

Business by the Bay applications open through March 4

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It's one thing to kick around what you think might be a great idea for starting your own business. It's quite another to tie all the pieces together to bring your entrepreneurial aspirations to fruition.

That's where Bay County's Business by the Bay Competition can come into play. Now in its fourth year, the business-boosting event has awarded nearly \$30,000 in cash prizes to 15 contest winners, all the while providing valuable exposure and expert business advice to far more early-stage companies and others that are looking to launch.

Business by the Bay offers local entrepreneurs the opportunity to showcase their business ideas and receive expert feedback while competing for a \$5,000 top prize. Applications will be accepted through March 4 at 5 p.m.

Aspiring entrepreneurs and fledgling business owners are invited to take what could turn out to be a key step to transforming a dream into something real, by submitting an application for the fifth annual Business by the Bay Competition.

"Small businesses are the heartbeat of our region, but the leap from an idea to sustainable company is often the hardest part," said Michelle Judd, Business by the Bay Co-Chair, of the Michigan Small Business Development Center Lake Huron Region.

Applicants must meet the following criteria:

Must be entrepreneurs, small business owners, and early-stage companies based in or with a principal location in Bay County

Businesses must be less than two years old as of September 16, 2026, with less than \$1 million in annual sales

Principal owner must be 18 years of age or older

Businesses that have previously won a cash prize in a Business by the Bay Pitch event are not eligible.

Ineligible businesses include non-profits, marijuana-related ventures, loan packaging, gambling, investment or lending businesses, or businesses in which the owner is on parole.

Selected participants are required to participate in a series of in-person workshops once a month beginning on March 18 in Bay County, with a kick-off meeting and program overview. Further workshops will be on April 15, May 20, and June 10. All of the sessions begin at 5:30 p.m.

Following the workshops, participants will submit pitch decks for virtual judging on August 26 and/or September 2, depending on the number of candidates. From there, five finalists will be selected for cash prizes at the live Business by the Bay Pitch Competition, scheduled for September 16 from 5-8 p.m. at John Glenn High School in Bay City.

Last year's contest saw five finalists win a total of \$11,750, topped by first-place finisher Malynnda Stewart, owner of Compassionate Navigation, LLC, who was awarded \$5,000.

For more information or to apply, go to michigansbdc.org/business-by-the-bay/.

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