Guidance for Judges: Use of AI in the Business Plan Competition

The Business Plan Competition permits teams to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools as supportive resources (e.g., for brainstorming, drafting, or language refinement). AI use alone should **not** be viewed as positive or negative. Judges should focus on the **quality of thinking, evidence of understanding, and founder accountability** demonstrated by the team.

Reviewing Written Plans

When reviewing written submissions, judges should:

- Evaluate clarity, logic, feasibility, and evidence—just as with any submission.
- Assume teams are responsible for all content, regardless of whether AI tools were used.
- Look for coherent reasoning, defensible assumptions, and alignment between the plan and the team's stated strategy.

Judges should not score a team lower solely because written materials appear highly polished or professionally written.

Judges are **not expected** to determine whether AI was used or to detect AI-generated text.

Expectations During Pitches and Q&A

Q&A is the primary mechanism for assessing authentic understanding. Judges are encouraged to:

- Ask follow-up questions that probe **reasoning**, not just conclusions.
- Test whether teams understand their:
    - Customer problem and value proposition
    - Market sizing and assumptions
    - Financial model logic and key drivers
    - Risks, tradeoffs, and alternatives considered
- Explore how and why key decisions were made.

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Center for Entrepreneurship

Strong teams can clearly explain and defend their choices. Weak alignment between written materials and verbal explanations may indicate insufficient understanding, regardless of AI use.

Red Flags to Consider (Not Proof, but Signals)

Judges may take note if:

- Teams cannot explain assumptions or calculations presented in their plan.
- Answers rely on vague or generic language without substance.
- There is a mismatch between polished materials and limited conceptual understanding.

These issues should be reflected in scoring related to preparedness, feasibility, and execution—not as a separate AI penalty.

Accountability

All teams are fully accountable for:

- The accuracy of their data and claims.
- The originality and feasibility of their ideas.
- Their ability to explain and defend their work in real time.

Judges should score based on demonstrated understanding and entrepreneurial readiness, not on speculation about tool usage.