



# **Startup Survivor Pitch Competition**

Presented by The Forge Incubator at McMaster University



## **Land Acknowledgement**

McMaster University recognizes and acknowledges that it is located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and within the lands protected by the Dish With One Spoon wampum agreement.

# The Forge Incubator at McMaster

## What is it?

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- **Startup Incubator** for McMaster University and Hamilton Region
- Supports **entrepreneurship and innovation** on campus and in the community
- Helps entrepreneurs **launch business ideas** and **grow startups**
- Connects McMaster students with startups for **work and experiential learning**
- **Website:** <https://theforge.mcmaster.ca>
- **Contact:** Mariya Leslie, Manager of Student Entrepreneurship, [mariya@theforge.mcmaster.ca](mailto:mariya@theforge.mcmaster.ca)



# The Forge Incubator at McMaster

## 10 Year Legacy

- 300+ Businesses Incubated
- \$67 Million+ Funds Raised
- 1,000+ Jobs Created
- 50+ Countries Reached

### BOARD BALL

The central graphic displays logos for several companies incubated by The Forge at McMaster. The logos are arranged in a grid-like fashion. From top-left to bottom-right, the logos are: nix Color Sensor; VOXNEURO™ GIVE THE BRAIN A VOICE; EMN; LONGAN VISION; EPINEURON TECHNOLOGIES; in Charge; TENOMIX; InputHealth; ADMASS; and MARINER ENDOSURGERY. Additionally, there is a circular logo on the bottom left that says 'TOQUES FROM THE HEART' with a red maple leaf in the center.



# Startup Survivor



# Startup Survivor

## What is it?

### \$65,000 Entrepreneurship Training Program and \$30,000 Startup Pitch Competition

- **Next Cohort:** May - August 2025 (Summer term)
- **Application Deadline:** March 31, 2025
- **Program website:**  
<https://theforge.mcmaster.ca/programs/startup-survivor>





## Program Benefits

# Startup Survivor

## Program Benefits

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- **\$5,000-\$10,000 funding per team**
  - Non-dilutive; McMaster does not take equity
  - Amount depends on industry sector
- **Weekly one-on-one mentorship**
- **Professional service provider advisory**
  - Corporate lawyers, intellectual property lawyers, accountants, insurance experts
- **10 Entrepreneurship workshops delivered by industry experts**
- **Investor Pitch Day**
  - Potential for \$50,000 investment (dilutive)
  - One-on-one pitch coaching to help prepare
- **Co-working inside McMaster Innovation Park**
- **Makerspace and prototyping advisory**
- **Entrepreneur meetups and socials**
- **\$30,000 Pitch Competition for top five teams**





# Program Overview

# Startup Survivor

## Program Overview

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- Program duration: **May 1 – August 29, 2025** (Summer term).
- Goal: Team completes **monthly business & technical challenges** to fast-track startup.
- Workshops: Each challenge begins with 2-3 **workshops facilitated by industry experts**.
- Mentorship: **Weekly mentor meeting** to help with challenges and provide strategic advisory.
- Challenges: Expert Review Panels provide **feedback and team scores**. Total score determines top 5 teams.
- Time commitment: Team commits **minimum 20 hours per week** to working on their business.
- Funding: When team completes challenges, they are rewarded with **funding** (Total: \$5,000-\$10,000).



## Eligibility Criteria

# Startup Survivor

## Eligibility Criteria

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- ✓ Founding team must have at least one McMaster University **student or recent alumnus** (up to 1 year from graduation).
  - Open to undergraduate and graduate students/alumni.
  - Open to all faculties and programs.
  - McMaster founder must hold equity in business; cannot be a non-equity holding team member/intern/volunteer.
  
- ✓ Must have a novel business idea or early-stage startup.
  
- ✓ All industry sectors are welcome as long as you're developing a scalable business model.



## Program Format

# Startup Survivor

## Program Format

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- **Challenge 1 (February & March)**

- Workshop: Customer Discovery

- **Challenge 2 (May)**

- Workshop: Business Modelling
- Workshop: Market Segmentation
- Workshop: Customer Journey Mapping

- **Challenge 3 (June)**

- Workshop: Prototyping Theory
- Workshop: Prototyping Methods

- **Challenge 4 (July)**

- Workshop: Go-To-Market Strategy
- Workshop: Sales Process Success

- **Challenge 5 (August)**

- Workshop: Pitching to Investors
- Workshop: Financial Modelling



# Startup Survivor

## Events Calendar

**Note:** This is a draft calendar for Summer 2025. Events dates are subject to speaker availability.

### Legend

**Orange:** Orientation (4hrs in-person)

**Blue:** Workshop (2hrs in-person)

**Yellow:** Mentor Meeting (1hr virtual)

**Green:** Cohort Meetup (3hrs in-person)

**Red:** Pitch Day (1hr in-person)

## MAY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1 Orientation Day	2	3
4	5 Challenge 2 Workshop A	6 Challenge 2 Workshop B	7 Challenge 2 Workshop C	8	9	10
11	12	13 Mentorship (select 1 day)		14	15	16
17	18	19 Holiday	20 Mentorship (select 1 day)		21	22
23	24	25 Mentorship (select 1 day)		26 Cohort Meetup	27	28
29	30	31 Mentorship (select 1 day)				

## JUNE

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1 Submission Deadline	2 Challenge 3 Workshop A	3 Challenge 3 Workshop B	4	5	6	7
8	9	10 Mentorship (select 1 day)		11	12	13
14	15	16 Mentorship (select 1 day)		17	18	19
20	21	22 Mentorship (select 1 day)		23 Cohort Meetup	24	25
26	27	28 Submission Deadline				
29	30	31 Submission Deadline				

## JULY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	
		1 Holiday	2 Challenge 4 Workshop A	3 Challenge 4 Workshop B	4	5	
6	7	8 ← Write GTM Workbook Draft →				9	10
11	12	13 Mentorship (select 1 day)		14	15	16	
17	18	19 Mentorship (select 1 day)		20 Cohort Meetup	21	22	
23	24	25 Mentorship (select 1 day)		26 Submission Deadline	27	28	
29	30	31 Mentorship (select 1 day)					

## AUGUST

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1 Challenge 5 Workshop A	2
3	4 Holiday	5 Challenge 5 Workshop B	6 ← Create Skeleton Pitch Deck →			7
8	9	10 Pitch Practice (Select 1 day)		11	12	13
14	15	16 Pitch Practice (Select 1 day)		17	18	19
20	21	22 Cohort Meetup		23 Submission Deadline	24 Investor Pitch Day	25
26	27	28 Program Ends		29	30	31



## **\$30,000 Startup Survivor Pitch Competition**



# Startup Survivor

## \$30,000 Pitch Competition





# Startup Survivor

## \$30,000 Pitch Competition

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- Top 5 Teams invited to Pitch Competition during **McMaster Entrepreneurship Week** in November 2025.
- Public event at McMaster University with 200-300 people in attendance.
- 5-min startup pitches and Q&A with **Investor Judging Panel**.
- **Cash Prizes**
  - First Place: \$15,000
  - Second Place: \$10,000
  - Third Place: \$5,000
- Acceptance into **Forge Incubator Lite Program**:  
Mentorship, access to service providers, 250+ startup discounts and perks.



# Application Process

# Startup Survivor

## Application Process

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**Application Deadline:** March 31, 2025.

**Application Process:**

**Part 1 of 2:** Complete customer interviews and fill out Customer Discovery Excel File.

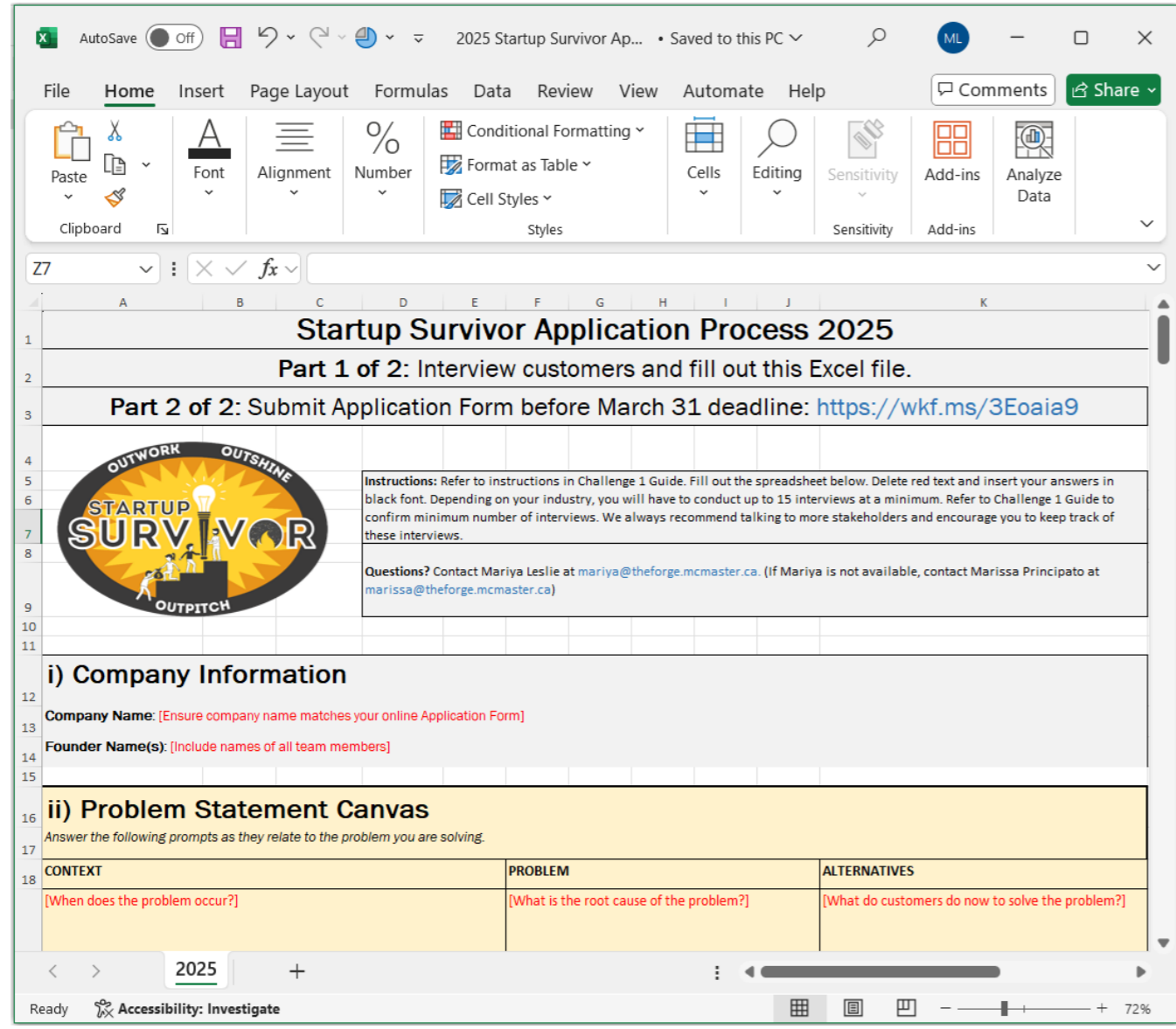
**Part 2 of 2:** Submit Application Form: <https://wkf.ms/3Eoaia9>



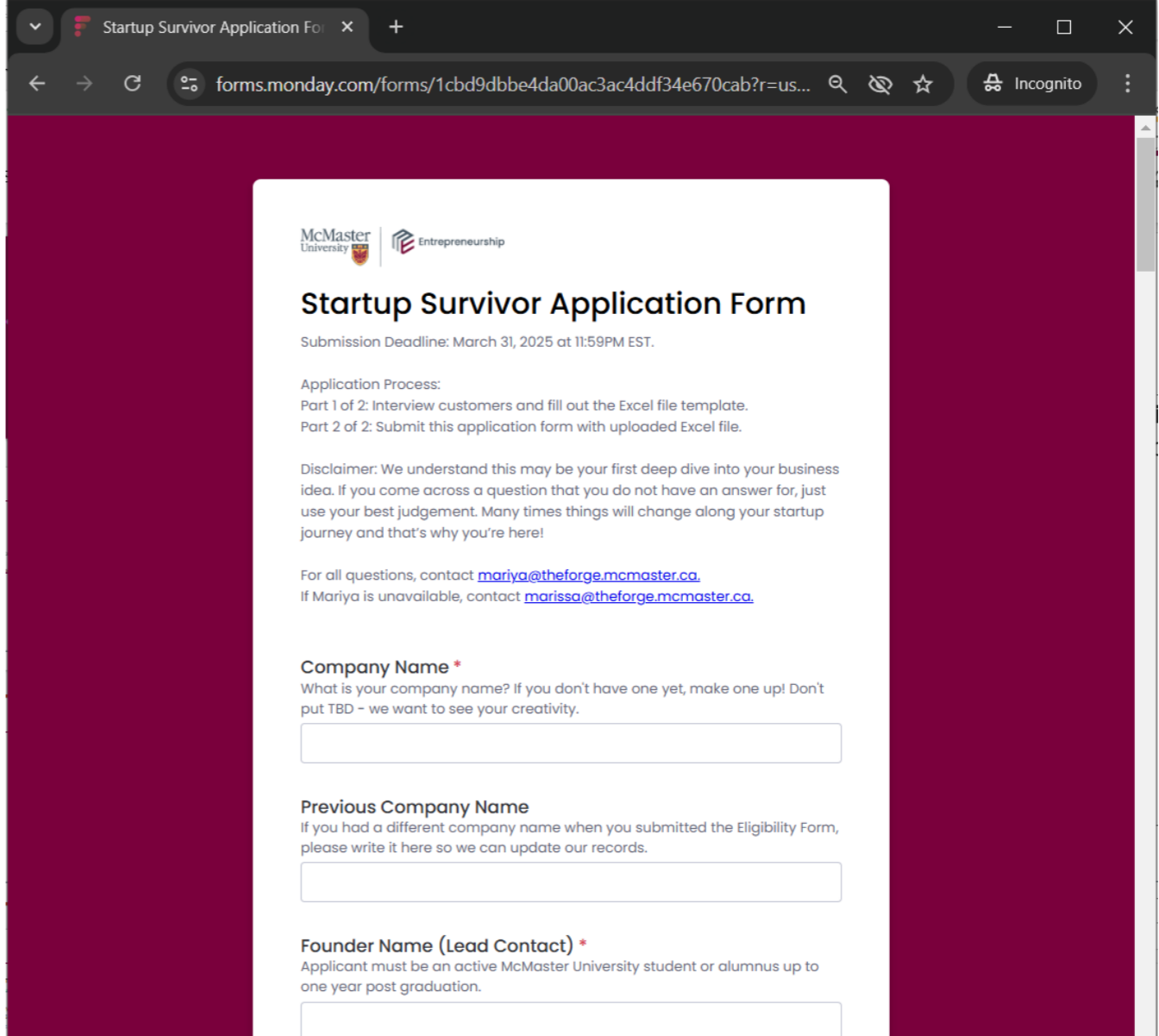
# Startup Survivor

## Application Process

### Application Part 1 of 2: Customer Discovery Excel File



### Application Part 2 of 2: Application Form



# Startup Survivor

## Helpful Resources

### Challenge Guide



Innovation doesn't start with an idea, a widget, or a prototype. Innovation starts with a **problem**.

In Challenge 1, we want you as founders to **forget about your solution**. Most of the time, founders come to The Forge with solutions but very often change these solutions after they do proper customer research. We want you to keep an open mind and avoid jumping to a solution. This challenge will teach you customer discovery methods to help you understand the problem you are trying to solve on a deeper level – through the eyes of your customers.

For example: The entrepreneurial journey for Airbnb founders Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia started in 2007 when they were attempting to travel from New York to San Francisco for a conference.

**The problem?** They could not find a cheap hotel room. All the affordable, inexpensive hotels in San Francisco had been quickly snapped up leaving only premium establishments at a minimum cost of \$300/night – completely out of their budget. As Brian and Joe asked other conference attendees about their journey to find a hotel, they discovered a strong pattern.

#### Goals for this Challenge

- Identify what is the problem
- Who is having this problem
- Understand whether this problem is important
- Identify patterns that cross from one customer to the next

#### Instructions

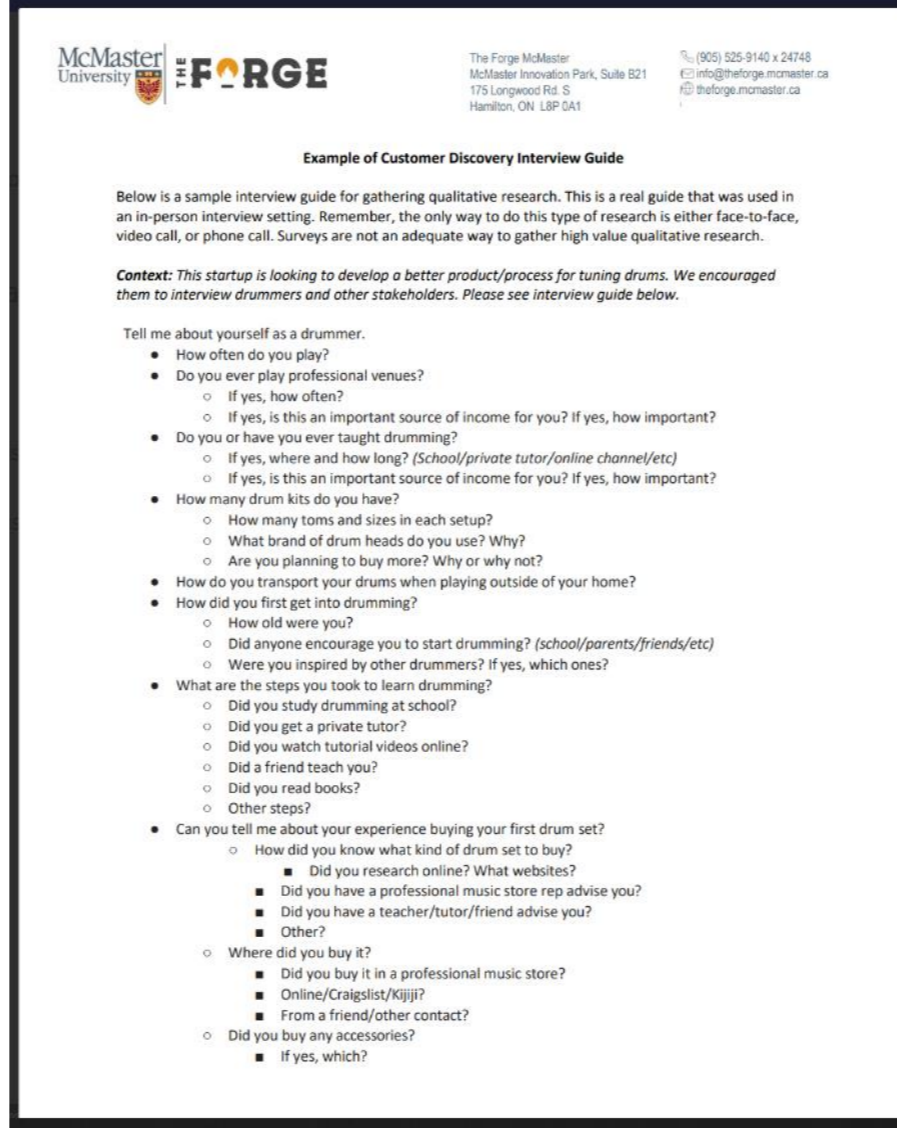
- Attend Startup Survivor Workshop to learn about the Customer Discovery Process.
- Based on your current knowledge about the problem you wish to solve, fill in the template 'Problem Statement Canvas' in the Excel file.

Ask yourself:

- When does the problem occur?
- Who has the problem most often?
- What is the root cause of the problem?
- What is the measurable impact of the problem?
- What do customers do now to solve the problem?
- What are the disadvantages of the alternatives?

It's okay if you don't know the answers to some of the above questions. Customer interviews will help you answer them!

### Sample Interview Qs



McMaster University THE FORGE

The Forge McMaster  
McMaster Innovation Park, Suite B21  
175 Langwood Rd S  
Hamilton, ON L8P 0A1

(905) 525-9140 x 24748  
info@theforge.mcmaster.ca  
theforge.mcmaster.ca

#### Example of Customer Discovery Interview Guide

Below is a sample interview guide for gathering qualitative research. This is a real guide that was used in an in-person interview setting. Remember, the only way to do this type of research is either face-to-face, video call, or phone call. Surveys are not an adequate way to gather high value qualitative research.

**Context:** This startup is looking to develop a better product/process for tuning drums. We encouraged them to interview drummers and other stakeholders. Please see interview guide below.

Tell me about yourself as a drummer.

- How often do you play?
- Do you ever play professional venues?
  - If yes, how often?
  - If yes, is this an important source of income for you? If yes, how important?
- Do you or have you ever taught drumming?
  - If yes, where and how long? (School/private tutor/online channel/etc)
  - If yes, is this an important source of income for you? If yes, how important?
- How many drum kits do you have?
  - How many toms and sizes in each setup?
  - What brand of drum heads do you use? Why?
  - Are you planning to buy more? Why or why not?
- How do you transport your drums when playing outside of your home?
- How did you first get into drumming?
  - How old were you?
  - Did anyone encourage you to start drumming? (school/parents/friends/etc)
  - Were you inspired by other drummers? If yes, which ones?
- What are the steps you took to learn drumming?
  - Did you study drumming at school?
  - Did you get a private tutor?
  - Did you watch tutorial videos online?
  - Did a friend teach you?
  - Did you read books?
  - Other steps?
- Can you tell me about your experience buying your first drum set?
  - How did you know what kind of drum set to buy?
    - Did you research online? What websites?
    - Did you have a professional music store rep advise you?
    - Did you have a teacher/tutor/friend advise you?
    - Other?
  - Where did you buy it?
    - Did you buy it in a professional music store?
    - Online/Craigslist/Kijiji?
    - From a friend/other contact?
  - Did you buy any accessories?
    - If yes, which?

### Office Hours



STARTUP SUPPORT

## OFFICE HOURS WITH THE FORGE

INTERESTED IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP? READY TO PITCH FOR MONEY?

DO YOU HAVE A STARTUP?

Book a 30-minute virtual meeting with Mariya Leslie by contacting: [mariya@theforge.mcmaster.ca](mailto:mariya@theforge.mcmaster.ca)

# Startup Survivor

## Application Process

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**INCOMPLETE or LATE applications will NOT be accepted.**

- You have over one month to complete customer interviews and submit application.
- If you're planning to apply on the last day, please submit application several hours before the 11:59PM deadline to avoid unexpected technical issues, etc.

### ACCOMODATIONS

- If you require an accommodation, you must submit request via email to [mariya@theforge.mcmaster.ca](mailto:mariya@theforge.mcmaster.ca) BEFORE February 14, 2025.



# Startup Survivor

## Application Next Steps

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- **April 1 - 11:** Virtual application review by Selection Committee made up of investors, entrepreneurs, and business advisors.
- **April 14 - 17:** Virtual interviews with 15 semi-finalists.
- **April 18:** Program acceptances sent to 10 finalists.
- **April 22:** Deadline to sign and send back contracts to officially join 2025 Startup Survivor cohort.
- **April 28:** Startup Survivor cohort announcement.
- **May 1:** In-person Orientation Day at 12:00-4:00PM in The Forge at McMaster Innovation Park.

# Q&A