

Saginaw and Bay City News

Bay County opens applications for \$5,000 Business by the Bay pitch competition

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Bay County entrepreneurs with businesses less than two years old can now apply for the 2026 Business by the Bay pitch competition. Image provided by Madison Bourgeois

By

[Advance Local Express Desk](#)

BAY CITY, MI – Applications opened Tuesday for Bay County entrepreneurs and early-stage business owners to compete in the Business by the Bay Pitch Competition, which offers a \$5,000 top prize and expert mentorship.

The competition, organized by the Michigan Small Business Development Center Lake Huron Region, accepts applications through March 4, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. Participants will showcase their business ideas, receive feedback from experts, and compete for cash prizes at a public pitch event scheduled for September 16, 2026, at John Glenn High School.

“Small businesses are the heartbeat of our region, but the leap from an idea to a sustainable company is often the hardest part,” said Michelle Judd, Business by the Bay co-chair at Michigan Small Business Development Center Lake Huron Region. “By opening applications for 2026, we’re seeking bold founders ready to scale. We provide the mentorship and a growth opportunity; they provide the vision that will drive Bay County’s economy forward for years to come.”

Eligible applicants must be based in Bay County, Michigan, or have a principal location there. Existing businesses must be less than two years old as of September 16, 2026, and have less than \$1 million in annual sales. Principal owners must be at least 18 years old. Businesses that previously won cash prizes in Business by the Bay Pitch events cannot apply again.

Non-profits, marijuana-related ventures, loan packaging, gambling, investment or lending businesses, and businesses where the owner is on parole are not eligible.

Selected applicants must attend four in-person workshops in Bay County starting March 18, 2026. The workshops cover program overview, marketing presentations, financial presentations, and pitch deck development. Sessions run from 5:30 p.m. through June 10, 2026.

After completing workshops, participants will submit pitch decks for virtual judging on August 26, 2026, and September 2, 2026, depending on the number of candidates. Five finalists will advance to the live competition at John Glenn High School from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. on September 16, 2026. The event is open to the public.

Applications are available at michigansbdc.org/business-by-the-bay/.