Competition Manual - 2027

The Goals

The CU Spark Tank competition was created to engage young professionals within Michigan's credit union movement by providing a platform to showcase their talents, creativity and innovative ideas.

For 2027, CU Spark Tank introduces a new Team Edition, encouraging young professionals to collaborate in developing innovative solutions to challenges and opportunities facing credit unions, their members, and the communities they serve.

The competition is designed to strengthen leadership development, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking and presentation skills. Participating teams will be challenged not only to identify and pitch an innovative idea, product or service, but also consider its potential impact, feasibility, and implementation.

Through this experience, young professionals will gain valuable opportunities to collaborate across functional areas, develop confidence in presenting ideas to industry leaders and strengthen skills that will benefit them throughout their careers.

The Michigan Credit Union League remains committed to investing in the professional development and advancement of the credit union movement's emerging leaders.

Judging the Teams

Judging at the chapter, semi-final and final levels will be based on the same criteria, with a maximum possible score of 100 points.

Judging Category	Points
Overall Concept / Innovation & Value	35
Impact & Feasibility	25
Clarity of Pitch	15
Team Collaboration, Delivery & Communication	15
Risk / Compliance & Reasonable Innovation	10
Total	**100**

*Presentation timing is included within the 15 points allocated to Team Collaboration, Delivery & Communication and is not scored separately or added to the 100-point total.

1. **Overall Concept / Innovation & Value (35 points)**

Judges will evaluate the originality and innovation of the proposed idea, product or service, the clarity of the problem or opportunity being addressed, its alignment with the credit union mission and its potential value to members, businesses or communities.

2. **Impact & Feasibility (25 points)**

Judges will evaluate the potential impact of the proposed solution, its operational feasibility, anticipated outcomes and the team's ability to demonstrate a realistic approach to implementation. Consideration may include estimated financial impact, return on investment, member outcomes or other measurable benefits.

3. **Clarity of Pitch (15 points)**

Judges will evaluate the organization, clarity and persuasiveness of the presentation, including the team's ability to communicate the problem, proposed solution and anticipated impact in a concise, professional and compelling manner.

4. **Team Collaboration, Delivery & Communication (15 points)**

Judges will evaluate the team's ability to demonstrate shared ownership, collaboration, role clarity and effective communication. Consideration will include presentation delivery, transitions between speakers, understanding of the proposed solution, responsiveness during judge Q&A and adherence to the seven-minute presentation limit.

Not all team members are required to speak during the formal presentation; however, all members must contribute meaningfully to the development of the solution and be prepared to participate in judge Q&A, as applicable.

Teams will be evaluated on their collective performance, regardless of team size or the number of individuals presenting.

5. **Risk / Compliance & Responsibility Innovation (10 points)**

Judges will evaluate the team's ability to identify potential risks, regulatory or compliance considerations, operational challenges and reasonable strategies for addressing those concerns.

The official CU Spark Tank Team Edition judging rubric will be provided to chapters and participating teams.

Judges may review required written submission materials in advance of each competition. Teams will receive submission instructions and deadlines for each round.

Rules

1. Team Eligibility

Each team must consist of a minimum of two (2) and a maximum of four (4) young professionals.

All team members must be at least 18 years of age and no more than 40 years of age as of May 1, 2027.

All team members must be employed by the same MCUL-affiliated Michigan credit union.

Teams consisting of employees from multiple credit unions, including chapter-assembled teams, are not permitted.

2. Credit Union Representation

Each participating credit union may be represented by only one (1) team at the chapter-level competition.

Credit unions with multiple interested teams may conduct an internal competition or selection process to determine which team will represent their credit union.

Teams are encouraged to include participants from different departments or functional areas to bring diverse perspectives and expertise to their proposed solution.

3. Chapter Participation

Each team must participate in the chapter-level competition associated with its credit union's headquarters, regardless of branch locations or membership in multiple chapters.

Each eligible chapter may advance only one (1) winning team to the statewide virtual semi-finals.

Chapters must provide equal opportunity for all eligible credit unions within their chapter to participate. This includes providing advance written notice of the competition to all credit unions in the chapter area.

4. Chapter Competitions

Chapter-level competitions must be held between January 1 and April 12, 2027.

Chapters are required to notify MCUF of their intention to host a competition, including the date, time and location.

MCUL prefers that chapter competitions be conducted in person; however, virtual competitions may be utilized when necessary.

All chapter competitions must use the official CU Spark Tank Team Edition judging criteria and scoring rubric.

5. Statewide Virtual Semi-Finals

The statewide CU Spark Tank Team Edition Semi-Finals will be held virtually on Wednesday, April 28, 2027.

Each chapter-winning team will advance to the virtual semi-finals, provided all competition rules and eligibility requirements have been met.

Teams will deliver their seven-minute presentation and participate in a brief judge Q&A.

All team members must be available for the virtual competition and judge Q&A, even if they are not participating in the formal presentation.

The five (5) highest-scoring teams will advance to the CU Spark Tank Finals at ACE27.

Additional virtual competition instructions, presentation schedules and technical requirements will be provided in advance.

6. CU Spark Tank Finals

The five (5) teams advancing from the virtual semi-finals will compete in the CU Spark Tank Finals on Center Stage at the Michigan Credit Union League's Annual Convention & Exposition (ACE27), held in Grand Rapids in June 2027.

Finalist teams will deliver their seven-minute presentation before a panel of judges and the ACE audience.

All team members are expected to attend and participate in the finals.

The highest-scoring team will be named the 2027 CU Spark Tank Champion, with the second-highest-scoring team recognized as the first runner-up.

7. Team Participation Requirements

All team members are expected to contribute meaningfully to the development of their proposed solution, supporting materials and presentation.

At least two (2) team members must participate in the formal presentation at each competition level.

All team members must be prepared to respond to questions from judges when Q&A is included.

Teams are encouraged to demonstrate collaboration, shared ownership and an understanding of the solution beyond each individuals assigned responsibilities.

8. Team Member Changes

Team membership should remain consistent throughout the chapter competition, virtual semi-finals, and finals.

Any proposed substitutions or changes to a team's roster following the chapter-level competition must receive prior approval from MCUL.

All replacement participants must meet the original eligibility requirements.

9. Presentation Requirements

Each team will be allotted seven (7) minutes to present its proposed idea, product or service.

Teams must present the same core concept throughout the chapter, semi-final and final competitions.

Teams may refine their presentations, supporting materials, and implementation plans based on feedback received between rounds, provided the underlying solution remains substantially the same.

Presentations must be developed and delivered by eligible team members.

10. Outside Audience and Mentorship

Teams may seek advice, feedback and mentorship from supervisors, executives, colleagues or other subject-matter experts.

However, the participating young professionals must remain primarily responsible for developing their proposed solution, supporting materials and presentation.

Outside assistance should support the team's learning and development rather than replace its work.

11. Confidentiality and Responsible Use of Information

Teams are responsible for ensuring that their presentations and supporting materials do not disclose confidential member information, proprietary credit unio information or other sensitive operational details without appropriate authorization.

Teams should also consider applicable legal, regulatory, compliance, and operational risks when developing their proposed solutions.

12. Chapter Winner Submission Requirements

Each chapter must submit the following materials to Andrea Tucker, Michigan Credit Union Foundation Executive Director by April 12, 2027:

- Completed 2027 CU Spark Tank Team Application
- Names and contact information for all team members
- Required written competition materials
- Presentation slide deck
- Print-quality color photograph of the team, or individual photographs of each team member
- Chapter competition scoring results
- Additional participant information or biographies as requested

Materials should be submitted to:

CU Spark Tank Competition
Michigan Credit Union League
Andrea Tucker
andrea.tucker@mcul.org

13. Competition Expenses

Each participating credit union, or corresponding chapter, is responsible for its team's expenses associated with internal and chapter-level competitions.

The statewide semi-finals will be conducted virtually, eliminating the need for travel or hotel accommodations for that round.

For teams advancing to the ACE27 Finals, complimentary ACE registration will be provided for all eligible team members, up to four (4) per finalist team.

The chapter will retain primary responsibility for its winning team's travel-related expenses, including hotel accommodations, meals and mileage, and may seek assistance from the participating credit union.

Finalist teams should contact Andrea Tucker before making hotel reservations to ensure they receive appropriate conference hotel information and room block instructions.

14. Attendance and Participation at ACE27

All members of the Top 5 finalist teams are expected to attend the CU Spark Tank Finals at Ace27.

Finalist teams will receive information regarding presentation schedules, required rehearsals, registration and other onsite expectations in advance of the event.

Following the competition of the finals, participants are welcome to remain at ACE for additional conference programming.

15. Competition Titles and Recognition

The winning team will hold the title of CU Spark Tank Champion Team for one year, until a successor is selected at the following year's competition, unless the title is revoked for cause.

The second-place team will be recognized as the CU Spark Tank Runner-Up Team.

Awards and recognition will be presented to the winning and runner-up teams.

16. Future Competition Eligibility

Members of a CU Spark Tank Champion Team will not be eligible to compete in subsequent years.

17. Ineligibility

Employees and directors of MCUL and its affiliated organizations, as well as members of their immediate families, are not eligible to participate at any level of the competition.

Topic Areas and Required Presentation Materials

All participating teams must develop an idea, product, service or concept that could provide a direct benefit to their credit union, its members, businesses, communities or the broader credit union movement.

Potential topic areas include, but are not limited to:

- Human Resources and Employee Development
- Lending Products and Services
- Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technology
- Financial Education and Financial Well-Being
- Insurance Products and Services
- Payment Solutions
- Member Experience and Engagement
- Operational Efficiency and Process Improvement
- Community Development and Outreach
- Digital Banking and Accessibility

Teams are encouraged to think creatively while considering the practicality, potential impact and implementation of their proposed solution.

Required Competition Materials

In additional to a seven-minute presentation and slide deck, each team must develop the following materials:

1. **Member/Business/Community Impact Hypothesis – Maximum One Page**

A written explanation of the anticipated impact of the proposed solution, including who would benefit, what outcomes the team hopes to achieve and how those benefits might be measured.

2. **Implementation Roadmap – Maximum Two Pages**

An outline of how the proposed solution could realistically move toward implementation, including:

- Initial implementation priorities and milestones
- Anticipated progress within the first 90 days
- Longer-term implementation goals at 12 months
- Departments, resources or partnerships that may be needed
- Potential operational, regulatory or compliance considerations
- Key performance indicators or other measurers of success

3. **Team Contribution Statement – Maximum One Page**

A brief overview identifying each team members primary role and contributions to developing the proposed solution.

This statement is intended to demonstrate meaningful participation and shared ownership of the team's work.

4. **Presentation Slide Deck**

A slide deck supporting the team's seven-minute presentation.

All required materials must be submitted according to the deadlines established for each competition round.

Teams may update and refine their materials as they advance, provided their core concept remains consistent.

Awards and Prizes

All CU Spark Tank participants benefit from opportunities to develop leadership, collaboration, problem-solving and presentation skills while gaining exposure to innovative ideas and industry leaders.

The following awards and prizes will be provided to the top-performing teams.

1. **First Place – CU Spark Tank Champion Team**
    - Recognized as the 2027 CU Spark Tank Champion Team.
    - Each eligible member of the winning team, up to four (4) individuals, will receive a full ride scholarship to MCUL's Executive Summit. Including paid registration, lodging costs and a $100 travel gift card.
    - Opportunity for a group lunch or meeting with a Michigan credit union CEO, coordinated by MCUL.
2. **Second Place – CU Spark Tank Runner-Up Team**
    - Recognized as the 2027 CU Spark Tank Runner-Up Team.
    - Each eligible member of the runner-up team, up to four (4) individuals, will receive a full ride scholarship to one of the eligible MCUL education events listed below. Including paid registration, lodging costs and a $100 travel gift card.
        - Individual team members may select their own preferred event to attend. The entire team is not required to select/attend the same event.
        - Eligible MCUL education events include;
            - HERO Conference (2027)
            - Branch Managers and Cultivating Leaders (2027)
            - Lead With Heart (2028)
            - YOU Conference (2028)
            - MCUL GAC (2028).

- Opportunity for a group lunch or meeting with a Michigan credit union CEO, coordinated by MCUL.

3. **ACE Finalist Teams**
   - All eligible members of the Top 5 finalist teams will receive complementary ACE27 registration to participate in the live finals.
   - Finalist teams will receive recognition for advancing to the statewide championship round.

Additional prize details, registration instructions and eligibility requirements will be communicated to advancing teams.

Chapter Checklist

Chapters are responsible for coordinating the first round of the CU Spark Tank Team Edition competition and selecting one winning team to advance to the statewide virtual semi-finals.

Before the Chapter Competition

- Notify all credit unions within the chapter of the CU Spark Tank Team Edition opportunity at the same time.
- Distribute the official competition manual, team application and promotional materials.
- Establish a deadline for team applications and required materials.
- Set a competition date between January 1 and April 12, 2027.
- Notify MCUF of the chapter completion date, time and location.
- Confirm that all participating teams meet the eligibility requirements.
- Recruit judges and provide the official Team Edition scoring rubric.
- Share presentation expectation, time limits and competition procedures with participating teams.

During the Chapter Competition

- Provide each team with an equal opportunity to present.
- Ensure all teams are evaluated using the official judging criteria.
- Follow the established presentation timing and Q&A procedures.
- Collect and compile judging scores.
- Identify one winning team to represent the chapter.

Following the Chapter Competition

- Notify Andrea Tucker (andrea.tucker@mcul.org) of the winning team by the established deadline.
- Submit the completed team application and required competition materials.
- Provide team member photographs and additional required information.
- Submit the chapter competition scoring results.
- Ensure the winning team understands the April 28 virtual semi-finals requirements.
- Coordinate applicable travel and expense arrangements if the team advances to the ACE27 finals.

Questions or Additional Information

For questions regarding eligibility, chapter competitions, required materials or other CU Spark Tank Team Edition details, please contact:

Andrea Tucker
Executive Director
Michigan Credit Union Foundation
andrea.tucker@mcul.org

Additional competition information and resources are available at: www.mcul.org/CUSparkTank