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AACC, NSF Announce 12 Student Teams to Advance to Community College Innovation Challenge Finals

Community college students will attend an Innovation Boot Camp to pitch their STEM solutions to real-world challenges

Washington, DC – Today, the [American Association of Community Colleges](http://WWW.AACC.NCHE.EDU) (AACC), in partnership with the [National Science Foundation](http://WWW.NSF.GOV) (NSF), announced that it has selected 12 finalist teams to advance to the final round of the [Community College Innovation Challenge](http://WWW.AACC.NCHE.EDU) (CCIC), set to take place in June 2026.

Now in its tenth year, the competition seeks to strengthen entrepreneurial thinking among community college students by challenging them to develop science, engineering, technology, and math (STEM)-based solutions to real-world problems. It also enables students to discover and demonstrate their capacity to use STEM to make a difference in the world and translate that knowledge into action.

Teams consist of two to four students and a faculty or administrator team mentor. Finalists attend an Innovation Boot Camp in June and interact with entrepreneurs and experts in business planning, stakeholder engagement, strategic communication, and marketplace dynamics. The Boot Camp culminates in a Student Innovation Poster Session on Capitol Hill with STEM leaders and congressional stakeholders and a pitch presentation to determine the first, second, and third-place winning teams.

“Congratulations to the 2026 CCIC finalists,” said DeRionne Pollard, president and CEO of AACC. “These visionary students are advancing innovations that protect the natural environment, improve infrastructure and preserve health and safety. In solving real-world problems that impact our communities, these teams of students are advancing their talent, skills and creativity. AACC is proud to partner with the National Science Foundation to celebrate their achievements and to support the entrepreneurs, innovators, and STEM leaders emerging from our nation’s community colleges.”

Among the ideas teams presented this year are solutions for food insecurity, search and rescue, road safety and infrastructure, energy efficiency, safe drinking water, senior protection, accessible learning for the visually impaired, power grid security, and expanding access to quantum technology—with many submissions incorporating emerging technologies including AI, machine learning, and advanced manufacturing.

The 12 finalist schools and their projects are:

- ***De Anza College (California)***

Project: The Micro-Buoy

- Micro-Buoy is a drone-deployed, reusable underwater search device designed to improve rescue efforts for drowning victims. Using acoustic signals and artificial intelligence, the miniature buoy can detect human silhouettes beneath the surface and transmit precise locations within minutes—helping first responders locate victims more efficiently.

- ***Henry Ford College (Michigan)***

Project: SuClara – Intelligent Water, Tailored to You

- SuClara is a smart water filtration system that combines real-time testing and treatment to improve access to safe drinking water. Using sensors, image processing, and machine learning, the system analyzes water quality and adjusts filtration based on detected contaminants—helping to reduce health risks and decrease reliance on bottled water.

- ***Hudson County Community College (New Jersey)***

Project: Hybrid Immersion Cooling for Long-Term AI Sustainability

- Hybrid Immersion Cooling is a sustainable data center cooling system that reduces the energy and water demands of artificial intelligence infrastructure. Using a biodegradable engineered liquid and advanced heat transfer, the system cools servers more efficiently to help lower the environmental impact while supporting AI growth.

- ***Pasadena City College (California)***

Project: Cortexa – Brain Powered Art

- Cortexa transforms brain activity into wearable art through a custom LED dress that lights up in real time based on the wearer’s brainwaves. By making neural activity visible and interactive, the project sparks curiosity about the brain, raises awareness of neurological health, and can be practically applied across disciplines in classrooms, museums, and performance spaces.

- ***Passaic County Community College (New Jersey)***

Project: Transforming Roads with Fly Ash – A Sustainable Future

- Passaic County’s innovation reimagines road materials using Fly Ash and self-healing chemistry inspired by ancient Roman concrete, which naturally seals cracks before they become potholes. Designed to last significantly longer than traditional asphalt, this approach is designed to reduce road damage, lower maintenance costs, and improve long-term infrastructure.

- ***Pellissippi State Community College (Tennessee)***

Project: 3D Modeling Accessibility for Visually Impaired Students

- This innovation creates 3D tactile learning tools—including adjustable electrical circuit models—to help visually impaired students better engage with STEM subjects such as math and engineering. Using CAD and affordable 3D printing technology, the project transforms digital and two-dimensional concepts into hands-on models to make learning more accessible.

- ***Perimeter College at Georgia State University (Georgia)***

Project: Enhanced Drain Obstruction Prevention (EDOP)

- EDOP is a smart storm drain monitoring system designed to help prevent urban flooding before it starts. Using sensors inside drains to detect debris buildup and monitor water flow, the system provides real-time alerts to maintenance teams—reducing flood damage, lowering costs, and improving public safety.

- ***San Jacinto College (Texas)***

Project: TrustLine- Helping Seniors Stay Safe from Digital Scams

- TrustLine is a phone app designed to help protect older adults from scam communications before financial harm occurs. By identifying common signs of fraud, alerting users to potential danger, and preventing sensitive information from being shared, the app offers a proactive approach to reducing scam-related losses and improving digital safety for seniors.

- ***Shawnee Community College (Illinois)***

Project: GroundTruth – Predicting Food Desert Risk Before It Happens

- GroundTruth is a data tool that identifies communities at risk of losing grocery access before food deserts form. By combining store data, food assistance records, Census demographics, and local health statistics, the platform creates risk scores and flags high-need areas—giving residents, community leaders, and policymakers the information needed to act early.

- ***Springfield Technical Community College (Massachusetts)***

Project: HydroShield

- HydroShield is a replaceable washing machine filter designed to capture microplastic fibers before they enter waterways. Using a specialized coated textile layer and a simple sensor to signal when the filter needs replacement, this low-cost system helps reduce microplastic pollution while protecting water quality and reducing long-term environmental health risks.

- ***SUNY Broome Community College (New York)***

Project: Hands-On Quantum Education

- SUNY Broome’s team is developing a compact laser and polarization experiment kit that gives students hands-on practice for careers in photonics and quantum technology. The portable system helps students explore concepts like superposition, gates, and measurement without advanced math—building technician-ready skills and expanding access to quantum learning.

- ***Wake Technical Community College (North Carolina)***

Project: GridGuardAI – Predicting Failure Before It Happens

- GridGuardAI uses artificial intelligence and machine learning to analyze images and videos of power lines and grid infrastructure, generating real-time maintenance reports for utilities. By helping providers identify repairs faster, the system can improve grid reliability, reduce costs, and better protect communities from outages and service disruptions.

To receive updates about the 2026 Innovation Boot Camp and the winners, follow [@Comm_College](#) or visit www.aaccinnovationchallenge.com.

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About AACC

As the voice of the nation’s community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), delivers educational and economic opportunity for nearly 10.5 million students in search of the American Dream. Uniquely dedicated to access and success for all students, AACC’s member colleges provide an on-ramp to degree attainment, skilled careers, and family-supporting wages. Located in Washington, D.C., AACC advocates for these not-for-profit, public-serving institutions to ensure they have the resources and support they need to deliver on the mission of increasing economic mobility for all. <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/>

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