

Rolls-Royce update

Where things stand with the Rolls-Royce competition at SkySong.

Rolls-Royce picks a winning team at SkySong

At stake: The corporate venturing arm of famed British manufacturer Rolls-Royce plc teamed up this summer with SkySong, the ASU Scottsdale Innovation Center, to hold a unique business plan competition. The goal was to find a team of students and/or alumni to build the North American market for Rolls-Royce's SignHear technology, a signature-verification device that works by "listening" to the rhythms of a user's signature. SignHear isn't core to Rolls' current business of making turbines for the aerospace and defense industries, but the company still wants to exploit its engineers' creations. SkySong, meanwhile, wants to prove its worth as a hot spot of global entrepreneurship.

Update: Five teams presented business plans to Rolls-Royce vice president Ged Heffernan, who narrowed the field to two. The finalists fine-tuned their plans, and Heffernan and Rolls-Royce management picked as the winner a team that plans to roll out the product at day-care centers, said John Mitchell, global business development director for SkySong. Arizona Technology Enterprises, which is ASU's commercialization arm; Rolls-Royce; and the winning team signed an agreement earlier this month to create a joint venture.

What's next: The parties are working on the legal paperwork to form a corporation, which Rolls-Royce will seed with \$50,000 and the SignHear technology. The team will open offices at SkySong, and Rolls-Royce plans to publicly identify the team when it launches the venture in January.

Other ventures are possible. Rolls-Royce has other technology on its shelf, and SkySong hopes to host future competitions.

Learn more: <http://skysong.asu.edu>, www.rolls-royce.com.

— Jane Larson, *The Republic*/azcentral.com, jane.larson@arizonarepublic.com

