



ABBREVIATED
GUIDEBOOK

IEEE OVERVIEW

IEEE is the world's largest professional association dedicated to advancing technological innovation and excellence for the benefit of humanity. IEEE and its members inspire a global community through IEEE's highly cited publications, conferences, technology standards, and professional and educational activities.

IEEE Entrepreneurship is an Initiative within the IEEE which aims to connect, collaborate and convene the engineering driven startup community that is at the forefront of turning ideas into successful businesses.

IEEE N3XT® is the flagship conference and brand of IEEE Entrepreneurship. The name IEEE N3XT® embodies the spirit of future technological development by using the root of the word “next,” and the numeral “3” to represent the three pillars of ideas, innovation, and inspiration on which our conference was founded.

IEEE owns the trademark for IEEE N3XT® and licenses the brand for use on an approval basis. The IEEE N3XT® brand is available as an add-on format, meaning that an IEEE N3XT® programming may be added to a larger event or conference, as a track, session, meetup, workshop, startup competition or other iteration.

IEEE N3XT® Affiliate Events are that events that license the IEEE N3XT® brand but are differentiated from the standalone flagship event.

The IEEE Affiliate Event Guidebook outlines the process of planning, promoting and executing a IEEE N3XT® Affiliate Event. The content contained within is intended to be a step by step toolkit can be adjusted to custom fit your needs. Additionally, the Guidebook is a living document that is regularly updated to reflect the growing breadth and variety of affiliated event styles.



Finalists show off their prize money at the Hardware Cup International Finals in Pittsburgh

OVERVIEW

The AlphaLab Gear Hardware Cup is an international pitch competition for early-stage hardware startups. Any company with a physical product component is eligible to apply, including manufactured products, Internet of things/connected devices, health/medical, consumer products & consumer electronics, food, fashion, robotics, etc. Companies are selected to pitch in regional competitions for a chance to compete at the Hardware Cup International Finals for the grand prize: a \$50,000 convertible-debt investment.

In four years, the Hardware Cup has grown from a 6-city competition to one of the largest international competitions of its kind. This year, in addition to the 6 US regional semi-final competitions, 4 other nations sent finalists to compete in the Hardware Cup International Finals in Pittsburgh.

A Few Quick Stats

- Since its inception, over 7000 entrepreneurs, investors, and members of the startup community have attended or viewed Hardware Cup events
- 7 countries have competed at the International Finals, including the US, Japan, South Korea, India, Israel, Canada, and Brazil
- The winner of the 2016 Hardware Cup went on to raise a \$2 million round just months after winning the Cup

Local, national and global media coverage, including but not limited to press in Boston, Miami, Pittsburgh, Japan, Israel, Canada, and India.

Examples: [Economic Times - India](#) [The Bridge - Japan](#) [CFC Creates - Canada](#)
[The Incline - Pittsburgh](#) [GeekWire - Seattle](#)

Past AlphaLab Gear Hardware Cup national and international sponsors have included, among others: Bosch, Arrow, Cohen & Grigsby, BNY Mellon, Innovation Works, Solidworks, Startbot Ventures, Philips, Ascender, and Computex.

Hardware Cup semi-final events are held in partnership with local hardware/startup powerhouses including the Chicago Connector, Google in Pittsburgh, Capital Factory in Austin, Make in LA, 1776 in DC, and Draper in Boston. Events consist of flash talks or a panel of industry experts, followed by a pitch competition where each of 6 semi-finalists has 4 minutes to pitch and then 4 minutes of Q&A with a panel of judges, all of whom are investors. The event ends with networking, and a “trade show” where companies that applied to compete but were not selected to pitch have an opportunity to show off their product at demo tables.

The event is win-win-win for investors who’d like to learn about what the newest companies are doing, startups who are seeking a stage as well as connections, and sponsors who want to be more involved in the burgeoning hardware startup scene.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

If you are interested in holding a Hardware Cup in your city, you’ve come to the right place! This is a preview of the full guidebook, which will guide you through the process of planning, promoting, and executing a Hardware Cup event.

You’ll notice that the “how to” guide below outlines a wide variety of useful documents — email templates, press releases, judging criteria, and more. You’ll also see reference to a Google Drive folder with graphics and other visual documents, which allows this to be a living document with constantly updated materials.

In each case, these are meant to be examples that can be edited to fit your needs. In an outreach email, for example, you’ll want to be sure to change the contact info, the name and date of the event, etc. to the details of your event. In a press release, you’ll update the names and descriptions of competing companies, but you’ll have a base to work from.

This serves two purposes:

1. You have an example of just about every type of email you’ll need to write, and don’t need to start from scratch — and this will hopefully save you lots of time!
2. Keeping the language consistent will help to keep things clear, and also to ensure that the original spirit of the AlphaLab Gear Hardware Cup is upheld in all future events.

Any IEEE chapter interested in holding a Hardware Cup should first contact **IEEE Operations**. Once approved, you can then schedule an orientation meeting with the AlphaLab Gear **Hardware Cup Coordinator**. Other questions? The Hardware Cup Coordinator will be happy to schedule a time to answer any questions and guide you through this guidebook to help you plan and execute the best event possible.

“HOW TO” GUIDE

Hardware Cup planning and execution can be broken down into 3 major sections: pre-event, event, and post-event. The following will walk you through what needs to be done at each stage, with links to example documents.

PRE-EVENT

A. Hardware Cup Preparation

1. Read blog post on why the Hardware Cup was founded [[See How Hard is Hardware blog post](#)]
2. Recruit sponsors [[See HW Cup Sponsorship Levels](#)]
3. Recruit location partner (usually a makerspace, accelerator, or like-minded organization) and come to an agreement on division of responsibilities. You can use this “How to” Guide as a task list and assign each one to either you or your location partner. We recommend day-of event logistics like chairs, AV, and food and drink be taken care of by location partner while outreach and coordination be take care of by your team.
4. Create website: AlphaLab Gear uses Wordpress and provides you with logos and graphics to include on your website in a **Google Drive** folder. Please email the Hardware Cup Coordinator to request access [You can see an example at www.hardwarecup.com]
5. Set up application [[See Hardware Cup Application Questions](#)]
6. Recruit judges (all should be investors) and panelists/flash speakers (experts in startups & tech, including moderator) [See [Past ALG Hardware Cup Judges & Panelists](#) for the full list of past participants]

B. Application Cycle

1. Outreach to accelerators, co-working spaces, universities, tech/startup publications, newspapers, Meetup groups, and other thought leaders [[See examples in Email Templates Master Doc: Step 1](#)]
2. Application review: choose approximately 6 companies to compete in regional and/or country-wide final competitions, and several more companies to have demo tables at the event. These should be early-stage physical product companies, and you should use the AlphaLab Gear judging criteria to choose them. [[See HW Cup Judges’ Score Sheet](#)]
3. Notify all applicants of decision: those chosen as a semi-finalist, those not chosen but offered a demo table, and those not chosen for either (and in this case our accelerator offers scheduled “office hours” to discuss what the company is doing and if there are alternate ways to support their work; your organization can choose to do the same) [[See Email Templates Master Doc: Step 2](#)]

C. Event Planning Logistics

1. Hold meeting with location partner to review responsibilities and get updates from both sides; assign any remaining tasks; choose emcee for event. (Use this outline as a checklist.)
2. Pitch event to journalists/tech bloggers [\[See Email Templates: Step 3\]](#)
3. Email semi-finalists, demo tables, judges, and panelists with event details. [\[See Email Templates: Step 4\]](#) (Examples of Mailchimp digital flyer campaigns and other promotional outreach documents in **Google Drive**)
4. Gather logos of each semi-finalist; update website with semi-finalist logos; announce via social media and schedule social media features on each. Also considering holding a Twitter Chat for additional buzz leading up to the event. [\[See HWCup SM Plan and Twitter Chat Checklist\]](#)
5. Order gifts and prizes for events [\[See Pre-Event Checklist\]](#) for details on each gift/prize]
6. Create [Eventbrite](#) event for competition and “text to vote” campaign for Audience Favorite (we use [Tallyspace](#)) [\[See Text to Vote for Audience Favorite\]](#)
7. Update poster with details for your event; print and distribute (editable poster in **Google Drive** folder)
8. Create and print all paper documents: event pamphlet, judge name cards, reserved signs, registration table signage (examples in **Google Drive**)
9. Create PowerPoint presentation for event; add semi-finalist pitch decks (example in **Google Drive**)
10. Check in with location partner one week before event to ensure food, AV, signage, and all other logistical matters are taken care of
11. Send reminder emails to each group: judges, panelists, semi-finalists, and attendees signed up via Eventbrite [\[See Email Templates: Step 5\]](#)

Use the [\[Pre-Event Checklist\]](#) to make sure you’re ready for the event.

EVENT

Event Format (1.5 - 2 hrs + networking):

[\[See example: Hardware Cup East Coast Regional Event Timeline\]](#)

- Demo Tables: as attendees arrive, encourage them to walk around and talk to the teams who have demo tables; this is a way to highlight teams that were not chosen to pitch at the Hardware Cup.
- Welcome including 1-minute talk from location partner and any sponsors present, outline of event, introduction of team, judges, panelists
- Panel discussion “How to grow a successful hardware startup” [\[see Questions for Panelists\]](#) or flash talks from industry leaders
- Pitch competition: each of 6 companies has 4 minutes to pitch their company (with support of PowerPoint presentation) and 4 minutes of Q&A with the panel of judges, all of whom are investors. [\[see Hardware Cup Judges’ Scoresheet\]](#)

- While judges leave the room to speak privately and decide on a winner, ask the audience to vote for their favorite company via text message. This winner will be named Audience Favorite and win a small prize. [\[See Text to Vote\]](#)
- You can then opt to either hold “lightning pitches” (1 minute pitches without a PowerPoint presentation) with local runner-up companies who were not chosen to pitch, or allow the networking part of the night to begin, noting that you’ll need to get everyone’s attention for the announcement of winners
- Judges return and announce Audience Favorite and Hardware Cup Winner; present each with prizes
- Networking and demo tables

POST-EVENT

A. Follow-up

1. Follow up email to each group (semi-finalists, tablers/1-min pitchers/judges/guests) with thank you and evaluation [\[See Email Templates: Step 6\]](#) & [\[See Event Evaluation Questions\]](#)
2. Follow up with media contacts, especially the market where the winner is from (e.g. if the winner is from Boston, follow up with Boston media contacts)

B. Administrative

1. Process prizes for finalist (As an example, AlphaLab Gear awards \$3000 cash to each regional winner, plus any local sponsor prizes. For the Audience Favorite, AlphaLab Gear awards a \$50 gift card for coffee/tea/energy drinks and a manufacturing consulting session with our parent organization, Innovation Works.)
2. Process travel reimbursements (As an example, AlphaLab Gear requires itemized receipts for all reimbursements, and offers a travel stipend of \$250 for regional competitions and between \$250 and \$500 for national competitions, depending on how far the company is traveling) [\[See IW_travel_reimbursement for finalists\]](#)

C. Public Relations/Promotion

1. Social media announcing and later promoting winners (link to social media accounts, website, any articles written on them, etc.)
2. Update website with winners and link to company websites
3. Write blog post on winners for regional competitions; write press release on winners of national competition [\[See Press Releases – launch, before finals, after finals\]](#)

AlphaLab Gear is pleased to share the Hardware Cup with IEEE chapters worldwide. We look forward to partnering with you to bring together hardware startups, investors, corporate partners, and the international technology and entrepreneurial communities.