

GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPANTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

The ECOWAS Startup Awards is a statutory regional programme designed to identify, celebrate, and scale high-impact startups across West Africa, advancing innovation, digital entrepreneurship, and economic integration in the process. The Award was an event established to bring together governments, startups, investors, development partners, private-sector institutions, innovation hubs and other key stakeholders to advance innovation, entrepreneurship, investment and enterprise development across ECOWAS Member States. Following its inaugural edition in Niamey, Niger Republic (18–19 November 2021), the Award has grown into a trusted platform connecting promising startups with investors, policymakers, and development partners from across the region.

The 2nd edition will bring together 60 startups from ECOWAS Member States, for a programme of masterclasses, startup clinics, pitch competitions, exhibitions, investor deal rooms, policy dialogues, and post-award acceleration support. It will focus on the following six priority sectors:

- EdTech and Skills Development
- FinTech
- HealthTech
- AgriTech and Food Systems
- CleanTech, Climate and Green Innovation
- Tourism, Hospitality and TravelTech

This edition is convened by the Directorate of Private Sector and Industry of the ECOWAS Commission, hosted in Abuja, and jointly implemented by the Pan African Alliance of Small and Medium Industries (PAOSMI) and Investment Promotion Agencies of West African States (IPAWAS).

2.0 COMPETITION OVERVIEW:

2.1 Key Dates

- 2.1.1 Application Opens: 3rd August, 2026
- 2.1.2 Application Deadline: 31st August, 2026
- 2.1.3 Virtual Master Class: 21st -25th September, 2026
- 2.1.4 Physical event: 28th – 30th September, 2026
- 2.1.5 Award Ceremony: 30th September, 2026

2.2 Thematic Areas

- 2.2.1 EdTech and Skills Development;
- 2.2.2 FinTech;
- 2.2.3 HealthTech;
- 2.2.4 AgriTech Food Systems;



2.2.5 CleanTech, Climate and Green Innovation; and

2.2.6 Tourism, Hospitality and TravelTech.

2.3 Competition Structure

Phase 1: National Selection based on predefined criteria.

The number of allocated slot for each Member State is indicated in the official letter. Each Member State is expected to submit 50% of the allotted slot while the remaining 50% would be sourced from advertisement opened to Community Citizens. Nominations should reflect startups with demonstrated innovation, growth potential, scalability and capacity to compete in regional and international markets.

Phase 2: Regional Finals

A Regional Technical Evaluation Committee constituted by the ECOWAS Commission will assess all national nominations and Finalists will pitch before an independent regional jury. Winners will be selected based on scoring and consensus.

3.0 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Applicants must:

- I. Be a citizen of an ECOWAS Member State
- II. Operate a startup registered and based within an ECOWAS country
- III. Have a minimum of two (2) years of operations
- IV. Demonstrate a working product/service
- V. Show evidence of market traction or scalability
- VI. Submit all required documentation

4.0 APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS/REGISTRATION

- I. Completed application form
- II. Government-issued identity documents
- III. Passport photograph
- IV. Business registration certificate
- V. 2 years Financial Statement
- VI. Business Plan (Max 10 pages, single spacing, Times New Roman font size 12)
- VII. Pitch Deck (Max 5MB and 10 slides)
- VIII. Pitch Video (Max 10MB)

5.0 EVALUATION CRITERIA

- I. Problem clarity and solution fit (20%)
- II. Innovation & Originality (20%)
- III. Market Potential & Scalability (10%)



- IV. Business Model & Financial Viability (10%)
- V. Social & Economic Impact (10%)
- VI. Team Capacity & Execution Ability (15%)
- VII. Alignment with ECOWAS Priorities (10%)
- VIII. Pitch, online voting and data integrity (5%)

6.0 JUDGING AND GOVERNANCE

Judges will include industry experts, investors, and policy stakeholders. All judges will adhere to conflict of interest and confidentiality policies.

7.0 BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPANTS

I. Cash price for the top 3 Innovative Startups

- Winner – US\$30,000
- 1st Runner up – US\$20,000
- 2nd Runner up – US\$15,000

II. 6 months acceleration program, capacity building and mentorship support

III. Regional visibility

IV. Access to investors

V. Networking opportunities

8.0 CODE OF CONDUCT & COMPLIANCE

Participants must provide accurate information, comply with laws, and maintain professionalism.

9.0 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND DATA PROTECTION

Applicants retain ownership of their intellectual property. Information will be handled confidentially.

10.0 DISCLAIMER

ECOWAS reserves the right to modify timelines, verify information, and disqualify non-compliant applicants.

11.0 CALL TO ACTION

We call on all eligible Startups to participate in this esteemed competition and take advantage of the opportunities it offers. Register now and showcase your innovative solutions at the 2nd ECOWAS Startup Awards. We look forward to receiving your applications and celebrating your innovation.

Submit your application before **31st August 2026**.

