Barrier Breakers 2026

EVALUATION CRITERIA & JUDGING RUBRIC

Barrier Breakers uses two separate evaluations: one when you apply (to select Demo Day finalists) and one on event day (to determine winners). Like Y Combinator, we care about your potential and ability to execute-not just your idea.

Application Review Criteria

Criterion	What We're Looking For
Team & Execution Ability	Why is your team suited to tackle this barrier? What unique skills, experiences, or perspectives do you bring? Why should we believe you can actually build this?
Problem Clarity	How well do you understand the barrier you're addressing? Have you done research? Do you understand the root causes and who is most affected?
Solution Potential	Is your initial approach thoughtful and feasible? Does it address the actual problem, not just symptoms? Is it realistic to build?
Ambition & Impact	How big could this be if it works? Could it help hundreds, thousands, or millions of young adults? Are you thinking big enough?

Note: There is no limit on applications. All teams that apply will compete-either in Demo Day (top team per track) or the Innovation Gallery (everyone else). Both have cash prizes.

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Same rubric for Demo Day and Innovation Gallery. Each criterion scored 1-5. Maximum 100 points total.

Problem Understanding (25 points)

Score	Description
5 (21-25)	Exceptional research. Deep understanding of root causes, affected populations, and systemic factors. Cites data and sources.
4 (16-20)	Strong understanding. Clearly explains the barrier with good supporting evidence.
3 (11-15)	Adequate understanding. Describes the problem but lacks depth or supporting research.
2 (6-10)	Surface-level understanding. Identifies the barrier but misses key factors.
1 (1-5)	Minimal understanding. Vague description of the problem.

Solution Quality (25 points)

Score	Description
5 (21-25)	Highly innovative and feasible. Addresses root cause. Working prototype or detailed implementation plan.
4 (16-20)	Creative and practical solution. Clear path to implementation.
3 (11-15)	Reasonable solution but lacks innovation or has feasibility concerns.
2 (6-10)	Generic approach. Unclear how it would actually work or be implemented.
1 (1-5)	Solution doesn't clearly address the problem or is unrealistic.

Presentation (25 points)

Score	Description
5 (21-25)	Compelling and professional. Clear narrative, engages audience, handles Q&A confidently.
4 (16-20)	Well-organized and clear. Good communication with minor areas for improvement.
3 (11-15)	Adequate presentation. Gets points across but lacks polish or clarity in places.
2 (6-10)	Disorganized or unclear. Difficult to follow the main points.
1 (1-5)	Unprepared or unable to communicate the concept effectively.

Impact Potential (25 points)

Score	Description
5 (21-25)	Transformative potential. Could help thousands+ of young adults. Clear path to scale.
4 (16-20)	Significant potential impact with realistic implementation path.
3 (11-15)	Moderate impact potential. Would help some people but limited scale.
2 (6-10)	Limited impact. Unclear who would benefit or how many.
1 (1-5)	Minimal or unclear impact potential.

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Judge Scoring Worksheet

BARRIER BREAKERS 2026 - MARCH 20, 2026

Team Name: _____

Track: [ ] Transportation   [ ] Housing   [ ] Healthcare   [ ] Community   [ ] Literacy

Division: [ ] Demo Day   [ ] Innovation Gallery

Judge Name: _____

Criterion	1	2	3	4	5	Score
Problem Understanding	O	O	O	O	O	/25
Solution Quality	O	O	O	O	O	/25
Presentation	O	O	O	O	O	/25
Impact Potential	O	O	O	O	O	/25
					TOTAL:	**/100**

Strengths:

Areas for Improvement:

Additional Comments: