

For Immediate Release



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Startups win \$55,000 at the “AUB President’s Innovation Challenge Pitching and Award” Ceremony

Thirteen participants with startup ideas competed on stage at the American University of Beirut (AUB) President’s Innovation Challenge Pitching and Award Ceremony on October 28. Four startup ideas were selected by a jury of industry leaders to receive a total of \$55,000 in cash prizes, in addition to full incubation and mentorship support at the Talal and Madiha Zein AUB Innovation Park.

“While Lebanon strives to tie the ends of an exceptionally challenging year, AUB carries its mission forward and continues to adapt its approach to empower youth in a constantly changing world,” said Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri, AUB president. “With the fast evolution of technology and job markets, AUB places interdisciplinary innovation and entrepreneurship as a core theme in its strategy.”

The AUB President's Innovation Challenge is a yearly competition for entrepreneurs from the AUB community—including students, staff, faculty members, and alumni—who have viable and scalable startup ideas, which can improve the well-being of people living in the current context of environmental hazards and economic challenges by helping create an inclusive and human-centered future.

This year, 132 applicants submitted their startup ideas in the themes of education and skills, waste management, economy, future of health, and future of food. Thirteen finalists were then selected to compete at the pitching and award ceremony. Prior to the event, the judges received short videos of the finalists’ detailed pitches. During the event, each finalist spent six minutes on stage to present their ideas to the judges and respond to questions. The event also included a panel discussion about the future of entrepreneurship in Lebanon.

"We are excited about the number and quality of teams that participated in this challenge," said Dr. Yousif Asfour, AUB chief innovation and transformation officer. "Despite all the challenges this country and the world are facing, it's amazing to see how our community perseveres and thrives. These teams give me hope in what we can still do – a small bright light during these difficult times."

Some of the startups that made it to the finalists were "Akle," which has developed a range of Lebanese-inspired meal replacement bars made from plant-based proteins and local super foods; "Cardio Solutions," aiming at developing a novel approach to cardiac ablation post-myocardial infarction without surgery; "CTCArray," a bimodal low-cost chip for high sensitivity detection, isolation, and enumeration of tumor cells in a blood sample; "Find a Nurse," the first and largest online network of home healthcare providers in Lebanon and Qatar, and "GreenStone," specialized in the production a stone made from glass waste, which is valuable in sustainability applications such as wastewater treatment, gravel alternative, insulation, hydroponic media and others.

Other startup ideas that were pitched at the event were "PLASFILL," an eco-conscious material that allows contractors and municipalities to fix potholes and mis-leveled manholes using recycled wastes; "Raw Bites - Protein Puffs," a line of healthy and nutritious snacks produced from real, whole food alternatives to processed, packed food; "SkanMD," specialized in building hand-held devices to quickly, safely, and non-invasively monitor and diagnose different skin anomalies such as skin cancer, among others; and "WonderEd," which teaches preschoolers the basics of coding through storytelling and hands-on games.

"Acoustosens," a new rapid, low-cost, COVID-19 home-monitoring and testing system, won the first prize of \$30,000. The second prize of \$15,000 went to "PETCRETE," a startup that works on transforming used plastic bottles to fibers used to reinforce concrete, replacing steel reinforcement.

The judges also selected two startups to be third place winners and receive \$5,000 each: "RAM Polymer," a novel composite surgical mesh for hernia repair; and "Synkers," an online learning platform that offers a personalized learning experience to students.

The challenge judges were AUB Trustee Abdo Kadifa, AUB President Fadlo Khuri, Beirut Digital District CEO Mouhamad Rabah, Enterprise Lead Microsoft MEA MCC Houda Younan, and retired businessman Samer Alameddine.

Mouhamad Rabah, CEO at Beirut Digital District and challenge donor, commented on the event saying that people have gathered to show that there is a hope to overcome challenges, to shed light on great entrepreneurs who can help pull Lebanon out of its abyss, to create job

opportunities and show that the immigration trend can be reversed, and to assert that the will to construct is stronger than the will to destruct.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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