OHIO FOUNDERS LEAGUE · SEASON 1 · 2026–27

Founder Guide

How MyVenture works, and why it works that way.

For student founders. Built from the same rules the platform runs on.

STAY. BUILD. WIN.

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IN THIS GUIDE

Founder Guide

This guide explains each part of the season the way the League designed it: what you do, how, and the reason behind it. Read it once before you register and again before your first boss fight.

Every number in this guide comes from the League's scoring engine. If the platform and this document ever disagree, the platform is right and this document is out of date.

On the web, with the Score Sandbox and the narrated walkthrough: **ofl-platform.vercel.app/learn/founders**

The season, and why it is a season

You register once, then build in public for eight months. One State Champion is crowned on May 19, 2027.

WHY IT MATTERS

A pitch competition rewards one good afternoon. The League is built to reward what you actually did between September and May. That is why the season is long, why you report every week, and why the prize capital is non-dilutive: $500,000 for the Founders Cup and $25,000 for each of three Regional Champions, with no equity taken, ever. The League wants you to keep the company you built.

The three phases exist so the field narrows on evidence. The Campus Activation Phase gets every strong venture registered by the November 20 cutoff. The Playoff puts 36 of them through eight tracked sprint weeks with a mentor each, then three live Regional Championships. Selection Sunday names ten. Seven more weeks of building, scores freeze on May 5, and the State Championship is decided on stage.

HOW IT WORKS

1 Register before November 20, 2026. There is no second window.

2 Your campus lead nominates 10 to 15 ventures. Make sure they know you exist.

3 The 36 are announced December 4. Sprint weeks run January 15 to March 5.

4 Regional Championships March 9 to 11 in Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland. Selection Sunday March 14. Blackout May 5. Championship May 19.

DATE	WHAT HAPPENS
September 29, 2026	Public announcement
November 20, 2026	Campus Activation Phase data cutoff
December 4, 2026	36 Playoff ventures announced, mentors assigned
January 15, 2027	PLAYOFF OFFICIALLY STARTS
March 9, 2027	Cincinnati Regional Championship (South Ohio) (12 ventures, 5 judges)
March 10, 2027	Columbus Regional Championship (Central Ohio)
March 11, 2027	Cleveland Regional Championship (North Ohio)
March 14, 2027	Selection Sunday (3 auto + 7 selected = 10)
May 5, 2027	Blackout
May 19, 2027	STATE CHAMPIONSHIP (State Champion crowned, $500,000 awarded)

Registration, and why you are told your stage

One flow, five steps, about ten minutes. The League tells you your stage and profile from what you have already done.

WHY IT MATTERS

Founders are bad at judging their own stage. Some undersell, most oversell, and a league where everyone picks their own starting line is not a fair race. So the discovery questions ask only about what exists today: an entity, a team, a documented problem and customer, an MVP, users, revenue, funding. The stage those answers support is the stage you get, with the reasons written out. Everyone in your cohort earned their starting line the same way.

Your profile is different. It is not a ranking. It describes how ventures like yours grow, so the League can give you the right advice and hold you to the right scale threshold later. A services firm and a software marketplace should not be told to chase the same milestones.

Some challenges are pre-checked from your answers because you have already done them. Confirm them honestly. An official will check every one of them at your first boss fight.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Your Venture: name, one line, university, team.
2. Discovery: yes or no on what exists, with follow-ups for each yes.
3. Your Profile: read your stage reasons and your profile. You do not pick either.
4. Challenges: confirm the pre-checked items. Uncheck anything you cannot prove.
5. Scorecard: your starting Traction Score and how it was built.

STAGE	WHAT IT MEANS	PROFILE	FITS
Stage 0 · Idea	Concept only: no entity, no product, no revenue.	Venture-Scale	Software, platforms, marketplaces. Growth over near-term profit.
Stage 1 · Formed	Company exists. Team assembled. Building toward something.	IP / Deep Tech	Hardware, tech transfer, deep R&D. Long cycles, patent-dependent.
Stage 2 · Validated	The market has given you a signal.	Revenue-First	Commerce, DTC, consumer products. Cash flow is king.
Stage 3 · Operating	Money coming in. Business model functioning.	Services	Consulting, agencies, professional services. People-driven.
Stage 4 · Scaling	Past 'does this work'. Now it's 'how big can this get.'		

If your campus registered you, nothing counts until you open the verification link, review every step, and accept. Decline it if the profile is not yours.

The Traction Score, and why only three things move it

Traction Score = metric points + challenge points + boss bonuses. Your stock price in the Scout market is the same number.

WHY IT MATTERS

The score has to be something a founder controls completely and a judge can trust completely. So nothing external moves it. Scouts buying your stock do not move it. Your campus lead cannot touch it. A judge cannot edit it. It goes up when you report work, complete a challenge, or beat a boss, and it goes down in exactly one case: an official audit finds something you claimed was not true.

The ten weekly metrics pay different rates at different stages on purpose. At Stage 0 the most valuable thing you can do is talk to customers, so a conversation is worth 5 points and revenue is locked. By Stage 3 the most valuable thing is money and customers, so revenue pays 5 points per $100 and conversations pay 2. The weights push you toward the work that matters at your stage, and they make it impossible to farm points doing Stage 0 work forever.

Locked metrics unlock when you beat a boss. That is the whole point of the bosses: the highest scores are only reachable by actually building the business.

HOW IT WORKS

1 Report units, not dollars or feelings: one conversation of 10 minutes or more, ten messages, one piece of content, one event, one document, one signed deal, $100 of revenue, one customer, one meaningful release, one mentor meeting of 30 minutes or more.

2 Check the rate for your stage below before you decide what to work on this week.

3 Use the Score Sandbox at the end of this guide to see how a week of numbers turns into points at each stage.

WEEKLY METRIC	UNIT	STAGE 0	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4
Customer conversations	1 per conversation (10+ min)	5 pts	4 pts	3 pts	2 pts	1 pts
Outreach sent	1 per 10 messages	3 pts	3 pts	2 pts	1 pts	1 pts
Content published	1 per piece	3 pts	2 pts	2 pts	1 pts	1 pts
Events attended / pitched	1 per event	2 pts	2 pts	2 pts	2 pts	2 pts
Contracts / proposals sent	1 per document	1 pts	2 pts	3 pts	4 pts	3 pts
Deals closed	1 per signed deal	Locked	1 pts	3 pts	5 pts	4 pts
Revenue earned	1 per $100	Locked	Locked	2 pts	5 pts	5 pts
New customers acquired	1 per customer	Locked	1 pts	3 pts	4 pts	4 pts
Product updates shipped	1 per meaningful release	2 pts	4 pts	3 pts	2 pts	2 pts

WEEKLY METRIC	UNIT	STAGE 0	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4
Mentor meetings completed	1 per meeting (30+ min)	2 pts	2 pts	2 pts	2 pts	2 pts

The weekly report, and why it is weekly

Ten numbers, once a week, due Sunday at midnight. Revise until the week closes.

WHY IT MATTERS

Weekly is the shortest cadence a founder can sustain and the longest the League can wait. A month is long enough to hide a bad stretch. A week is not. Reporting every week turns the season into a record of what you did, and that record is what officials verify, what Scouts read, and what judges interpret as momentum.

The report is also where the League compares you to your cohort. Each sprint week, your score increase minus the cohort's average increase is your Sprint VAA, value added above average. Cumulative VAA across the Playoff sets your rank within the cohort, and that rank is the Traction slice of League Scoring. It means a Stage 0 venture that outbuilds its cohort can out-score a Stage 3 venture on traction. Raw score never decides the Playoff. Progress against your peers does.

Streaks exist because consistency is the best predictor the League has. Four straight weeks earns Consistent, eight earns Dedicated, a full season earns Iron Will. Missing a week never costs points, but it resets the streak and it shows.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Open Report. Enter units for each metric. Lock in the week.
2. You see points per line, your total against last week, whether it is a personal best, and your cohort rank.
3. Revise any time before Sunday midnight. Points update with the revision.
4. Only report what happened this week. The activity feed shows your cohort what you reported.

Challenges, and why each one exists

A short list per stage. Each pays once. Finish the list and you are Boss Ready.

WHY IT MATTERS

The challenges are the work that gets a venture from one stage to the next, in the order that works. Stage 0 is about knowing what you are building and for whom. Stage 1 is about being findable and having something to sell. Stage 2 is about asking for money until someone says yes. Stage 3 is about proving people come back. Stage 4 is about building the machine. Each list is short because a short list you finish beats a long list you admire.

Every challenge shows what done looks like, because done has to mean the same thing for every venture in the cohort. A landing page with no call to action is not done. A deck you have never presented is not done. Mark a challenge done when you could show the evidence to an official, and keep the evidence.

Later and N/A exist so honesty is never punished. A Stage 1 challenge that is not the right move yet can wait. A challenge that does not fit your profile can be marked N/A and does not count against Boss Ready.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Open Challenges. Read what done looks like before you start.
2. Work the list. Mark done only what you can prove.
3. Use Later for timing and N/A for fit. Reset anything you marked by mistake.

STAGE	CHALLENGE	DONE LOOKS LIKE
0 Idea	Write down your problem, solution, and differentiation	A written one-pager you could hand to a stranger.
0 Idea	Identify your specific target customer	A one-sentence description of a real person you could go find today.
0 Idea	Research your competition	A short table of alternatives with what they do well and poorly.
0 Idea	Develop your elevator pitch	You can deliver it without notes and get a follow-up question.
0 Idea	Get feedback from real people	Notes from 5+ conversations with people you did not know before.
1 Formed	Build a basic website or landing page	A live URL with a call to action (waitlist, contact, buy).
1 Formed	Create a pitch deck	A deck you have presented at least once.
1 Formed	Build a fundraising pro forma	A spreadsheet with assumptions you can defend.
1 Formed	Define your launch offer	A written offer with a price that you could put on a landing page today.
1 Formed	Run a soft launch with 5 real users	Five strangers used it and you recorded what happened.
1 Formed	Set pricing and show it to prospects	A price list or page that prospects have reacted to.
1 Formed	Find an advisor who's built and shipped	A named advisor with a recurring check-in.

STAGE	CHALLENGE	DONE LOOKS LIKE
1 Formed	Build a lead list of 50 named prospects	A list of 50 named prospects, updated weekly.
2 Validated	Build fundraising pro forma with use-of-proceeds plan	A model plus a one-page use-of-proceeds.
2 Validated	Identify who gives money to businesses like yours	A list of 20+ named sources with why they fit.
2 Validated	Assemble evidence from Stages 0 and 1	A traction page or appendix in your deck.
2 Validated	Make the ask, repeatedly	A log of 10+ distinct asks with outcomes.
2 Validated	Pitch to a real check-writer	You were in the room, you pitched, and you have their questions written down.
2 Validated	Get signed commitments	At least one signed document promising money.
3 Operating	Track where every customer comes from	A dashboard or sheet with a source column filled in.
3 Operating	Build a referral mechanism	A live referral link, code, or program.
3 Operating	Measure your retention	A retention number you update monthly.
3 Operating	Launch targeted marketing channels	Channels with spend, output, and results tracked.
3 Operating	Run customer surveys	Survey results from 20+ customers.
3 Operating	Track sales cycle length	An average cycle length with a trend.
3 Operating	Increasing SEO coverage	Ranking pages for 5+ relevant terms.
4 Scaling	Land a channel or distribution partner	A signed partner with first orders flowing through them.
4 Scaling	Expand to a second market	First paying customers in the second market.
4 Scaling	Cross a scale threshold	The threshold crossed and documented.
4 Scaling	Launch a second offering or pricing tier	Existing customers are buying it.
4 Scaling	Win a flagship account	Signed, and you can name them.
4 Scaling	Prove your unit economics	CAC, margin, and payback documented across at least one cohort.
4 Scaling	Prepare for next round of fundraising	A round-ready data room.
4 Scaling	Build marketing automation	Automated campaigns with measured output.
4 Scaling	Build mature sales structure	A sales team or process hitting targets.

Boss fights, and why an official checks everything

Each boss has one kill shot. Prove it with evidence, an official reviews the whole stage, and you advance with a bonus.

WHY IT MATTERS

A stage gate has to be defended or it is not a gate. So every boss fight is a verification event. The official checks the kill shot, and then checks everything you claimed at that stage: every challenge marked done and every weekly number. If it holds, you get the ceremony, the bonus, a title, and the next stage with its metrics unlocked and its challenges at a higher rate. If it does not, the official writes the reason, the unprovable items are struck, and a penalty can follow. A previous stage advancement can be reversed.

Audits are public on your profile, and every Scout holding you is notified. That is deliberate. The whole League runs on self-reported numbers, and self-reported numbers only work when everyone knows they will be checked and everyone can see what happened when they were.

The kill shots are chosen because each one is the thing a founder at that stage most wants to avoid. Apathy dies when a stranger cares. Invisibility dies when the public can find you. Money dies when a dollar actually moves. Proven Demand dies when customers come back without being asked. Scale dies when the business can survive eighteen months on its own.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Gather the proof first: a screenshot, a link, a statement, a recording.
2. Submit from Challenges: describe the evidence, attach or link it. PROVEN DEMAND needs three of the five demand signals.
3. You can attempt a boss any time you have proof. Most ventures finish the challenges first.
4. If it fails, read the reason, fix the record, and submit again when you have the evidence.

BOSS	BEATS STAGE	KILL SHOT (WHAT YOU MUST PROVE)
APATHY	0 to 1	A real stranger (not friend/family) engaged with your idea: waitlist signup, email reply, survey response, recorded conversation.
INVISIBILITY	1 to 2	Publicly launch your business or MVP: live website, app in store, product on shelves, bookable service. The public can find and try you.
MONEY	2 to 3	Money moved into your account: customer payment, investor check, grant award, client retainer, pre-order. Documented.
PROVEN DEMAND	3 to 4	Accumulate 3 of 5 demand signals: (1) customer repeat purchase, (2) customer referral, (3) customer found you organically, (4) revenue/customers grew 2+ consecutive months, (5) customer said they'd be disappointed without you.

BOSS	BEATS STAGE	KILL SHOT (WHAT YOU MUST PROVE)
SCALE	4 to Final	18+ months of financial sustainability through revenue, funding, or a combination. Documented with cash position, burn rate, revenue trajectory, and committed funding.

The five demand signals: a customer made a repeat purchase; a customer referred another customer; a customer found you organically (no outreach); revenue or customers grew 2+ consecutive months; a customer said they'd be disappointed without you.
Keep an evidence folder from week one. Boss fights are easy when the folder is already full.

Cohorts, Scouts, and League Scoring

You are ranked against ventures that started where you did. Scouts back you with credits. Judges decide the rest.

WHY IT MATTERS

Cohorts exist because a fair race needs a fair starting line. Your cohort is every venture that started at your stage, and every comparison the League makes, from the dashboard to the Playoff, is within it.

Scouts exist because a venture with people behind it is a stronger venture. Students, faculty, staff, and alumni get $10,000 in play credits (not real money: no Scout ever puts money in or takes money out), hold up to ten ventures, and sell at most 3 times a week. Your price is your Traction Score, so the only way their pick pays is if you build. They are told every time you earn points and every time an audit takes points away. Their aggregate backing feeds the Fan score at live events and the Scout slice of League Scoring. Recruit them.

League Scoring decides the Regional Championships and the State Championship: Judges 60, Traction 30, Scouts 10. Five judges score six criteria from 1 to 5, and the composite normalizes to 60. Traction is your cohort rank on cumulative VAA. The split is deliberate: judges project what you could become, traction proves what you did, Scouts show who believes it.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Check your cohort rank every week on the dashboard and the Leaderboard.
2. Open any venture's public profile from the University tab to see how they are scoring.
3. Ask friends, classmates, and alumni to register as Scouts and back you.
4. Build your pitch to the six criteria below. You get the rubric in advance. There are no prescribed slides.

CRITERION	1	3	5
Problem & Market Opportunity	Assumed, not validated. Market undefined.	Validated by real customers. Market meaningful. Entry point defined.	Undeniable problem, extensive validation. Massive, well-timed market.
Solution & Differentiation	Vague, no differentiation.	Clearly solves the problem with identifiable differentiation.	Defensible moat. Demonstrated product-market pull.
Team & Execution Capability	Lacks critical skills. No execution evidence.	Core skills present. Consistent execution. Learns from mistakes.	Exceptional expertise. Coachable, resilient, hungry.
Business Model & Economics	No clear revenue model.	Defined and partially tested. Path to revenue articulated.	Proven model with strong economics.
Growth Potential & Scalability	Limited, lifestyle scale.	Credible ambition. Can articulate the 10× version.	Sees what most don't. Plan to reshape the market.
Momentum	Stagnant. No forward motion.	Steady progress. Positive trend.	Clear inflection point. Accelerating across dimensions.

All five judges count equally. No trimming. Strong convictions are signal.
Average per criterion (1.0–5.0), then sum the six averages for a composite (6.0–30.0).
Normalize: (composite ÷ 30) × 60 = Judge Points (0–60).
Scorecards are submitted digitally immediately after each pitch, before the next venture begins.