

PEAK | 26

March 26 & 27, 2026

Thursday and Friday

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

THURSDAY

Northern Center, NMU

8-9 AM

Registration Opens and
Continental Breakfast

9-9:50 AM:

Keynote: Alex West Steinman

10-10:50 AM

Women in Business
Panel Discussion

11-11:50 AM

Morning Breakout Sessions

12-12:30 PM

Lunch

1-1:50 PM

Afternoon Breakout Session

2-2:50 PM

How to Lead A More Inclusive
Design Process

3-4:30 PM

Maker's Fair
Build Your Own Birdhouse

5-7 PM

Innovation Party at
Ore Dock Brewing Co.

FRIDAY

*Innovation Hall,
Jacobetti Complex, NMU*

8-9 AM:

Registration Opens and
Continental Breakfast

9-9:50 AM:

Keynote: Bill Hawker

10 AM-12:30 PM

Design Jam with
Design Core Detroit

12:30-1 PM

Lunch

1-2 PM:

Kicking Your Fear in the Face
with Nancy Lyons

2:30-5 PM

The Big Pitch & Outdoor
Innovation Pitch Competitions

5-6 PM:

Pitch Reception

THURSDAY, MARCH 26

8-9 AM

Registration & Breakfast

Location: Ballrooms 1 & 2, Northern Center, NMU

9-9:50 AM

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: ALEX WEST STEINMAN

Crowdfunding Your Way to Launch

Location: Ballrooms 1 & 2, Northern Center, NMU

10-10:50 AM

WOMEN IN BUSINESS PANEL DISCUSSION

Featuring: Lucy Seitz, Brooke Grondin, Nikki Odom,
& Jessica Mariin (moderator)

Location: Ballrooms 1 & 2, Northern Center, NMU

11-11:50 AM:

MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS:

Anyone Can be An innovator *with Jason Williams*

Location: Penninsula II Room

**Selection Pressure: Why Great Founders Run Toward
the Hardest Problem** *with Joe Thiel*

Location: Peninsula IV Room

12-12:30 PM

Lunch

Location: Ballrooms 1&2, Northern Center, NMU

NORTHERN CENTER, NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

1401 Presque Isle Avenue, Marquette, MI 49855

THURSDAY, MARCH 26

1-1:50 PM:

AFTERNOON

Effective Communication Strategies For Building Customer Loyalty That You Can Activate Today

with Adela Piper, Siren Strategy

Location: Ballrooms 1&2

Financial Clarity for Business Growth & Financing

with Julie Olsen & Lisa DeCaire,

Embers Credit Union

Location: Peninsula I Room

2-2:50 PM:

How to Lead A More Inclusive Design Process

with Bonnie Fahoome, Design Core Detroit

Location: Founders Room

3-4:30 PM:

Makers Fair *with Innovate Marquette Protolab*

Make Your Own Birdhouses or Headphones

Location: Ballrooms 1&2, Northern Center, NMU

5-7 PM:

Innovation Party - networking, local beverages, and hors d'oeuvres

Location: Ore Dock Brewing Co.,
114 W. Spring St., Marquette, MI 49855

THURSDAY KEYNOTE

Crowdfunding Your Way to Launch

ALEX WEST STEINMAN

9-9:50 AM | Northern Center, Ballrooms 1 & 2

Alex West Steinman is a nationally recognized speaker, entrepreneur, and dynamic leader helping people and organizations turn purpose into power. As the co-founder and CEO of The Coven, a fast-growing network of inclusive coworking spaces and communities across the U.S., Alex leads with a mission to make work better for everyone. After raising \$350,000 via crowdfunding, Alex knows the ins and outs of building a successful crowdfunding campaign and will share her insight on crowdfunding your way to launch in this session.



Women In Business PANEL

10-10:50 AM | Northern Center, Ballrooms 1 & 2



Lucy Seitz

Social Media Influencer,
Cosmetologist
LAS Beauty LLC



Brooke Grodin

CEO/Owner
*Girly Pop & Bombshell
Boudoir Photography Studio*



Nikki Odom

CEO/Owner
Read My Lips Bookstore



Jessica Mariin

Moderator
Owner, Fresh Coast Beauty

ANYONE CAN BE AN INNOVATOR

with Jason Williams

11-11:50 AM | Peninsula II, Northern Center



Jason A. Williams is an innovation strategist and ecosystem builder who helps organizations and communities turn insight into action. He serves as CEO of the Society of Innovators at Purdue Northwest, where he leads initiatives that advance innovation, entrepreneurship, and talent development across Northwest Indiana. Jason is also the founder of Spycomps, a business intelligence platform that helps consumer and retail-focused organizations better understand their markets, competitors, and opportunities for growth.

SELECTION PRESSURE

WHY GREAT FOUNDERS RUN TOWARDS THE HARDEST PROBLEM

with Joe Thiel

11-11:50 AM | Peninsula IV, Northern Center



Startups are difficult not simply because entrepreneurship is risky, but because founders operate in environments with intense selection pressure. Markets, technology constraints, capital limitations, and time quickly expose weak assumptions and force teams to adapt. The most successful founders learn to recognize these pressures and move toward the hardest problems instead of avoiding them.

In this session, we'll explore how breakthrough companies identify the bottlenecks that unlock real value and why the path to innovation is rarely straightforward. We'll also discuss how startup ecosystems like Innovate Marquette support founders through that process, helping them navigate challenges, learn quickly, and keep moving forward when things inevitably get hard.

Effective Communication Strategies For Building Customer Loyalty That You Can Activate Today

with Adela Piper, Siren Strategy

1-1:50 PM | Ballrooms 1 & 2, Northern Center



Wondering how to build and retain a loyal client base? Join us at Peak26 for a talk with Adela Piper, a public relations expert with 20+ years of experience.

For many small businesses, marketing and strategic communication can feel overwhelming. In this session, Adela aims to break down marketing, public relations, and strategic communication in an easily accessible way. She will focus on why these efforts are important and the most essential strategies for all leaders.

FINANCIAL CLARITY FOR BUSINESS GROWTH & FINANCING

*with Julie Olson & Lisa DeCaire,
Embers Credit Union*

1-1:50 PM | Peninsula I, Northern Center



Your financials tell the story of your business and understanding them can unlock real growth.

Join us at Peak26 for this financial breakout session led by Julie Olson, a financial services professional with 25+ years of experience supporting business growth, and Lisa DeCaire, an accounting graduate of Northern Michigan University and commercial lending underwriter at Embers Credit Union. Together, they'll break down profit and loss statements, balance sheets, business structures, and what lenders look for when reviewing loan applications. Walk away with a clearer path to funding and future growth.



Embers

CREDIT UNION

HOW TO LEAD A MORE INCLUSIVE DESIGN PROCESS

with Bonnie Fahoome

2-2:50 PM | Peninsula I, Northern Center



Inclusive design leads to stronger ideas and better outcomes. Join Bonnie Fahoome, Co-Executive Director of **Design Core Detroit**, for an interactive breakout session on how to lead a more inclusive design process and apply human-centered thinking to programs, products, places, and systems.



PEAK | 26

MAKERS FAIR

Craft a Wooden Birdhouse
with 3D Printed Elements



Hosted by the Innovate Marquette Protolab

Thursday, March 26 | 3-4:30 pm | NMU Northern Center, Ballrooms 1&2

PEAK | 26 INNOVATION PARTY

ORE DOCK
BREWING CO.

5-7 PM

Join us for networking, local beverages, and hors d'oeuvres from 5-7 PM at The Station Bar at Ore Dock Brewing Co.

FRIDAY, MARCH 27

8-9 AM

Registration & Breakfast

Location: Innovation Hall, Jacobetti Complex, Northern Michigan University

9-9:50 AM

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: BILL HAWKER

Location: Innovation Hall, Jacobetti Complex, Northern Michigan University

10 AM-12:30 PM:

DESIGN JAM

Location: Innovation Hall, Jacobetti Complex, Northern Michigan University

12:30-1 PM:

LUNCH

Location: Innovation Hall, Jacobetti Complex, Northern Michigan University

1-2 PM:

KICK YOUR FEAR IN THE FACE WITH NANCY LYONS

Location: Innovation Hall, Jacobetti Complex, Northern Michigan University

2:30-5 PM:

NMU'S THE BIG PITCH & THE OUTDOOR INNOVATION PITCH COMPETITION

Location: Innovation Hall, Jacobetti Complex, Northern Michigan University

PITCH RECEPTION TO FOLLOW 5-6 PM

INNOVATION HALL, JACOBETTI COMPLEX, NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

2296 Sugar Loaf Ave., Marquette, MI 49855

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: BILL HAWKER

*9-9:50 AM | Innovation Hall, Jacobetti Complex,
Northern Michigan University*



Bill Hawker is the Director of Business Development at Elevate97 in Green Bay, Wisconsin, where he helps organizations build their brands and strategy through interior branding, vehicle graphics, printing and more. Prior to Elevate97, Bill spent 20 years developing corporate partnerships for the Chicago Bears, Green Bay Packers, and Detroit Lions.

DESIGN JAM

with Design Core Detroit

**10 AM - 12:30 PM | Innovation Hall, Jacobetti Complex,
Northern Michigan University**



This interactive workshop lead by Bonnie Fahoome from **Design Core Detroit** is for anyone teaching, learning or practicing creative problem-solving in product, program or process development. Design Jams bring together makers, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, educators, students, professional designers, and end users to collectively brainstorm and prototype new ideas using a human centered design thinking methodology.

Learn how this approach to product development leads to better business

outcomes and gain the skills and resources needed to teach and practice this method.

KICK YOUR FEAR IN THE FACE

with Nancy Lyons

**1-2 PM | Innovation Hall, Jacobetti Complex,
Northern Michigan University**



None of us fully knows what we're doing. Not your CEO, not the person who seems to have all the answers, not even the smartest person in the room. Yet some people move through their work with confidence, not because they aren't afraid, but because they've learned how to keep going anyway.

In this session, Nancy will break down five types of fear she sees every day in workplaces and share practical actions you can start taking right away to kick them in the face.

Friday, March 27

PITCH COMPETITIONS

The pitch competition provides founders and emerging entrepreneurs the opportunity to access capital.

Finalists of The Big Pitch and the Outdoor Innovation Pitch will compete live on stage for the chance to win thousands of dollars in prizes.

Timeline of Events:

2:30–5:00 PM.....Pitch Competitions

5:00–6:00 PM.....Pitch Reception

Meet the finalists and judges on the following pages.



Mr. Ervin Kranberg '71 BS Endowment

Friday, March 27

THE BIG PITCH

Northern Michigan University's College of Business presents the annual New Business Venture Competition. During the Big Pitch, NMU students present their business ideas to a panel of judges for a chance to win cash prizes and consultation service packages to help get their ideas off the ground.

The Big Pitch encourages entrepreneurial activism by recognizing and rewarding those who present detailed plans on designing and creating new business enterprises, drawing on their own ideas and inventions.

Northern Michigan University College of Business is an AACSB-accredited university

The Big Pitch is being generously supported in part through an endowment created by Mr. Ervin Kranberg '71 BS.

Business consultation awards are provided by Kendricks, Bordeau, Keefe, Seavoy & Larsen, PC; and Tailored CPAs.



Accredited institutions have met rigorous standards and are committed to upholding and advancing the quality of their business and accounting programs.



THE BIG PITCH

NMU College of Business

MEET THE FINALISTS

- **AfterMath** – *Autumn Brutyn Bo Brutyn*
- **BrewMelt** – *RJiwoo Back, Yujin Lee*
- **Hot Box Sauna Club** – *Thomas Roush*
- **Marquette Chalet** – *Minnie Bittell*
- **Superior Sourdough** – *Brooke Kluz, Janelle Harris*
- **ZiTech** – *Maya Van Berkum*

THE BIG PITCH

Judges



Dr. Steven VandenAvond

*Extended Learning/Community Engagement
Associate Provost & Dean CTOS*



Jenna Smith

Market Manager, Manpower



Liam Goetz

Business Navigator, AccelerateUP

OUTDOOR INNOVATION PITCH

PRIZES:

GRAND PRIZE:

One (1) "Grand Prize" will be awarded. The "Grand Prize" winner will receive a chance at up to \$50,000 in services and investments from the Michigan Outdoor Innovation Fund*

**Investment from the MI Outdoor Innovation Fund is pending the results of the competition and is mostly likely to be in the form of convertible notes.*

MAKE IT IN MICHIGAN AWARD:

One (1) "Make it in Michigan Award" will be awarded and the winner will receive up to \$10,000 in product development services. The "Make it in Michigan Award" is sponsored by Centrepolis Accelerator, Innovate Marquette, and the Michigan Outdoor Innovation Fund.**

***The "Make it in Michigan Award" winner will receive product development services up to \$10,000 in value. The services will be available through Centrepolis Accelerator and/or other Michigan service providers. Eligible services include product design, engineering, prototyping and/or manufacturing readiness services.*

CROWD FAVORITE PRIZE



OUTDOOR INNOVATION PITCH COMPETITION

MEET THE FINALISTS



Andrew Van Steenburg
Electrocharger



Guardian
Matt Rogien & Logan Nash



Fibarcodes
Mars Harvey



N River Fabrication
Brian Marvin



Lodge Outdoor
Sanjiv Lal & Clint Starrs



**TerraHike
Outdoors**
Evan BeVier

OUTDOOR PITCH

Judges



Jim Baker

Sr. Assoc VP for Research, Innovation at Michigan Technological University & Managing Director, Michigan Outdoor Innovation Fund, Powered by InvestUP



Robert Lehto

President, TriMedia Environmental & Engineering



Nancy Lyons

Founder, Clockwork & Tempo



Dan Radomski

CEO, Centrepolis Accelerator



Jim Tenzillo

Managing Director, Michigan Outdoor Innovation Fund, Founder, New Ventures Consulting LLC

**THANK
YOU**