



Programs

tecBRIDGE provides a variety of mission-driven programs throughout the year. The following programs are active commitments for fiscal 2026 – 2027 (alpha):

- Business Plan Competitions (High School, Collegiate, Non-Collegiate)
- High School Big Idea Essay Competition
- High School Internship Program
- Innovation Conference
- Keystone Innovation Zone
- TechCelerator Program
- Youth Entrepreneurship Conference

Each of these programs are described further on the following pages.



Business Plan Competitions (High School, Collegiate, Non-Collegiate)

History and Perspective:

In April of this year, tecBRIDGE held its 24th Annual Business Plan Competition Awards Event at the FM Kirby Center in Wilkes-Barre with over two hundred students, parents, and community members in attendance.

We currently support competitions in three divisions: High School, Collegiate, and Non-Collegiate. The College Division is our oldest competition and is now “one of the top ten oldest continuous Business Plan Competitions in the U.S.”

As a member of the greater NEPA community, if you are familiar with tecBRIDGE, you probably know us from one of our Business Plan Competitions or Awards Events. Our supporters often refer to the annual Awards Event as “the leading celebration of entrepreneurship and innovation in NEPA”.

Timeframe:

Fall through Spring, culminating in the Annual Awards Event in April.

Team awareness activities traditionally begin in the Fall when students return to high school or one of the local colleges or universities. To be competitive in the Spring Competitions, most ventures need to start with ideation and initial research before the year end holidays. Recruiting for the Non-Collegiate Division is a year-round activity.

Insights from this year’s Competitions:

- Thirty-three (33) high school students participated in this year’s High School BPC.
- Eighteen (18) Collegiate & Non-Collegiate teams participated in the Help Sessions.
- Seventeen (17) Subject Matter Experts participated in the Help Sessions.
- Fifty-One (51) individual help sessions were conducted, with additional conversations continuing afterwards.
- Nineteen (19) community members participated as High School, College, or Non-Collegiate Judges.
- Over thirty (30) organizations provided direct sponsorship support for team prize money and event overhead.

Learn more about the Collegiate and Non-Collegiate Competitions [here](#) and the High School Competition [here](#).



High School Big Idea Essay Competition

History and Perspective:

This year marked the 7th annual High School Big Idea Essay Competition. The purpose of this Competition is to provide all students with an opportunity to share individual perspectives on issues that impact NEPA.

Past essay questions have explored entrepreneurship, community environment, and Artificial Intelligence. This year our question was on Energy.

The Big Idea Essay Champion receives a \$1,000 stipend to put towards future education initiatives and four other finalists receive \$500 stipends.

Timeframe:

The annual Big Idea Essay Question is announced at the November Youth Entrepreneurship Conference. Essay submissions are typically due at the end of March and the Award Winner is announced at the Business Plan Competition Awards Event in April.

Insights from past Competitions:

- Over the years we have had active participation from over a dozen school districts in the greater NEPA footprint.

Learn more about the High School Big Idea Essay Competition [here](#).



High School Internship Program

History and Perspective:

The tecBRIDGE High School Summer Internship Program is now in its fourth summer. This is a grant funded initiative thanks to generous financial support from the William G. McGown Charitable Fund, AllOne Charities, and NEPA Gives. This is a paid internship program with 28 students participating from across the region this year.

Based on lessons learned over the years, this summer we are focusing on three tracks of student interest – business, health science, and software engineering.

- The Business Cohort is working on a range of projects including students that wish to continue investing in the venture concepts from this year's High School Business Plan Competition. Business Cohort students are also scheduled to work with former BPC companies OCOA, Optimist Intelligence, and WildKeeps.
- The Health Science Cohort conducts weekly hands-on lab experiments at the University of Scranton with the Sweeney Innovation Solutions Cardiovascular Model as well as additional team assignments.
- The Software Engineering Cohort will build on principles from our Vibe-Coding "Pop Up Event" that we hosted at Luzerne County Community College in February. TechCelerator graduates TechA11y, Quick Stx, and CrashWith have agreed to support student project development efforts.
- All cohort students meet in weekly workshops on skill development including pursuing the tecBRIDGE Entrepreneurship Competencies Credential.
- Cohort members will attend the August tecBRIDGE Innovation Conference on Energy.

Timeframe:

School Counselor engagement has evolved into a year round activity in order to identify our target student audience candidates (rising seniors). We have four founding school districts that act as our cornerstones for the Program.

Student nominations take place in the Spring. The actual internship length depends on individual student summer commitments with our goal of providing each participate with between 50 – 60 hours of paid internship time.

Students typically begin their internships at the end of June and finish in August.

Insights from the Program:

- This Program has significant potential for the future of our region.



Innovation Conference

History and Perspective:

This year's Eighth Annual tecBRIDGE Innovation Conference will be held on Thursday, August 13th at the Luzerne County Community College Education Conference Center in Nanticoke.

Our topic for this year's Conference is Energy. Luke Bernstein, President of the PA Chamber of Commerce, and NEPA native, will be our Keynote Speaker.

From inception, the purpose of the Innovation Conference has been to showcase leading academic and private sector talent/accomplishment from the region. The Conference follows an "academic style" format with keynote speakers, panel discussions, and subject matter expert breakout sessions in concurrent Academic and Private Sector Tracks.

We identify potential speakers according to the following drivers:

- Transformational potential based on new and innovative approaches
- Inspiring regional colleagues to "Want to Learn More"
- "Can Play Beyond NEPA"

Timeframe:

The tecBRIDGE Innovation Conference traditionally takes place in early August each year.

Speaker recruiting is a year-round activity.

Insights from the Program.

- Each year the Conference provides between 20 – 25 subject matter expert speaking opportunities.
- Last year's Artificial Intelligence conference videos can be [viewed here](#).

Learn more about the Innovation Conference [here](#).



Keystone Innovation Zone

History and Perspective:

tecBRIDGE currently administer 39 early-stage technology companies in the Lackawanna and Luzerne Keystone Innovation Zones.

In May, DCED announced 2025 Tax Credit Awards to fifteen (15) Lackawanna and Luzerne companies totaling \$1,058,981. This year's awards represent an approximate 100% increase over 2024.

Since program inception (2004), Lackawanna and Luzerne KIZ companies administered by tecBRIDGE have received approximately \$32.7MM in tax credit awards to be applied against Commonwealth tax obligations or sold to reinvest in the KIZ businesses.

Timeframe:

tecBRIDGE has the following administrative responsibilities throughout the year:

- Work with prospective applicants to confirm program eligibility and complete the NEPA KIZ application. Most applications are received in the fourth quarter and are decisioned by a sub-committee of the Board. Accepted applicant data must be entered into the DCED system by year-end.
- Oversee required annual reporting for all KIZ participants due by the end of Q1.
- Meet with all KIZ participants planning to apply for Commonwealth Tax Credits to confirm Zone operations and eligibility in advance of the December 1st DCED application deadline. Issue a KIZ Certificate for each eligible applicant planning to apply for the tax credits.

Insights into the KIZ Program:

- tecBRIDGE is not compensated for this DCED program support. We support this initiative on behalf of our Chamber of Commerce partners and for the larger tecBRIDGE mission.



TechCelerator Program

History and Perspective:

The TechCelerator Program is a ten-week classroom experience for aspiring entrepreneurs and culminates in a community presentation by each venture participant. The program content originated with Ben Franklin Technology Partners of Central PA.

Five TechCelerator cohorts have completed the program in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties. A typical cohort consists of eight (8) idea or early stage ventures. Guest speakers from the community are part of the classroom curriculum sharing insights on traditional business topics including legal, marketing, finance, capital formation, and human resources.

Luzerne County is actively recruiting for their next cohort to start in Fall of 2026.

tecBRIDGE is the TechCelerator Program Administrator and classes are taught by Executive Director Don Webster and Larry Puleo of MLP Consultants.

Timeframe:

In the past, cohorts have run in both Fall and Spring in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties.

Insights from past TechCelerator Cohorts:

- A number of past TechCelerator ventures have gone on to participate in the annual tecBRIDGE Business Plan Competition.
- Each TechCelerator venture is paired with a subject matter expert mentor as part of the Program.
- Several TechCelerator ventures have gone on to secure Ben Franklin Technology Partners investment capital.

Learn more about the Lackawanna County TechCelerator Program [here](#) and the Luzerne County TechCelerator Program [here](#).



Youth Entrepreneurship Conference

History and Perspective:

The Youth Entrepreneurship Conference started in partnership with King's College in 2017 with thirty high school students on a Saturday morning. Today, the program has grown into an annual half-day, in-person, conference experience for high school and college students to learn, grow, and explore business, entrepreneurship, and innovation topics with thought leaders from the region.

Modeled after the Innovation Conference format of keynote speakers, panel discussions, and subject matter expert breakout sessions, the Youth Entrepreneurship Conference looks to complement traditional classroom learning objectives with real world discussions.

Timeframe:

The annual Youth Entrepreneurship Conference takes place at King's College each year on the Friday before Thanksgiving.

Speaker recruiting is a year-round activity.

Insights from past Youth Entrepreneurship Conferences:

- King's College provides a scholarship opportunity for students that participate in at least two tecBRIDGE program activities during the academic calendar year.
- There is strong interest in this annual program with regular repeat attendance from regional high school partners.
- Students attending the Conference also typically stay for lunch on campus and tours of the College are also available.

Learn more about the Youth Entrepreneurship Conference [here](#).