

SEP STRIVE

Round 2 | Spring 2026

Welcome to Round 2 of SEP Strive!

All Strive finalists automatically advance to SEP Thrive, the statewide high school business pitch finale.

Please read the information below carefully and follow each step.

Important Dates for Round 2:

- **Submission Deadline:** Wednesday, March 25, 2026 at 11:59 PM
- **Finalists Announced:** March 30, 2026

Video Submission Steps:

Students must record a **3–5 minute video pitch** and upload it as an **.mp4 file**.

Your video must clearly include:

- 1. The Problem or Opportunity**
 - What problem are you solving?
 - How big or serious is this problem?
 - Who is affected?
- 2. Your Solution**
 - What is your product or service?
 - How does it solve the problem?
- 3. Your Customer**
 - Who would pay for this?
 - Why would they want it?
- 4. Your Competition**
 - What other products, services, or alternatives already exist?
 - Why is your idea different or better?
- 5. Your Market Test / Experiment Plan**
 - What is one simple way you could test your idea?
 - What would the experiment cost? (Suggested budget: up to \$500)
 - Why is this a good way to test if customers are interested?

Additional Details

- Visual aids (slides, posters, product examples, etc.) are allowed.
- Make sure your video is clear, easy to hear, and within the time limit.
- Practice before recording.
- If you would like to schedule a virtual meeting with our team, we highly encourage you to do so. Use this link to schedule: [SEP Idea Consultation](#)

How to Submit

When you are ready, email the following to:

shelby.mills@usm.edu

Include:

- Your 3–5 minute video (.mp4 file)
- All team member names
- Your business idea name

⚠️ Your submission is NOT complete until you receive a confirmation email stating that your video was successfully received and can be reviewed.

If you do not receive confirmation, please follow up.

Video Submission Judging Criteria:

Judges will evaluate your submission in the following areas:

1. Problem

- Is the problem clearly explained?
- Does the student show understanding of how big or important the problem is?
- Is the solution realistic and connected to the problem?

2. People

- Is there a clearly identified paying customer?
- Does the student understand the competition or alternatives?

3. Plan

- Is the market test simple and useful?
- Is the budget reasonable?

4. Communication of Ideas

- Does the student clearly understand basic business concepts?
- Is the presentation clear, organized, and easy to follow?
- Does the student communicate confidently and professionally?

What's Next?

Thrive| SEP State Finale

This “Shark Tank” type experience will allow students to gain experience pitching ideas to an audience using a microphone and an accompanying visual aid while standing on a stage in business professional attire. Finalists will present to a live audience and a panel of judges who

will provide written evaluations to help mentor students on their ideas and to determine who will place in the competition (overall or in separate divisions, to be determined based on submissions). The SEP Thrive experience will include an introduction to the Hattiesburg campus of Southern Miss and a tour of the College of Business and Economic Development and The Hatchery, home of the Center for Entrepreneurship. Participants will also attend the finale of the university's annual pitch event, the Golden Idea Pitch Competition.

- Finalists advancing to the state finale will be announced March 30.
- Finalists will be expected to participate in a 30-minute coaching session with a Center for Entrepreneurship/SEP mentor before the competition. This will allow students to get valuable feedback on their ideas and how the ideas might be best pitched at the finale.