



Written Business Plan Support Guide

There are 7 major sections of the written business plan that will be scored by judges for the National Business Plan Competition*. The purpose of this guide is to assist you in your preparation of the competition. This in-depth guide is being provided to assist facilitators and their classes when creating the written business plan. Examples are given throughout this body of work as suggestions, and **are not designed to be the ideal, or sole writings within your business plan.**

Please note that this guide is geared toward Business Plan Nationals. Actuals must be as of **2/29/2024 (leap year). Be aware that this is different from Business Plan Regionals where actuals are set by the Regional Director. For all National Business Plan Qualifiers, the Written Business Plan is worth 30% and the Oral Business Plan Presentation is worth 70% of the overall score. To see more about score breakdown for National Rounds, see [here](#).*

Table of Contents

Click on the links below to jump to the appropriate section:

1. Executive Summary	2
2. Business Rationale	2
3. About the Business	3
4. External Environment	5
5. Marketing Plan	7
6. Financial Planning	10
7. Appendix	12
8. Overall Organization and Presentation	12



1. Executive Summary

Although this section is listed as the first component in the rubric, **it should be created last**. Once the entire plan has been written and finalized, the executive summary should be written in 1-2 pages, which is designed to attract the attention of an executive to the most important aspects of the plan. At a minimum, it should include an overview of the business idea and what the firm sells, customer empathy, which should determine the business rationale, the company mission, goals, financial highlights and plans for the future. **In the real world, the executive summary can be the deciding factor as to whether an executive will decide to read the rest of the plan, or to dismiss the business idea completely.**

2. Business Rationale

Please refer to the Foundational Tasks & Resources of the Curriculum in the LMS: Design Thinking Tasks 1, 2, and 3 for specific step-by-step determination

Customer Empathy / Problem Statement / Solution

Statement

This section is designed to make the students research, contemplate, and resolve their potential customers' needs and problems. Consequently, the students are required to provide the reader with a possible solution to their customers' problems and how the business will accomplish this.

Example: After extensive research and analysis has been performed by the R&D Department through surveys and statistical review, it was determined that the majority of VE firms require General Liability insurance to protect themselves from potential litigation in the event of accidents on their premises. In response, VE Law will now sell general liability insurance, as well as other pertinent insurance products to meet the insurance needs of VE firms and their employees.

Company Goals

Additionally, in this section, goals and objectives of the business should be stated, as well as providing strategies to achieve these goals. Goals should follow a SMART framework (see Management Task 5).

Example: VE Law anticipates \$1,000,000 in gross sales this fiscal year from participation in 3 trade shows, a state-of-the art website and out-of-network sales generating \$500,000.



3. About the Business

This section could probably be completed in the first 2 months of operation, since all the components of this section can be addressed in this time frame.

Company Overview

This component should indicate what the business sells, whether it's a C-Corp, B-Corp, LLC, S-Corp, etc. and why you selected this legal form of ownership over other alternatives. Companies identifying as B corps must provide results of their B Impact Assessment (<http://bimpactassessment.net/>). Companies identifying as S corps or LLC's need to provide:

- A list of all the shareholders** and;
- An explanation of how profits and losses will be allocated to each shareholder (i.e., what percentage of profits and losses will be allocated to each shareholder) and an agreement from the shareholders that they are willing to pay the taxes on the profits. List of shareholders should be included in the appendix of the written business plan.

Example: We decided to form a C-Corporation because it protects our employees and officers from legal liability in the event of litigation and allows us to raise capital by selling stock.

There should be a brief history of the company if this is an existing firm. If this is a new firm, you would state that you are a first-year firm and other pertinent information.

Example: This firm is located at 122 Amsterdam Avenue – Room 463 and was incorporated in 2025 with the sole purpose of providing translation services to VE firms and their employees. We employ over 20 associates and 6 officers, with a CEO that reports directly to the Board of Directors.

Mission Statement

This should be a compelling statement and not something to be treated lightly. **The true purpose of a mission statement is to tell the world why you chose this field and business to make money rather than all the other possible alternatives that could have been chosen.**

Example: The mission of Clean Streets Forever is to provide the forum, workforce, and expertise to help cities across the US maintain an ergonomically-friendly inner-city environment that can be an example for urban dwelling nationwide.



Organization

Basically, this section of the plan should display an Organizational Chart, identifying the positions of the firm, as well as the employees in those positions. The chart should display some form of hierarchy/matrix/chain of command. **Some firms provide a write-up to further explain why this organizational structure makes the firm successful.**

SWOT Analysis

This component is usually provided in some form of a grid format with 4 quadrants to visually explain the analysis; but tables, or other formats work just as well. Additionally, there should be an explanation below the visual to further explain your mitigation and proactive measures where they apply.

<p>Strengths are internal and should represent positive aspects of the firm that are controllable. <i>Be certain to explicate how the firm uses its strengths to give it a competitive edge in the market.</i></p> <p><i>Example: Experienced management team and 12 employees who are multilingual to provide the best possible translation service for our clients.</i></p>	<p>Weaknesses are internal disadvantages that your firm needs to address to meet your goals. <i>Be certain to demonstrate how the firm proactively mitigates or has mitigated potential weaknesses.</i></p> <p><i>Example: Limited work hours to provide our service and an inexperienced staff with limited training. Hours will expand with increased business activity. Staff is currently on a training schedule.</i></p>
<p>Opportunities are external openings for something positive to happen for the firm. <i>Be certain to explicate how the firm uses opportunities to give it a competitive edge in the market.</i></p> <p><i>Example: Attending 3 trade exhibitions to maximize revenue and plan to organize a networking event at your firm to increase exposure and marketability.</i></p>	<p>Threats are external disadvantages that can negatively affect the firm. Threats should not be confused with risks, which will be discussed later in this guide. <i>Be certain to demonstrate how the firm proactively mitigates or has mitigated potential threats.</i></p> <p><i>Example: New competitors in the field, natural disasters that could shut down the firm. Liability and Business interruption insurance has been acquired.</i></p>



4. External Environment

Current Economic Conditions

This section is designed for the firm to demonstrate understanding of the current economic conditions, both nationally and internationally. While it is important to state key points like GDP, GNP, Exchange Rates, inflation rates, Prime Rate, Fed Funds borrowing rate, etc., the key here is to articulate how this information is affecting your VE firm, your industry, and even VE as a whole, if applicable. **Just stating economic conditions is not relevant unless you show how this information is pertinent to your business. Firms may use their discretion pertaining to the number and which specific economic indicators/conditions they wish to discuss in their plans.**

Real Industry Analysis

This component should reveal your understanding of the real industry your VE operates in. Is the industry a growth industry, stagnant, or on the precipice of becoming obsolete in the next few years? Consider including a graph demonstrating past performance over the last several years. Additionally, you may consider providing another graph with professionally cited information projecting potential results for the next 5 years. There should be dollar amounts provided for revenue earned; number of people employed in the industry; competition and potential threats, or opportunities that lie ahead.

Virtual Industry Analysis

This component should demonstrate how your VE firm is adapting and has reacted to current economic conditions and the facts pertaining to the real industry. It should also reveal the difference between the real industry and the virtual one. Explaining your understanding of the differences between the real and virtual industry is an important factor. You should state how revenue is generated in VE, the number of firms here and abroad, the dollar amount in sales generated by VE firms in this industry and the impact of this information on your firm.

Helpful Resource

Reference the VE Market Insights Tool to assist you in this endeavor
insights.veinternational.org (Hub → VE Market Insights)



Competitive Analysis

This section should identify all direct and indirect competitors for your firm. A direct competitor provides the exact, or very similar product or service that your firm provides. An indirect competitor may sell different products or services, but target the same market and customer segments.

***Example:** Concierge Ticket brokerage sold tickets virtually to sporting and Broadway events. VE firms that also sell tickets to the same events are direct competitors and include VE firms XYZ events and ABC Tickets.. Firms selling tickets to unrelated events are indirect competitors such as LMN Fun Times.*

Additionally, you should state how your firm compares to the competition and state the **competitive advantage** your firm has over them and why. A common mistake that many firms make is stating that they are in competition with a real-world firm. **That is rarely true.** Polyglot Translations provided translation services to VE firms and employees and were in competition with the real-world Google Translate App. However, that is a very rare instance when a VE firm directly competes with a real-world firm. Also, at trade shows, it should be stated that **all firms participating in the trade show are potential indirect competitors, regardless of what they sell**, because every VE booth is attracting potential customers to their booths and away from yours.

***Example:** There are no other firms in VE that offer the variety and price points that Concierge can provide. We offer slightly lower prices in many cases, and a much broader range of options in all cases.*

To determine who potential competitors are, you should utilize the Firm Directory in Marketplace Tools ([Hub](#) → [Marketplace Tools](#) → [Firm Directory](#)).



5. Marketing Plan

A marketing plan, in its simplest form, determines who will potentially buy your product/service and how you plan to let them know who you are and why they need to buy your product /service.

Target Market & Market Segmentation

This component should specify your primary, secondary and even tertiary markets. Additionally, is your firm appealing to firms, or employees, or both? That's a critical distinction. If you intend to spend the majority of your selling and advertising in the NYC market, then NYC is your primary market. If you plan to branch out and go to San Francisco, Tennessee, Chicago, etc. for a one-time selling event, then that geographic region would be a secondary market. If you plan to send emails to European firms directing them to your website, but don't intend to attend a European trade fair, then Europe would be a tertiary market. Additionally, be specific about the demographics of your customers

Example:

- **Demographics:** *Customers are between 16-18 years old, earn between \$15-\$20 per hour or \$50,000-\$125,000 in annual VE salary*
- **Geographics:** *Firms in the New York City, San Francisco, and Canadian markets*
- **Psychographics:** *Gen-Z students that regularly use cellphones and rely on apps and social media and expect instant results*
- **Socioeconomics:** *Most VE employees within our secondary market are from middle-class households with median household incomes of over \$100,000 per annum*

The real issue here is how to determine this information. Your VE firm needs to research the VE market, send surveys, use the firm directory, etc. It's not that hard to determine that most VE employees are between 16- 18 in the US. **However, in Europe, the ages are really 17-19 because the education system is different in Europe and students don't move on to "University" until 19 on average.** In Canada, if your firm determines it wants to sell to firms and employees there, the system is totally different. Many of the firms are in Quebec Province and the language is French. Outside of Quebec, it's English. Additionally, Canada calls their system "Practice Firms", as they do in Europe, and **their practice firms are comprised of Canadian adults who are in transition from unemployment to gainful employment.** Therefore, when students in the US contact firms in Canada, or any other foreign country, they should perform appropriate research on these countries to ensure their marketing approach is accurate.

Marketing Mix



The 5 P's of Marketing now come into play in this component and are extremely important. Additionally, many firms, when putting the business plan together, do not always understand the real purpose of some of these "P"s. It is important to not only explain what is your marketing mix but also **how** your Product, Pricing, Placement, Promotion, and Positioning entice the customer to buy from the firm.

Marketing Mix: Product

This is what you are selling. An explanation of the product/service is critical, as well as how you explain it.

Exercise

Concierge sells tickets to events at market price.

OR

Concierge sells tickets to premium Broadway shows, sporting events, and concerts at 3 different price points to meet the demands and budgets of all our clients.

Which explanation would look better in the business plan?

Marketing Mix: Pricing

This sounds like an easy "P", but it's not. In a business plan, you not only have to state what your prices are, but how you arrived at them. Are your prices based upon demand (Demand-based Pricing), or based upon covering your costs (Cost-based pricing), or what your competition is charging (Competition-based pricing)? Your firm needs to do some research on different pricing methods and then you need to make a case in your business plan as to why you chose that specific pricing method.

Marketing Mix: Placement

Placement has 2 major components. Where are your sales being made and how are you sending the product/service to the customer? VE is **not** an economy where there are traditional storefronts and you get walk-in business from the street. **The majority of your income is at trade shows, email solicitations and website sales. The product, or service, is usually sent by email, or through a virtual shipping company.**

Marketing Mix: Promotion

This "P" is how you are getting the message out to your potential clients. If you are Target, you spend \$1,500,000,000 per year in a worldwide advertising campaign on TV, radio, billboards, etc. As a small VE firm, you have a small budget and need to spend money



wisely. Many VE firms create a website and send an email link of their website to VE firms in their determined markets. **Is it cost-effective?** Some firms spend up to \$100,000 virtual dollars per year with a VE advertising agency to promote their product/service for them. Some firms do their own campaigns and have a small budget to spend with an advertising firm as well. Another option is social media marketing, which has high exposure and affordable costs. Show or explain what type of campaign you are using for social media and other promotions, and why this is effective in creating interest with your target audience.

Marketing Mix: Positioning

This “P” is supposed to reveal how your firm has positioned itself in the market. The best illustration of this would be to explain the difference between Cadillac and Kia. Cadillac has positioned itself in the car market as a car manufacturer that appeals to people who are in a wealthy socio-economic level and demand a significant level of performance, luxury and status. Kia has positioned itself as a car manufacturer that appeals to someone who is looking for reliable transportation from point A to point B and is concerned with saving money. They have positioned themselves on the opposite end of the spectrum from Cadillac, Mercedes, Lincoln, Audi, and BMW. Your VE firm needs to be able to make that distinction with potential clients. Are you an “everybody” firm appealing to all VE firms and their employees, or are you just appealing to firms with high incomes? Or some other specialized criteria?

Discussion of Business Risks

Note the difference between a risk and a threat. **A threat** is an outside force or external force that could create negative effects for the business. **A risk** is the extent to which a negative event can impact the business.

Additionally, for every risk you state, you should have a mitigation statement, putting the reader at ease that you are aware of the risk and you have a plan to prevent the risk from having an adverse effect on the firm.

Example of a threat: A storm

Example of a risk: That potential of \$1 million in lost profit incurred from being unable to have operating hours due to said storm.

Corporate Social Responsibility Goals

In collaboration with the Human Resources Department, review the firm’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals. In what ways does the firm’s marketing strategy work towards accomplishing these goals? For example, if a technology manufacturing firm’s goal is to be



80% carbon neutral by 2030, then they should explain how the components of their technology are carbon neutral. If the same firm has the CSR goal to provide technological education to over 300 students by 2028, then they may highlight that they promote on social media platforms or other places where young people frequent.

6. Financial Planning

When creating the financial statements, please remember to add footnotes that provide an explanation for months in which the firm generated high revenue, little revenue, or no revenue. **Treat the reader of the plan as someone who knows nothing about VE and explain things.** Don't assume that the judge knows there is no school in the summer, so they won't require any explanation of \$0 revenue for 3 or 4 months. **Using the templates in the reference file section of the Accounting & Finance section of the curriculum is critical.** These templates will provide the students with the framework that is expected in the business plan. While you do not have to use them, **it is strongly recommended that you do.**

**Please note that actuals in this section differ from that of Regional Business Plans. For the National Business Plan Competition, ensure that actuals are as of 2/29/2024.*

Break-even Analysis

This template will determine what a firm's break even point is based upon the following factors that must be determined and input by a VE firm; **average selling price** (usually determined by adding all the prices of every item you sell and then dividing by the number of items you sell); **fixed costs** (these are costs that **are not a function of sales**, such as rent, utilities, salaries, matching FICA, matching Medicare, etc.); **variable costs** (these are costs that **are a function of sales**, like Costs of Goods Sold, ink, paper, postage, etc.). The template will automatically calculate the total costs for your firm for each level of sales illustrated in the template. It will calculate the **average profit rate %, the breakeven point in units of sales and sales dollars**. If a firm exceeds its breakeven point, it is making a **profit**. If it hasn't reached its break even point, it is incurring a **loss**.

Sales Projection Summary

This report is basically the top portion of the income statement from previous years. Breakout projected sales revenue by online sales, trade show sales, direct sales, out-of-network sales, and interest from any bank accounts (if applicable). **The total of this report should equal the Gross Revenue amount on the Summary Profit & Loss Statement.**



Summary Profit & Loss Statement

This report has been simplified from the Income Statement from previous years. The report must show projected totals as of 4/30 of the fiscal year: 1) Gross Revenue for the fiscal year 2) Cost of Goods Sold 3) Gross Profit 4) Gross Profit Margin % 5) Total operating expenses and 6) Net Income/Loss. However, the figures for the Operating Expenses should derive from the **Startup Budget Worksheet** created early in the year as an attachment to the **Business Registration Form**. This worksheet should be included in the Appendix of the Business Plan. If there are significant changes from the original worksheet, a page of explanation should also be included in the Appendix. To justify the **Gross Revenue number, it should equal the total from the new Sales Projection Summary report.**

Please Note

For those firms that intend to compete for qualification in the National Business Plan Competition, students should complete the advanced Profit & Loss Summary template, which requires more specific information and will earn a higher score from the judges.

Balance Sheet

This template allows the students to enter data for every Balance Sheet account and will provide a balance sheet acceptable for the business plan. The balance sheet must be as of 2/29 of the fiscal year **with actual numbers or based dates set by your regional team.** The cash balance on this document must reconcile to the bank statement balance in the Appendix.

Using the new “QuickBooks” Accounting program will go a long way in being able to produce this document and do all the leg work for you when producing the actual numbers. Remember that $\text{Assets} = \text{Liabilities} + \text{Owner's Equity}$. If the balance sheet does not balance, **that is a significant deduction.**

Please refer to the Future of Work Learning Series: QBO in the Materials section of the QBO Accounting tasks of the curriculum in the VE-LMS.

[Hub / VE-LMS / Accounting & Finance / QBO Tasks](#)



7. Appendix

This section must contain a **“Notes or Citations to Research”** page which tells the reader where you obtained your facts, such as the details in the **Current economic conditions** section and the **Real industry analysis** section. Also, a copy of any **“Out of Network” (Non-VE) contracts, Angel Investor letters, Loan Amortization Schedule**, and a copy of the **Bank Statement as specified by the Regional Director or National Business Plan Scoring Guide**.

*Please remember that fabricated information about the financials, marketing, operations, other VE firms, or any part of the business plan can result in disqualification.

Loan Amortization Schedule

This template is also available in Microsoft Office-Excel and is an excellent tool used by all banks and finance companies to determine the loan payment, broken down into principal and interest for every month. Therefore, **if your firm has a loan, there should be a copy of the loan amortization schedule in the appendix**. This document breaks down the monthly payment into principal and interest, which firms need for accounting purposes. All firms with loans must provide a copy of the loan amortization table in the Appendix.

Please Note

There is a template for loan amortization in the Reference Files of the Accounting & Finance section of the VE-LMS as well.

B Corps / S Corps / LLCs

Companies identifying as B corps must provide results of their B Impact Assessment (<http://bimpactassessment.net/>). Companies identifying as S corps or LLC’s need to provide:

- A list of all the shareholders** and;
- An explanation of how profits and losses will be allocated to each shareholder (i.e., what percentage of profits and losses will be allocated to each shareholder) and an agreement from the shareholders that they are willing to pay the taxes on the profits. List of shareholders should be included in the appendix of the written business plan.

8. Overall Organization and Presentation

The overall organization and presentation of the plan is **worth 10%**. The Appendix is a critical component of this segment of the rubric and required to achieve the additional 10%.