Competitive Landscape Matrix

A practical worksheet for comparing competitors, substitutes, workarounds, and market alternatives before committing to product, funding, or commercialization decisions.

How to use this tool

Use this matrix to compare what customers already use, what competitors claim, where substitutes are good enough, and where your idea may have a defensible opening.

Do not limit the scan to companies that look exactly like yours. Include consultants, manual workflows, spreadsheets, academic labs, legacy vendors, internal tools, and non-consumption.

The goal is not to prove the idea is unique. The goal is to understand where the idea must be meaningfully better, easier, cheaper, faster, safer, or more fundable.

1. Opportunity Snapshot

Project / idea name	
Organization / team	
Prepared by	
Date / version	
Intended market or application area	
Primary decision this matrix will support	Example: continue discovery, refine positioning, select a funding pathway, prioritize features, prepare an SBIR/STTR commercialization plan, or assess a spinout opportunity.

2. Market Frame

Define the market from the customer's point of view. A competitive landscape is most useful when it starts with the job-to-be-done, not merely with similar technologies.

Customer problem / job-to-be-done	What problem, workflow burden, research barrier, operational pain point, clinical/technical gap, or commercialization bottleneck is the customer trying to solve?
Target user(s)	Who uses the solution directly?
Buyer / budget owner	Who pays, approves, sponsors, procures, or controls access?
Current alternatives	What are customers doing today instead of buying or adopting a new solution?
Market boundary	What products, services, internal workflows, or substitutes should

	be included in this scan?
Out-of-scope alternatives	What will not be compared, and why?

3. Competitor and Alternative Identification Checklist

[ ] Direct competitors with similar products or services	[ ] Indirect competitors solving the same problem differently
[ ] Manual workarounds such as spreadsheets, email, meetings, consultants, or custom scripts	[ ] Internal teams or legacy enterprise systems
[ ] Open-source tools, academic tools, or public resources	[ ] Regulated or reimbursed alternatives, if relevant
[ ] Products serving adjacent customer segments	[ ] Large incumbents that could add the feature later
[ ] Early-stage startups or university spinouts in the same space	[ ] Non-consumption: customers choosing to do nothing for now

4. Initial Competitive Pressure Rating

Dimension	Prompt / scoring question	Rating 1-5	Evidence or notes	Action needed
Customer urgency	How urgently do customers need an alternative to what they use now?			
Switching friction	How difficult is it for customers to leave their current process or vendor?			
Incumbent strength	How strong are the most credible alternatives on trust, evidence, distribution, and usability?			
Differentiation clarity	Can the team explain a meaningful difference in one or two sentences?			
Evidence depth	How much external evidence supports the comparison?			
Adoption path	Is there a clear path to a pilot, purchase, grant-funded project, license, or partner adoption?			

5. Core Competitive Landscape Matrix

List competitors, substitutes, and workarounds. Use evidence rather than assumptions where possible. Update this table as customer discovery, grant reviews, investor feedback, and market research reveal new information.

Alternative / competitor	Type	Target user / buyer	Problem solved	Strengths	Weaknesses / gaps	Pricing / access model	Evidence source	Threat level	Implications for our idea
Example: incumbent workflow or vendor	Direct / indirect / substitute / workaround	Who uses or buys it?	What job does it solve?	Why customers tolerate or prefer it	What it does not solve well	Free / subscription / enterprise / service / internal	Interview / website / paper / review / demo	Low / Med / High	What should we change, test, or emphasize?

6. Feature, Evidence, and Capability Comparison

Compare the features and proof points that matter to buyers, users, funders, university partners, regulators, or implementation sponsors. Replace the sample criteria with criteria that fit the technology and market.

Capability / criterion	Why it matters	Our solution	Competitor A	Competitor B	Competitor C	Current workaround	Evidence gap	Priority
Example: integration with existing workflow	Tie criteria to adoption, funding, regulatory, implementation, or procurement needs.	Current status or planned claim					What proof is missing?	High / Med / Low

7. Differentiation and Positioning Worksheet

Use this section to turn the landscape scan into a concise position. Strong differentiation is not just novelty; it is a customer-relevant reason to change behavior, spend money, fund a pilot, license technology, or adopt a new process.

Most important customer pain	
Most credible current alternative	
Our strongest differentiator	
Proof we have now	
Proof we still need	
Potential weak spot in our position	
Positioning statement draft	For [target customer], who needs [job/problem], our [solution] provides [benefit] unlike [alternative], because [differentiator/proof].

8. White Space and Opportunity Analysis

Underserved segment	Which user, buyer, geography, application, organization type, or workflow appears underserved?
Unmet need	What need is not addressed well by current options?
Adoption opening	What event, requirement, funding shift, regulatory change, cost pressure, workflow burden, or technical limitation may create an opening?
Potential partnership route	Which university, industry partner, system integrator, grant program, commercialization organization, or channel partner could help validate or enter the market?
Risks to this opening	What could make this white space smaller, temporary, or less valuable than it appears?

Competitor / Alternative Profile 1

Name / type	Direct competitor, indirect competitor, substitute, internal workaround, open-source tool, service provider, or incumbent process.
Target customer	Who they appear to serve. Include user, buyer, payer, sponsor, procurement group, or clinical/technical champion.
Core value proposition	What they promise and why a customer would choose them.
Strengths	Brand, distribution, evidence, pricing, usability, data access, regulatory status, integrations, customer base, or funding.

Weaknesses / gaps	Where the offering is incomplete, expensive, hard to adopt, poorly evidenced, narrow, or vulnerable.
Evidence sources	Website, publications, customer reviews, procurement records, grants, patents, interviews, demos, or sales materials.
Implications for our idea	How this competitor changes positioning, feature priorities, customer discovery, pricing, or funding strategy.

Competitor / Alternative Profile 2

Name / type	Direct competitor, indirect competitor, substitute, internal workaround, open-source tool, service provider, or incumbent process.
Target customer	Who they appear to serve. Include user, buyer, payer, sponsor, procurement group, or clinical/technical champion.
Core value proposition	What they promise and why a customer would choose them.
Strengths	Brand, distribution, evidence, pricing, usability, data access, regulatory status, integrations, customer base, or funding.
Weaknesses / gaps	Where the offering is incomplete, expensive, hard to adopt, poorly evidenced, narrow, or vulnerable.
Evidence sources	Website, publications, customer reviews, procurement records, grants, patents, interviews, demos, or sales materials.
Implications for our idea	How this competitor changes positioning, feature priorities, customer discovery, pricing, or funding strategy.

Competitor / Alternative Profile 3

Name / type	Direct competitor, indirect competitor, substitute, internal workaround, open-source tool, service provider, or incumbent process.
Target customer	Who they appear to serve. Include user, buyer, payer, sponsor, procurement group, or clinical/technical champion.
Core value proposition	What they promise and why a customer would choose them.
Strengths	Brand, distribution, evidence, pricing, usability, data access, regulatory status, integrations, customer base, or funding.
Weaknesses / gaps	Where the offering is incomplete, expensive, hard to adopt, poorly evidenced, narrow, or vulnerable.
Evidence sources	Website, publications, customer reviews, procurement records, grants, patents, interviews, demos, or sales materials.
Implications for our idea	How this competitor changes positioning, feature priorities,

	customer discovery, pricing, or funding strategy.

9. Key Assumptions to Validate

Assumption	Why it matters	Current confidence	Validation method	Owner	Due date
Example: buyers will pay for faster evidence generation	Tie to commercialization, funding, adoption, licensing, or product design	Low / Med / High	Interview, desk research, pilot, demo, advisor review, grant review, or pricing test		

10. Next-Step Action Plan

Priority	Action	Purpose	Owner	Target date	Status / notes
1	Interview three users currently using the strongest workaround	Confirm whether the current alternative is painful enough to replace			

11. Summary Decision

Recommended decision	Continue exploration / revise idea / narrow segment / pause / seek

	partner / prepare grant or pilot / other.
Rationale	Summarize the strongest evidence and the biggest concern.
Top three follow-up questions	
Date for next review	

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