

NOVA Start-Up Competition Regulation

Preamble

The NOVA Start-Up Competition is an initiative of the NOVA Impact Office aimed at identifying, rewarding, and supporting the best entrepreneurial projects within the NOVA University Lisbon (NOVA) ecosystem. The Competition serves as the official qualifying event that selects the project representing NOVA at StageTwo 2026, the European University Start-Up Competition to be held in Berlin on 22–23 October 2026, and representing NOVA at UniVerse – Academia Empreendedora, to be held in Lisbon on the 10th of November 2026.

In this Regulation, the NOVA Impact Office is referred to as the "Organisation" and acts on behalf of NOVA.

Article I

Goals

The principal objectives of this initiative are:

- Select and reward the best entrepreneurship project from the NOVA ecosystem and nominate it to represent NOVA at StageTwo 2026 in Berlin and to represent NOVA at UniVerse - Academia Empreendedora.
- Stimulate and reinforce an entrepreneurial culture among students, researchers, staff and *alumni*.
- Promote multidisciplinary and collaboration through diverse teams.
- Strengthen entrepreneurship training across NOVA schools by offering international exposure.
- Connect promising start-ups with venture capital investors and the national level and at the broader European innovation ecosystem.

Article 2

Promoters and Sponsors

The NOVA Start-Up Competition is promoted by NOVA University Lisbon, through its NOVA Impact Office, and may elect to do it in partnership with sponsors designated for this purpose.



Article 3

Eligibility

The following applicants are eligible to apply. Applications demonstrating a stronger connection to NOVA will be viewed favourably during evaluation.

General eligibility requirements (applicable to all applicants)

- a) **NOVA affiliation:** applicants must demonstrate a connection to the NOVA ecosystem through one of the following:
 - Students enrolled at any academic level and in any field of study;
 - Researchers, staff members, or faculty members;
 - Alumni who graduated from NOVA within the previous five (5) years.
- b) **Spin-offs and start-ups:** companies incubated at one of NOVA's incubators (Madam Parque or Haddad Entrepreneurship Center) are eligible to apply.
- c) **Individual founders:** solo entrepreneurs may apply, provided they demonstrate a demonstrable link to the NOVA ecosystem.
- d) **Originality:** all submitted projects must be original. Applicants are solely responsible for ensuring that their projects do not infringe any third-party intellectual property rights or other legal obligations.
- e) **Project requirements:** submitted projects must:
 - Demonstrate clear innovation;
 - Address a well-identified market need or problem;
 - Have a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) already developed;
 - Be investment-ready at the time of application, or reasonably expected to become investment-ready within twelve (12) months;
 - Ideally (although not mandatorily), contribute to one or more of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Additional eligibility requirements for StageTwo

Applicants wishing to compete in the StageTwo competition must also meet the following requirements:

- f) At the time of application, the project must not have raised:
 - More than 500.000€ in equity investment; and
 - More than 1.500.000€ in grant funding.



Additional eligibility requirements for UniVerse

Applicants wishing to compete in the **UniVerse** competition must also meet the following requirements:

- g) The company must have been formally incorporated less than three (3) years before the date of the competition and be recognised as a start-up by the participating Higher Education Institution.
- h) The company must not have received any investment round or may only have received one initial early-stage investment round, with total funding not exceeding €250,000, including venture capital, grants and/or prize funding.

Article 4

Overview

The NOVA Start-Up Competition consists of two sequential phases leading to participation in StageTwo 2026 and / or to the participation in UniVerse – academia empreendedora. All key dates are published on the NOVA Innovation website (<https://novainnovation.unl.pt/>).



Phase	Activity	Date
NOVA Startup Competition	Online application form + Business Plan	14.07.2026
	Pitch Day – in person, NOVA Rectorate	22.07.2026
StageTwo	Nomination submitted to StageTwo	31.07.2026
	Coaching Day – pitching practice (virtual)	14.09.2026
	Startup Day – virtual info session	25.09.2026
	Networking & Competition in Berlin	22–23.10.2026
UniVerse	Nomination submitted to UniVerse	30.09.2026
	Pitch Day – in person, Pavilhão Portugal	10.10.2026

Article 6

Registration and Formalisation of Application

- Participation is free of charge. Applications must be formalised by completing both of the following steps:
 - Complete the online registration form available at <https://novainnovation.unl.pt/>; AND
 - Submit the Business Plan by e-mail to novaimpact@unl.pt.
- Submitting only the Business Plan or only the online form will disqualify the team from the Competition.

Article 7

Business Plan

- Business Plans must be submitted in electronic format (preferably .PDF) to novaimpact@unl.pt by the deadline specified on the NOVA Innovation website. The document must not exceed 15 A4 pages, minimum font size 12 pt, line spacing 1.5 with the required sections:
 - Executive Summary
 - Problem / Opportunity
 - Business Model
 - Competitive Landscape





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- Financial Plan / Investment Needs

A maximum of 10 teams will be selected from the Business Plan review to proceed to the Final Pitch.

Article 8

Final Pitch

1. Projects will be presented in person at the Rectorate of NOVA University Lisbon on July 22nd, 2026, at 14h30. Remote participation is not permitted.
2. Teams may use multimedia supports (PowerPoint, audio/video).
3. Functioning prototypes may be showcased.
4. Each pitch lasts 3 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of jury Q&A.

Article 9

Decision

1. The jury shall establish a ranking of the participating startups, from the highest-ranked startup, which shall be declared the winner of the edition, to the lowest-ranked startup, based on the scores received during the evaluation process.
2. The jury's decision will be announced at the end of the Final Pitch event.
3. The decision is final.

Article 10

Jury

1. Business Plans and Pitch presentations will be evaluated by a Jury designated by the NOVA Impact Office, composed of representatives from venture capital firms and/or the innovation ecosystem.
2. In case of a tie, the jury president casts the deciding vote.
3. The Jury reserves the right not to award the prize if no application meets the required standards.

Article 11

Evaluation Criteria

The Jury evaluates teams in accordance with the StageTwo 2026 guidelines, and in accordance with the UniVerse guidelines, respectively, based on the following criteria:

- Innovativeness: The degree to which the solution introduces a novel approach to an existing problem.
- Defensibility: The strength of competitive moats — IP, network effects, proprietary data, etc.
- Team: Complementary expertise, multidisciplinary backgrounds, and skills.





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- **Investment-readiness:** The winning team must be seeking pre-seed or seed funding, or be in a position to do so within the next 12 months.

Article 12

Prizes and StageTwo Participation

1. The winning team will directly represent NOVA University Lisbon at StageTwo 2026 in Berlin (22–23 October 2026), including all pre-events, entailing:
 - Pitching to top European venture capital investors;
 - Networking with 40+ universities and 70+ VCs from 20+ countries;
 - Participating in coaching and legal preparation sessions (September 2026);
 - Gaining international exposure, media coverage, and investor deal-flow visibility.
2. The selected team will receive a compensation of up to 1.500€ to cover StageTwo participation costs (flights, accommodation, subsistence).
3. The team must sign a Declaration of Honour confirming the funds will be used for StageTwo participation. Any surplus may be applied to project development.
4. Failure to comply with the Monitoring Committee's conditions implies reimbursement to the NOVA Impact Office.
5. If eligible, the winning team shall also represent NOVA at the 2026 edition of UniVerse, to be held in Lisbon on the 10th of November 2026. If the winning team does not meet the UniVerse eligibility criteria, the highest-ranked eligible startup shall be selected to represent NOVA instead.

Article 13

NOVA Spin-off® Recognition

1. Projects developed within the NOVA ecosystem that subsequently establish a legal entity and satisfy the eligibility requirements set out in the applicable NOVA Spin-off® Regulation (Regulation no. 157/2018, published in *Diário da República*, 2nd series, of March 14th) are encouraged to apply for the NOVA Spin-off® recognition.
2. The award of the NOVA Spin-off® seal is subject to a separate evaluation process and approval in accordance with the applicable institutional regulations. Successful applicants may benefit from the rights, recognition, and support measures associated with the NOVA Spin-off® programme.
3. Nothing in these Regulations shall be construed as limiting the intellectual property rights of participants or creating any obligation to establish a company or apply for the NOVA Spin-off® recognition.



Article 14

Communication and Announcement of Winners

1. All communication with participants will be conducted by e-mail.
2. Winners will be announced publicly on Pitch Day and through the NOVA Innovation website and social channels.

Article 15

Image Rights

1. By registering for the Competition, participants automatically authorize the free use of their name, photos, and images in any medium — digital or print — for the purpose of disseminating Competition results.
2. This authorization does not imply any obligation of disclosure or payment.

Article 16

Confidentiality and Intellectual Property

1. Jury members and the Organisation undertake to keep all competitor information confidential. Applicants must clearly mark any information they consider confidential as such.
2. Protection of intellectual property is the sole responsibility of applicants.

Article 17

Personal Data

1. The Organisation shall treat all applications and supporting documentation with due confidentiality throughout the evaluation process.
2. Information submitted by applicants shall be accessed only by the Organisation and the members of the Jury, except where disclosure is required by law or expressly authorised by the participants.
3. The identity and application materials of teams not selected for the Final Pitch shall not be publicly disclosed by the Organisation.
4. By submitting an application, participants acknowledge and consent to the processing of their personal data by NOVA University Lisbon solely for the purposes of administering the Competition, communicating with participants, and complying with applicable legal obligations, in accordance with the applicable data protection legislation.



Article 18

Withdrawal

Should any competing team withdraw, the Organisation may invite the next-ranked team to take its place.

Article 19

Liability

Participants exempt NOVA University Lisbon from any liability for damages — pecuniary or moral — arising from their participation in the Competition.

Article 20

Interpretation and Amendments

1. Any doubts regarding the interpretation of this Regulation shall be resolved exclusively by the Organisation via novaimpact@unl.pt.
2. The Organisation guarantees confidentiality throughout the evaluation process and reserves the right to amend these Regulations on grounds of force majeure.

