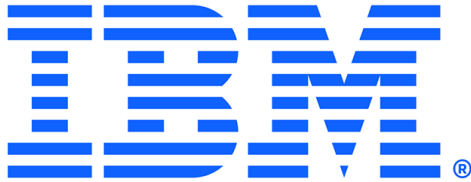


IBM Launches Sports Tech Startup Challenge at Web Summit Vancouver

Web Summit Vancouver will host the first pitch showcase for the challenge running worldwide throughout 2026, as part of a global IBM program, culminating with an invite-only Prize Competition at Web Summit Lisbon



VANCOUVER, BC May 12, 2026 -- IBM (NYSE:[IBM](#)) today kicked off the **IBM Sports Tech Startup Challenge at Web Summit Vancouver**, marking the first showcase in a global initiative to find and accelerate cutting-edge AI startups transforming the world of sports.

The Vancouver showcase represents the opening moment of a multi-city challenge as AI reshapes the USD 2.3 trillion global sports economy, transforming fan engagement, digital experiences, athlete performance, and operations. The challenge focuses on growth-stage startups building enterprise-ready technologies for the business of sports.

Meeting founders where innovation happens

As the first stop on the global Sports Tech Startup Challenge, Web Summit Vancouver and IBM bring together local, regional and international founders building scalable sports technology solutions. Vancouver's startup ecosystem, known for its strong AI talent and strengths across gaming, immersive and interactive technologies, digital media, and data-driven innovation, provides a natural backdrop for connecting with founders early in the journey.

"AI is redefining the future of sports – how organizations operate, compete and connect with fans," said **Emily Fontaine, Global Head of Venture Capital at IBM**. "By launching this challenge at Web Summit Vancouver, we're stepping directly into that innovation, engaging with founders building what's next and exploring how IBM can help power their growth along with supporting our clients globally."

Experts guiding the showcase

Startups participating in the Vancouver showcase will be reviewed by leaders across venture capital, professional sports, and growth-stage strategy:

- Emily Fontaine, Global Head of Venture Capital at IBM, leading [IBM Ventures](#) Jim O'Mara, Director of Digital Experiences at MLSE (Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment Partnership)
- Alexander Hanhan, Senior Global Lead Tax Principal and KPMG Private US Tax Emerging Growth Leader
- Sheila Schindel, Managing Director of Commercialization and IP Programs at Innovate BC

About the IBM Sports Tech Startup Challenge

The [IBM Sports Tech Startup Challenge](#) will hold showcases at [Web Summit Rio](#), [Web Summit Lisbon](#), and a16z tech weeks in New York and San Francisco. Select startups may be invited, at IBM's discretion, to compete in the IBM Sports Tech Startup Prize Competition at Web Summit Lisbon, with the potential for a paid proof of concept valued up to USD 100,000, subject to project scope and applicable approvals. Participation in regional showcases, including Web Summit Vancouver, is for visibility and engagement purposes only and does not confer eligibility, priority, ranking, or advancement to any prize competition, proof of concept, investment, or commercial opportunity.

IBM Ventures is seeking growth-stage startups (Seed to Series B) building AI-powered solutions that enhance the business of sports.

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<https://stage.mediaroom.com/ibmnewsroom/2026-05-12-ibm-launches-sports-tech-startup-challenge-at-web-summit-vancouver>