, and state.

Question 8: Student team's faculty advisor/mentor information to include their full name, title, email, and phone number.

Section II: Business Venture Proposal

Question 9: Provide name of business venture.

Question 10: Identify sector/industry of business venture.

Question 11: As a single PDF file, upload the business venture proposal that discusses:

- the business venture and product/service/concept *(max 50 words)*
- the application of data science tools/techniques in solving the business challenge *(max*

200 words)

- the competitive advantage created using data science tools/techniques *(max 100 words)*

PHASE II

Teams advancing from Phase I will be notified by **January 13, 2027**, and proceed to Phase II of the competition.

- All teams that advance will be required to attend a mandatory workshop intended to provide support in the next phase of the competition.
- Teams **MUST** have at least one team member represent their team, although attendance by the entire team is highly encouraged.
- **IMPORTANT**: Missing this workshop will result in a one-point deduction from the team's final pitch competition score.

Business Plan and 90 Second Pitch Video

- As a single PDF file, upload the venture business plan using the Business Model Canvas (BMC). A customized template is provided on the application form. The BMC is a tool that entrepreneurs use to track their progression from unproven concepts to viable ventures. This document also lays the foundation for the executive summary finalists to submit prior to finals.
- Provide the YouTube link to a 90-second pitch video marked as "unlisted." A short guide, in the application, is provided for tips.
- Certification of Student Status: All team members must be current students or recent graduates as of **December 31, 2026**. Verification of enrollment is required for every member. After submitting Phase I of the application, each listed team member will receive an email with instructions to provide proof of student status.
    - **Current students:** Submit a current class schedule or unofficial transcript with all necessary identifiable information (name, university, term, student ID number).
    - **Recent graduates:** Submit a diploma, degree confirmation indicating graduation date, or an unofficial transcript.

  A team's application will not be considered until proof of status is received for each team members due by **January 6, 2027**.

EVALUATION PROCESS

Upon receipt of all phase II application materials, including the confirmations of student status, the Draper steering committee will review team applications to select finalists invited to the onsite competition event. The review criteria are defined to match the content of the application form.

Teams will be judged on the following criteria:

- Clear identification of problem statement
- Novel technical approach to solving business challenges using data science tools and methodologies
- Review of a 90-sec pitch video and Business Model Canvas (BMC) documents

INVITATION TO COMPETE OR WITHDRAW

- Any pre-selected venture invited to continue to Phase II of the competition will be notified by **January 13, 2027**.
- All finalist teams invited to pitch their business venture in-person will be notified by **February 22, 2027**, and will have until **February 26, 2027**, at 5:00 pm (CST) to confirm their participation.
- Confirmation of participation will take place through email. Instructions will be provided to those selected, and initial information about the finals will be provided.
- Failure of a team to confirm participation in the finals by the stated deadline will result in disqualification.

STAGE COMPETITION REQUIREMENTS FOR INVITED TEAMS:

- Virtual Check-In Session: **Monday, March 29, 2027**.
- In-Person Pre-Competition Orientation/Practice Run: Early evening on **April 8, 2027**, at San Pedro 2. Teams traveling to San Antonio must arrive in time to attend this mandatory session.
- **Competition Day Check-In:** By 10:00 a.m., **Friday, April 9, 2027**.

Note: Penalty points will be applied to teams that fail to attend these mandatory sessions. One point will be deducted for failure to have representation at the virtual check-in session on March 29th and two points will be deducted for teams not in attendance for the pre-competition day meeting on April 8th.

DELIVERABLES FOR THE COMPETITION FINALS

By April 5, 2027, participating teams must submit:

- An executive summary that provides a written narrative of the venture's Business Model Canvas (BMC)
- A venture pitch deck that will be used during final presentations

Templates for both documents will be provided.

The Executive Summary

- May not include any information about a team's school (Omit reference in text, email, headers/footers.)
- Will be limited to two pages of consecutive text.
- May include one additional page of images, graphics, and charts only.
- Should address all the questions in the template, which will be provided.
- Must be submitted as a PDF document with venture name as the file name (i.e., "VentureName.pdf")

The Venture Pitch Deck

- Company summary – In 1-2 paragraphs describe the problem the venture is addressing,the data science solution, product or offering, and identify the potential customers.
- Problem Statement – What is the problem you are addressing and why do customers care?
- Market Size – How large is your total addressable market?
- Customer Analysis – Which customer segments are you targeting? If you are addressing more than one, include who you are targeting first.
- Product or Service Description – Describe the product or service you are selling.
- Product Development Status – What is the state of your product development? What else needs to be done to be able to go to market? What are the key milestones? (e.g., Do you have an MVP already? Do you have pilots? Do you have customers?)
- For life science companies, outline your FDA approval timeline.
- Intellectual Property – What is the status of your IP (e.g., patents) and status of any IP licenses (e.g., if you are licensing your IP from a university)?
- Competitive Differentiation – Who are your competitors and why is your product better than the competition?
- Sustainable Competitive Advantage – What is the moat around your business?
- Sales and Marketing Plan – What is your plan to go to market?
- Company Management Start-Up – Show the current founders/managers of the company. Highlight those that are currently degree-seeking students.
- Advisors and Advisory Boards – Show individuals who are advising the company. (If applicable).
- Financial Projections for 3 - 5 years (e.g., Revenue, income, and net cash flow).

- Describe amount of investment sought and use of funds.
- Expected exits (IPO, acquisition) and potential acquirers. (If applicable.)

At the finals, a panel of at least three external judges will assess each venture's viability, investment potential, and competitiveness.

AWARDS TO WINNERS

After the competition, individual meetings will be scheduled with each winning team to discuss the award of their prizes and any other applicable reimbursement expenses. Competition prizes will be equally divided among all team members and disbursed to them by the College of AI, Cyber and Computing. It is the sole responsibility of the team to determine the use of funding once earnings have been distributed to each winning team member. Any student that seeks to be removed from the team must request their team lead submit an e-mail to the Draper Steering Committee by **March 26, 2027.** After this date, all team members included in the application will be considered team members and equally share any potential winnings.

Each final payout to students will reflect any cash prize earned by their team, in addition to their respective travel costs discussed below.

Applicable taxes will be deducted from the prize amount, and winnings may have tax implications like other income. Students receiving need-based financial aid should be aware that additional income could affect future aid awards. For questions regarding financial aid, participants are encouraged to contact their institution for guidance.

AVAILABLE REIMBURSEMENT

Travel costs, hotel accommodations, and meals will only be covered for participating teams traveling into San Antonio. **Any team local to the city is NOT eligible for any form of reimbursement.**

Please note that disbursements (awards and reimbursements) can take 45 days after the end of the competition to be processed**. At that time, the College of AI, Cyber and Computing will consider its financial obligations to all participants complete.**

Travel

For participating teams, travel reimbursements will be calculated as follows:

- Within San Antonio: Parking will be provided at the competition site. Details will be provided closer to the event. No other travel reimbursement will be offered.
- From Texas, excluding San Antonio: $250 per student on each team.
- Outside Texas, but coming from the contiguous 48 states of the United States, Alaska, Guam, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico: $450 per student on each team.
- Outside the United States and coming from Canada or Mexico: $650 per student on each

team.

Lodging

- Hotel accommodations for the duration of the competition will be arranged by, and at the expense of, the College of AI, Cyber and Computing.
- Students who decline accommodations provided by UT–San Antonio are responsible for arranging their own lodging. Any associated costs will not be reimbursed, and prearranged university lodging expenses will be deducted from any reimbursement owed.
- Any early arrival, prior to the check-in date as noted in the hotel reservation, will be at the student's own expense, and WILL NOT be reimbursed.
- Late arrivals, past the reservation check-in date, will result in nightly hotel charges being deducted from the student's reimbursement, unless an emergency is promptly reported to the Draper Steering Committee.

Meals

Each participating team member traveling into San Antonio will be reimbursed in the following manner:

- **Thursday, April 8, 2027**: Dinner only - at the rate of $31.
- **Friday, April 9, 2027**: Lunch only - at the rate of $20; Breakfast and dinner will be provided at the event.
- **Saturday, April 10, 2027**: Breakfast only - at the rate of $18.

As required by the State Comptroller, UTSA adheres to the GSA per diem reimbursement rates as the method for determining maximum meal rates.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The Draper Data Science Business Plan Competition is hosted by The University of Texas at San Antonio's College of AI, Cyber and Computing. Please email draper@utsa.edu with any additional questions. We appreciate your interest and hope to see you on pitch day!