

USAI® | UNITED STATES ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE INSTITUTE

USAI's
Global 
Hackathon 
2026

AI READINESS QUALIFIER

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Step-by-step instructions for every track

Tips for strong answers

FAQs

**30
Minutes**

**No Coding
Required**

**Mandatory for
Participants**

**June
7-10, 2026**

What is the AI Readiness Qualifier?

The AI Readiness Qualifier is a short, structured assessment that every team must complete before the **USAII® Global AI Hackathon 2026**. You will answer a series of questions about a community support challenge – explaining your thinking about the problem, the users affected, how AI could help, and how you would keep people safe.

You are not building anything yet. This is about your thinking, not your code!



30 minutes



8 short responses



AI-scored instantly



Results by June 12



The qualifier uses a single scenario for all teams: Community Support -- Making Help Visible. You will answer questions about this topic. Read the scenario carefully on Screen 3 before you begin writing.

Before You Start

What you need

- ▶▶ Your Devpost registration confirmation - at least one team member must be registered on Devpost before the qualifier opens
- ▶▶ Your team's information: team name, track, each member's name and email, University and Country
- ▶▶ A reliable internet connection - the qualifier auto-saves but you need a stable connection. You may use any device including your phone.
- ▶▶ About 30 minutes of uninterrupted time - you can save and return, but finishing in one session is recommended

Important dates

Date	What happens
Now -> June 6, 2026	Register your team on Devpost (required before qualifier opens)
June 7, 2026 -- 10:00am ET	Qualifier opens. URL: qualifier.usaii.org
June 10, 2026 -- 11:59pm ET	Qualifier closes. All submissions must be complete by this time.
June 12, 2026 -- 11:59pm ET	Selected teams will advance for Final Hackathon
June 14-21, 2026	Hackathon
June 22-25, 2026	Projects will be judged and selected
June 27, 2026	Global Awards Showcase



The qualifier closes June 10 at 11:59pm ET. There are no extensions. If you experience a technical problem before the deadline, email hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org immediately with your Submission ID.

Screen 1 - Registering Your Team



Go to qualifier.usaii.org. You will see two options: Register New Team and Returning Team. If this is your first time, use the New Team tab.

USAII GLOBAL AI HACKATHON 2026

AI Readiness Qualifier

Complete this 30-minute assessment.
Clear specific answers score as well as long ones.

30 Minutes
No building required

AI Thinking
Show your reasoning

Top Teams Qualify
Win prizes

Register Your Team

Register below to begin the qualifier.

Team Name *

Track *

Team Members (2-5 people) *

At least one email must match your Devpost registration.

<input type="text" value="Full name"/>	<input type="text" value="email@example.com"/>
<input type="text" value="Full name"/>	<input type="text" value="email@example.com"/>

[+ Add Member](#)

Primary contact for qualifier results *

Advancement notifications will be sent here.

Team Country of Residence *

For teams across multiple countries, select the country where the majority of members reside.

Participation is not available in all regions. See Terms of Use for details.

I confirm all members of our team meet the eligibility requirements for the selected track. *

High School: secondary school. College: undergrad. Graduate: graduate program. Mixed teams use highest track.

I agree to the [USAII Privacy Policy and Terms of Use](#) *

Your data is used only to run this hackathon and will not be shared with third parties.

[Register & Begin Qualifier](#)

Team Name

Team Name (Maximum 60 characters)

Choose a name that represents your team. This is how you will be identified in all qualifier and hackathon communications.

Example: The Lighthouse Builders

Track Selection

Track (Select one)

Choose the track that matches your current education level. If your team has members at different levels, select the highest level represented.

Example: College / Undergraduate

Note: Teams of mixed tracks must enter at the higher track level

Track	Who should select this
High School	All team members who are currently enrolled in Grades 9 -12
College / Undergraduate	All team members who are currently enrolled in an undergraduate degree program
Graduate & Doctoral	All team members who are currently enrolled in a Graduate / Masters / PhD degree

Team Members (2-5 people)

Member Names and Emails (2 minimum, 5 maximum)

Enter the full name and email address for each team member. At least one email must match your Devpost registration. Each member must have a unique email - no duplicates.

Example: Jane Smith - jane.smith@university.edu



At least one team member email must match your Devpost registration. If none of your emails are recognized you will see an error. Register on Devpost at <https://usaii-global-ai-hackathon-2026.devpost.com/> & then return here.



You can add 2 members to start and click **“Add Member”** to add more. You can register with 2-5 members total.

Country

Country (Select from dropdown)

Select the country where your team is primarily based. If your team spans multiple countries, select the country of the team captain.

Example: Kenya

Contact Email

Contact Email (One email address)

This is the email address where USAII® will send your qualifier result and, if you advance, your Qualifier Code. Make sure this is an email address you check regularly and that it belongs to a real person on your team.

Example: teamcaptain@university.edu



Double-check this email before submitting. If your contact email is wrong you will not receive your advancement notification. Contact hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org if you need to update it after submitting.

Track Eligibility Checkbox

Check this box to confirm that all team members meet the eligibility requirements for the track you selected. By checking this you are confirming your team is who you say you are.

Privacy Consent Checkbox


Check this box to confirm you have read and agree to the USAII® Privacy Policy and Terms of Use. The link opens in a new tab. Your data is used only to run this hackathon and will never be sold or shared with third parties.

Your Session Code

Your Team Code

Save this code. You will need it if you close this browser before finishing the qualifier.

**USAII - 2026 -
DTXNLH**

 **Copy Code**

Share this code with your team members. Anyone with this code can resume your qualifier session.

Registration Summary

Team Name
Ajit Strong College Team

Track
College / Undergraduate

Members
Ajit Test One (ajit1@testteam.com)
Ajit Test Two (ajit2@testteam.com)
Ajit Test Three (ajit3@testteam.com)

Contact Email
ajit.jha@usaii.org

Country
United States

Continue to Qualifier →

After you click **“Register & Begin”** Qualifier, a Pop-up will appear with your unique Session Code in the format USAII-2026-XXXXXX. This is your team's entry key for the qualifier.



SAVE YOUR SESSION CODE BEFORE CLICKING CONTINUE. Copy it to a safe place – a note, a message to your team, anywhere. If you close your browser before finishing, you will need this code to return to your submission.



Click the **“Copy”** button to copy the code to your clipboard, then paste it somewhere safe. Then click **“Continue to Qualifier.”**

Screen 3 - The Problem Canvas

Screen 3 is the heart of the qualifier. You will read a scenario about community support systems and answer 7 questions about it. Read the scenario carefully before you begin -- all your answers should connect back to it.



The scenario for all teams is: Community Support -- Making Help Visible. Community support systems exist in most communities - food assistance, mental health resources, housing help, tutoring, crisis services - but people in crisis often cannot find them in time. Your answers should be grounded in this context.

Section 3 — Problem Understanding

What problem are you trying to solve? *

What makes this situation difficult for people?

Be specific. Who is struggling and why?

0 / 50 words

Who specifically experiences this problem? *

Name a specific person — not just people.

0 / 30 words

Why is this problem frustrating, expensive, or harmful? *

What goes wrong if this stays unsolved?

0 / 40 words

Auto-Save

Screen 3 automatically saves your answers every 30 seconds. You will see a 'Draft saved' confirmation near the top of the screen. You do not need to click anything to save -- just keep typing.



If you need a break, your answers will be saved automatically. Close your browser, come back to qualifier.usaii.org, click "**Returning Team,**" enter your session code, and your answers will be there.

Word Limits

Every field has a word limit. A counter shows how many words you have used. The counter turns “orange” when you are close to the limit and “red” when you exceed it. You cannot continue to the next screen if any field is over its limit.



Short, specific answers score just as well as long ones. You do not need to use every word. Focus on saying something precise and real rather than filling the space.



Examples

Example answers in this guide are for illustration only. Do not copy them into your submission. The scoring system detects copied text from this guide and will flag your submission for disqualification review.

Field 1 - What Problem Are You Trying to Solve?

Problem (Maximum 30 words)

Describe the specific problem in the community support scenario. Be concrete - who is struggling, with what, and why does the current situation fail them? Avoid starting with 'Many people..' or 'In today's world...' - get specific immediately.

Example: Families in sudden crisis cannot find the right help fast because information is scattered across dozens of websites and phone numbers that often do not answer.

(Do not use this answer as it will be flagged and you will be disqualified)

Section 3 — Problem Understanding

What problem are you trying to solve? *

What makes this situation difficult for people?

Be specific. Who is struggling and why?

0 / 50 words

Who specifically experiences this problem? *

Name a specific person — not just people.

0 / 30 words

Why is this problem frustrating, expensive, or harmful? *

What goes wrong if this stays unsolved?

0 / 40 words



Think about one specific type of person in a specific moment of need. The best answers describe a real, vivid situation - not a general category of problem.

Field 2 - Who Specifically Experiences This Problem?

Target User (Maximum 20 words)

Name the specific person or group who faces this problem. Include a detail that makes them real - their situation, constraint, or characteristic that makes the problem particularly hard for them.

Example: Families with limited English or limited digital literacy facing sudden crises who do not know where to start.

(Do not use this answer as it will be flagged and you will be disqualified)



'Community members' or 'people who need help' are not specific users. Name who they are, what their situation is, and why the problem is especially hard for them.

Field 3 - Why Is This Problem Frustrating, Expensive, or Harmful?

Why It Matters (Maximum 40 words)

Explain the real consequences of this problem going unsolved. What happens to real people when the help they need is hard to find? What is the cost - in time, health, money, or wellbeing?

Example: Every hour a family spends searching is an hour the problem gets worse. Families who cannot navigate the system often give up - even when the help they needed was available.

(Do not use this answer as it will be flagged and you will be disqualified)

Section 4 — AI Thinking

How could AI help improve this situation? *

What can AI do that a simple search could not?

0 / 50 words

Which AI capability might power your solution? Select up to two. *

Natural language processing

Computer vision

Recommendation systems

Pattern detection & classification

Predictive modeling

Generative AI

Decision support

Agentic workflow

Other

Not sure yet

Describe your idea at a high level. *

What would it do? What does a user see?

0 / 60 words

Field 4 - How Could AI Help Improve This Situation?

Why AI (Maximum 50 words)

Explain why AI is the right tool for this problem -- and specifically what it can do that a simpler tool (like a search engine or a directory website) cannot. Name an AI capability and explain what it enables.

Example: A search engine requires knowing the right words to search. AI using natural language processing can interpret a situation described in plain language - such as 'I lost my job and my landlord is threatening to evict me' - and identify the most relevant types of help

(Do not use this answer as it will be flagged and you will be disqualified)



The strongest answers explain 'WHY AI' over a simpler alternative. A search engine is not AI. A rule-based matching system is not AI. What does AI specifically enable that those cannot?

Capability	Best for...
Natural language processing	Understanding or generating text - interpreting what someone says, summarizing documents, translating language
Computer vision	Analyzing images or video - detecting objects, reading documents, identifying visual patterns
Recommendation systems	Matching people to options - suggesting resources, products, content, or connections based on their profile
Pattern detection / classification	Categorizing or identifying types - detecting fraud, flagging content, classifying requests
Predictive modeling	Forecasting outcomes - predicting demand, risk, or behavior based on historical data
Generative AI	Creating new content - writing, images, code, or summaries from a prompt
Decision support	Helping humans make better decisions - surfacing tradeoffs, risk scores, or recommendations with explanations
Agentic workflow	Taking multi-step actions autonomously - browsing, filling forms, completing tasks with minimal human direction

Field 5 - Describe Your Idea at a High Level

Solution (Maximum 60 words)

Describe what your AI solution would actually do. Include: what data it uses, what the AI does with it, and what the user sees or gets as a result. Think of it as: input -> AI process -> output.

Example: A mobile tool where a family describes their situation in plain language. AI classifies the crisis type, ranks local resources by urgency and availability, and generates a plain-language checklist of next steps. Supports multiple languages.

(Do not use this answer as it will be flagged and you will be disqualified)



The best solutions name a specific data source, a specific AI capability, and a specific output. Vague solutions like 'an AI app that helps people find resources' score low because they do not explain how.

Section 5 — Responsible AI

Every AI system has risks. Being specific is a sign of strong thinking.

What is one risk or concern when using AI here? *

Think: bias, privacy, over-reliance, misuse, or exclusion.

0 / 40 words

How might you reduce or manage this risk? *

What design choice or safeguard helps?

0 / 40 words

Field 6 - What Is One Risk or Concern When Using AI Here?

Risk (Maximum 40 words, minimum 10 words)

Identify one realistic, specific risk of using AI in this community support scenario. The best risks are specific to your solution - not just 'AI might be biased' or 'AI might give wrong information' without explaining how or why.

Example: The AI might misclassify a mental health crisis as a housing issue, directing someone to the wrong type of help at a critical moment when every minute matters.

(Do not use this answer as it will be flagged and you will be disqualified)



'AI might not work correctly' and 'AI could be biased' are too vague and will score low. Describe a specific way your solution could fail and who would be harmed.

Field 7 - How Might You Reduce or Manage This Risk?

Mitigation (Maximum 40 words, minimum 10 words)

Describe one specific design choice that would reduce or manage the risk you identified. The best mitigations are concrete actions - not just 'we would test it' or 'we would use better data.'

Example: Show the AI's confidence level to the user, always include a crisis hotline regardless of classification, and automatically flag low-confidence responses for a human volunteer to follow up within 4 hours.

(Do not use this answer as it will be flagged and you will be disqualified)



The best mitigations have a specific mechanism - something the system actually does differently because of the risk. 'Test it more' and 'use better data' are not mitigations.

Screen 4 - AI Signals & Human Role

Where Would Your System Get Information?

Data Source (Select one)

Choose the primary source of data your AI solution would use. Pick the one that best matches your idea.

Example: External APIs

6a — Where would your system get information? *

Pick the one that best fits.

Public datasets

User input

Sensors, images or video

External APIs

Synthetic or mock data

Not sure yet

Option	Best for...
Public datasets	Government open data, census data, public health data, published research
User input	Information typed or spoken by the person using your tool
Sensors / images / video	Camera feeds, environmental sensors, uploaded photos or video
External APIs	Live data from third-party services - maps, resource directories, weather, transit
Synthetic / mock data	Simulated or artificially created data for testing and demonstration
Not sure yet	If you genuinely are not sure - selecting this is honest and acceptable

What Would You Build for the Solution?

Build Type (Select one)

Choose the type of tool or interface your solution would use. Pick the one that best matches what a user would actually interact with.

Example: AI assistant

6b — What would you build for this solution? *

Pick the one that best fits.

AI chatbot

AI assistant

Workflow automation

AI-powered dashboard

Mobile or web prototype

Decision-support tool

Section 7 — Human in the Loop

AI should not make every decision. Strong AI systems keep humans in control for decisions that really matter.

Where should humans remain involved instead of AI? *

Aim for 1–3 sentences. Specific beats vague.

Describe where a human — not AI — should make the final call.

0/50 words

Where Should Humans Remain Involved Instead of AI?

Human Role (Maximum 50 words, minimum 10 words)

Identify at least one specific decision or action that your AI should NOT make autonomously — where a human must stay in control. Explain when this happens and why human judgment is necessary at that point.

Example: A human caseworker must handle any case where the AI confidence score is below a set threshold, where a user describes an emergency, or where the situation involves child safety or domestic violence. AI handles initial intake only.

(Do not use this answer as it will be flagged and you will be disqualified)



The strongest answers have a specific trigger (when does the human step in?), a specific role (what does the human do?), and a reason (why can't the AI handle this?). 'Humans should oversee the AI' is too vague.

Screen 5 - Your One-Line Pitch



Screen 5 asks you to complete a structured pitch sentence: 'We are building an AI-powered solution that helps [WHO] so they can [WHAT].' Fill in both parts.

Your One-Line Pitch

Clear and specific beats vague and impressive.

We are building an AI-powered solution that helps

describe who you are helping...

0 / 20 words

so they can

describe the outcome for them...

0 / 20 words

e.g. ...helps elderly residents living alone so they can find local support programs in plain language without needing to search the web.

Continue to Review

Who Are You Helping?

Pitch - Who (Maximum 20 words)

Describe the specific person or group your solution helps. This should match your Target User from Screen 3 - be specific.

Example: families in sudden crisis who do not know where to turn for help

(Do not use this answer as it will be flagged and you will be disqualified)

What Can They Do Because of Your Solution?

Pitch - What (Maximum 20 words)

Describe the specific outcome or capability your solution gives them. What can they do, find, or understand that they could not before?

Example: find the right community support in minutes in their own language without needing to know the right search terms

(Do not use this answer as it will be flagged and you will be disqualified)



Read your pitch sentence aloud: 'We are building an AI-powered solution that helps [your who] so they can [your what].' It should sound clear and specific to someone who has never heard of your idea.

Screen 6 - Review & Submit

Screen 6 shows all your answers in one place before you submit. Read through everything carefully. Once you click Submit your answers are final - you cannot edit them after submission.

Review Your Qualifier Before Submitting
Click any section to review. Final once submitted.

Section 3 — Problem Understanding Edit ▾

Section 4 — AI Thinking Edit ▾

Section 5 — Responsible AI Edit ▾

Section 6 — AI Signals Edit ▲

Data Source

Public datasets

Build Type

Decision-support tool

Section 7 — Human Role Edit ▾

Section 8 — Pitch Edit ▾

I confirm this is our team's original work and was not entirely AI-generated without original thinking.

Our team wrote these qualifier responses ourselves. We may have used AI tools to support our thinking, but the ideas and writing in this submission represent our own work.

Submit Qualifier

Integrity Checkbox

You must check the integrity checkbox before the Submit button activates. By checking it you confirm that your team wrote these responses yourselves and that your answers are genuine.



- Using AI tools to help you research and think through your ideas is fine. The responses you submit should reflect your team's own reasoning and should be written in your own words. Wholesale AI-generated submissions that show no original thinking will score low by design.

Submitting

Click **“Submit”** when you are ready. A confirmation Pop up will appear asking you to confirm. Click **“Yes, Submit to finalize.”** After submitting you will see a loading indicator for up to 30 seconds while your submission is scored. Do not close the browser during this time.




Once submitted you cannot change your answers. If you notice an error after submitting, email hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org with your Submission ID before June 10 at 11:59pm ET.


Screen 7 - Confirmation

After scoring completes you will see the confirmation screen showing:

- Your Submission ID - save this. You will need it if you contact support.
- Your team name, members, and country
- The qualifier closing date and notification date
- Next steps and contact information

 **Qualifier Submitted!**

Team
Praveen Strong Grad Team

Submission ID
2a8bd209-7953-4e70-ba56-e5b3b6d0da4b 

Track
Graduate

Submitted
April 17, 2026 at 12:52 AM EDT

Your qualifier results will be sent to: **praveen.handral@usaii.org**
If this email is incorrect, contact hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org with your Submission ID before June 10, 2026 at 11:59pm ET.



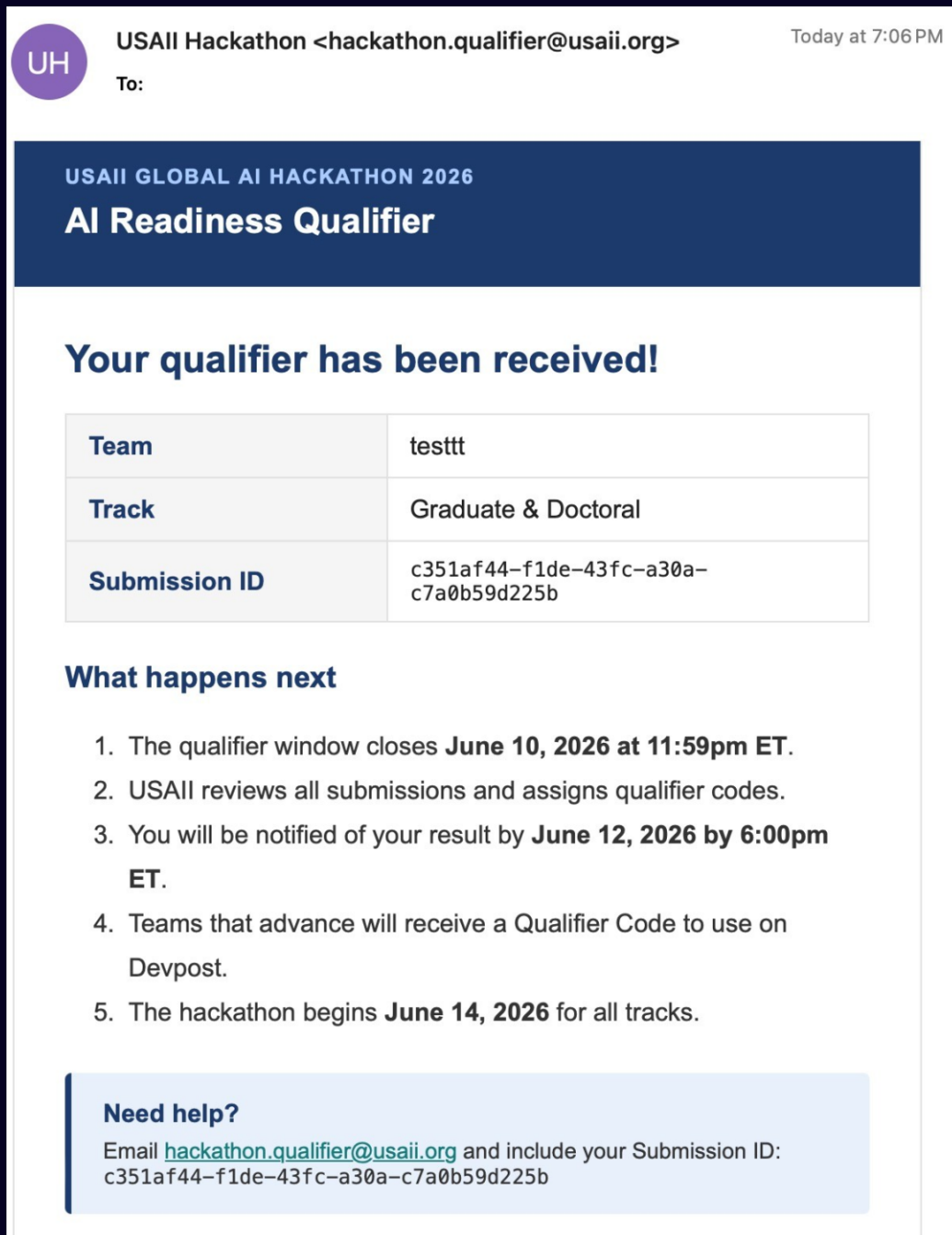
Your score is not shown on the confirmation screen. Results are sent by email on June 11, 2026 to the contact email you provided. If selected, teams are informed by email on June 11, 2026 to the contact email you provided



Take a screenshot of your confirmation screen as a record. The Submission ID is your proof of completion.

Confirmation Email

Within a few minutes of submitting you will receive a confirmation email from hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org. If you do not receive this email within 30 minutes, check your spam folder. If it is not there, contact hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org with your team name.



Frequently Asked Questions

Registration Questions

Q: My email is not being recognized during registration. What should I do?

A: Your email must match the email you used to register on Devpost. Check that you are typing the same email exactly - including any dots, underscores, or numbers. If you registered on Devpost with a different email, use that one. If you still have trouble, email hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org with your Devpost username.

Q: I registered on Devpost but the qualifier says my email is not recognized.

A: The registered participant list is loaded from Devpost after the registration deadline. If you registered very recently the list may not yet include your email. Contact hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org with your Devpost confirmation and we will verify your registration manually.

Q: Can my team register if we are from different countries?

A: Yes. Teams can include members from different countries. Use the country of your team captain when selecting country during registration.

Q: Can my team include members from different schools?

A: Yes. Teams of 2-5 members can come from different schools or universities. Enter each member's actual school in their profile.

Q: We made a mistake in our registration -- wrong team name, wrong email, wrong track. Can we fix it?

A: Contact hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org as soon as possible with your Submission ID and the correction. We can make adjustments until the qualifier closes on June 10 at 11:59pm ET.

Q: My team already submitted but we want to change our answers. Can we resubmit?

A: No. Once submitted, answers are final. Each team may only submit once. If you have a genuine error in your contact email or registration details, contact hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org before the June 10 deadline.

Qualifier Questions

Q: Do we need to build anything for the qualifier?

A: No. The qualifier is entirely text-based. You are answering questions about how you would approach a community challenge - you are not writing code or building a prototype at this stage.

Q: Can we use AI tools to help us with our answers?

A: Yes, you may use AI tools to help you research, brainstorm, and refine your thinking. The responses you submit should reflect your team's own reasoning and should be written in your own words. Submissions that appear to be wholesale AI-generated with no original thinking will score low by design - the rubric specifically rewards specific, situated thinking that generic AI output cannot produce.

Q: Is there a right answer?

A: No. The qualifier assesses how well you think through a problem - not whether you reach a specific conclusion. There is no single correct solution. Strong submissions are specific, grounded, and show genuine reasoning about AI's role and limitations.

Q: Our team is from a non-English speaking country. Will we be penalized for grammar or vocabulary?

A: No. The scoring rubric explicitly instructs the AI evaluator not to reward grammar, English fluency, or vocabulary level. Your score is based on the clarity of your thinking, not the polish of your writing. Minor spelling errors do not affect your score.

Q: How long should my answers be?

A: Each field has a word limit. You do not need to use the maximum - short, specific answers score just as well as long ones. Focus on saying something precise and real rather than trying to fill every word.

Q: Does the length of my answers affect my score?

No. Short specific answers score just as well as long ones. The rubric scores the quality of your thinking, not the volume of your words. A 15-word answer that names a specific user, a specific risk, and a specific mitigation will outperform a 40-word answer full of general statements.

Q: Can I save my progress and come back later?

A: Yes. Your answers auto-save every 30 seconds on Screen 3. If you close your browser, return to qualifier.usaii.org, click Returning Team, and enter your Session Code. Your answers will be restored. Save your session code before leaving.

Q: Does my English grammar or writing style affect my score?

No. The scoring system is explicitly instructed not to reward grammar, English fluency, or vocabulary level. The rubric evaluates clarity of thinking, not writing polish. Minor spelling errors do not affect your score. If your idea is clear and specific, it will score well regardless of how formal your writing is.

Q: The page froze while I was writing. Did I lose my answers?

A: Auto-save runs every 30 seconds on Screen 3. If the page froze after an auto-save, your answers are preserved. Reload the page, enter your session code, and check whether your answers are there. If you lost significant content, email hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org with your Submission ID before the deadline.

Scoring Questions

Q: How is the qualifier scored?

A: Your submission is evaluated automatically by an AI scoring system using a structured rubric across six criteria. Each criterion is scored 0 to 5, and the criteria are weighted differently based on their importance. Your final score is a number from 0 to 100.

Criterion	Weight	What it measures
Problem Understanding	25%	How clearly you identified a specific user, a real problem, and why it matters
AI Reasoning	25%	Why AI is the right tool — not just that AI helps, but what it enables that a simpler approach cannot
Solution Coherence	20%	Whether your data source, AI capability, and build type work together logically
Responsible AI	15%	Whether you identified a real, specific risk and a concrete way to reduce it
Human Oversight	10%	Whether you identified a specific point where humans must remain in control and why
Clarity of Communication	5%	Whether your answers are clear and understandable

Q: Will I see my score?

A: Your score is not shown on the confirmation screen. If your team advances, you will receive your qualifier code and brief feedback in your notification email on June 12. If your team does not advance, you will receive feedback explaining your strongest area and key area for improvement.

Q: What do the scoring bands mean?

Submissions fall into one of three bands after scoring:

Band	Score	What it means
Strong	60 and above	Your submission demonstrated clear AI thinking, a specific user, and genuine engagement with the problem. You are in consideration for advancement.
Review	40 to 59	Your submission showed some genuine thinking but lacked specificity in one or more areas. USAII® staff will review your submission before making a final advancement decision.
Did not meet threshold	Below 40	Your submission was too general or incomplete to demonstrate the AI thinking readiness the qualifier is designed to assess.

Q: Is there a human review process?

A: Yes. Submissions in the borderline range receive human review before final advancement decisions are made. USAII® staff review all flagged submissions and borderline cases. Automated scores are inputs to human judgment -- not the sole determining factor.

Q: What does a score of 60 or above actually look like?

A submission in the 60-80 range typically has all of the following:

- A named, specific user — not "people who need help" but "elderly residents over 70 living alone who are not comfortable searching online"
- A real problem with clear stakes — what goes wrong today and why it matters to that specific user
- A justified AI approach — not just "AI can help" but an explanation of why AI over a simpler tool like a search engine or directory website
- A realistic risk — something that could actually go wrong with your specific solution, not a generic statement like "AI might be biased"
- A mitigation with a real mechanism — not "test it before using it" but a specific design choice that addresses the risk
- A human role with a specific trigger — not "humans should oversee the AI" but a named decision point where human judgment is required and why

A submission in the 80-100 range does all of the above and also shows deeper thinking — for example explaining why AI over a rules-based alternative, identifying who specifically is harmed by the risk and how, or naming a specific handoff condition for human review with a timeframe.

Q: What is the most common reason submissions score low?

The single most common reason is lack of specificity. The rubric is designed to reward concrete, situated thinking over general statements. Here are the most common patterns that score low at each level:

High School:

- User is described as "people who need help" or "community members" — scores 1 on Problem Understanding
- Risk is "AI might not work correctly" or "AI could be biased" with no further explanation — scores 1 on Responsible AI
- AI reasoning is "AI can process data and find patterns" — scores 1-2 on AI Reasoning

College:

- Naming machine learning or recommendation systems without explaining what the model takes as input and returns as output — scores 2 on AI Reasoning
- Mitigation is "use diverse training data" — scores 2, not 3, because this is the most common generic answer
- Solution describes what the tool does but not how the AI component actually works — scores 2-3 on Solution Coherence

Graduate:

- Any response that would score 3 at High School level scores 2 at Graduate level — the bar is higher
- Naming fairness constraints without specifying the type (equalized odds, demographic parity) — scores 2-3 on Responsible AI
- No model evaluation strategy, no lifecycle thinking, no mention of what happens after deployment — scores 3-4 on Solution Coherence

Q: Do submissions get disqualified for other reasons?

Submissions may be flagged for human review before final advancement decisions are made.

Q: What may flag a submission?

Flag	What triggered it	What it means for you
INCOMPLETE	One or more required fields was left blank or contained fewer than 5 characters	Your submission was missing content in at least one field. This significantly reduces your score.
MISSING_ETHICS	Your risk or mitigation field was blank or contained fewer than 4 words	The responsible AI section is required. A response of "AI might fail" with no further explanation scores very low and triggers this flag.
OVER_LIMIT	One or more fields exceeded its word limit	The scoring system noted you went over a word limit. This is informational — the limit is enforced in the app before submission, so this flag typically appears when content was pasted and the app did not catch it. It does not disqualify you.
GENERIC_FILLER	Your answers contained template style language with no specific content	Phrases like "leverage AI," "harness the power of technology," "in today's world," or answers that could apply to any app rather than your specific idea. This flag reduces your score.
HARMFUL_CLAIM	Your submission contained language associated with harmful applications	Words or phrases associated with surveillance, mass tracking, weapons, or systems designed to harm specific groups. This flag results in immediate disqualification review
EXACT_DUPLICATE	Your submission is identical to another team's submission	The content of your answers exactly matched another team's submission. This is treated as plagiarism and will result in disqualification of the later submission.
SHARED_MEMBER	A registration email matches a member of another team	Someone on your team appears to also be registered on a different team. Each person may only participate on one team. USAII® will contact you to verify before any action is taken.
COPIED_EXAMPLE	Your answers contain phrases from the student help guide examples	The scoring system detected content copied directly from the example answers in the official USAII® qualifier help guide. Your submission will be reviewed by a human before any advancement decision.

Q: My submission was flagged. Does that mean I am disqualified?

Not automatically. Most flags trigger a human review, not an immediate disqualification. USAII® staff will review your submission before any final decision. The only flags that result in immediate disqualification review without further consideration are HARMFUL_CLAIM and EXACT_DUPLICATE.

Technical Questions

Q: The Register button is not activating even though I filled everything in.

A: Check three things: (1) both checkboxes are checked -- track eligibility AND privacy consent, (2) the reCAPTCHA 'I am not a robot' challenge is completed, (3) all member emails show a green checkmark. All three are required before the button activates.

Q: I lost my Session Code. How do I get back to my submission?

A: Email hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org with your team name and the email addresses you used to register. We can look up your session code. Do not register again -- that will create a duplicate registration.

Q: The qualifier is not loading. What should I try?

A: Try these steps in order: (1) hard refresh the page (Cmd+Shift+R on Mac, Ctrl+Shift+R on Windows), (2) try a different browser (Chrome or Firefox recommended), (3) try incognito/private mode, (4) check your internet connection. If none of these work, email hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org.

Q: I submitted but did not receive a confirmation email.

A: Check your spam or junk folder. The email comes from hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org – add this address to your contacts to prevent filtering. If not in spam after 30 minutes, email us with your team name and we will confirm receipt.

Q: I am getting an error that my email is already registered.

A: This means one of the emails you entered is already associated with another team. Each team member can only be on one team. If this is an error, contact hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org.

Advancement Questions

Q: When will I find out if I advanced?

A: All teams will be notified by email on June 12, 2026. Check the contact email you provided during registration.

Q: What happens if I advance?

A: You will receive a Qualifier Code by email in the format USAII-2026-XXXXXX. When you submit your hackathon project on Devpost, you will be asked to enter this code. Keep it safe - it is your proof of qualification.

Q: What if my team does not advance?

A: You will receive an email with feedback on your qualifier submission - your strongest area and a key area for improvement. We encourage teams who do not advance to review the feedback and consider participating in future USAII® events.

Q: Can I appeal my qualifier result?

A: Yes. If you believe a material error occurred in the evaluation of your submission, email hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org with subject line 'Appeal - [Team Name]' within 48 hours of receiving your result. Appeals must specify the alleged error clearly. Appeals based on disagreement with scoring criteria will not be considered.

Contact and Support

Need Help?

Email: hackathon.qualifier@usaii.org

Include your team name and Submission ID in every message. Support will be monitored from June 7 to 10 during the qualifier window.

Response time: within 24 hours (usually faster during qualifier window)



DISCLAIMER: USAII's Global AI Hackathon 2026 is exclusive to students only. Full-time students from any degree or doctoral program are also eligible. Working professionals enrolled in any Degree or Doctoral Programs are not eligible to participate in the competition. Should anyone win the competition (in any category) and be discovered as a working professional, the prize and other benefits will be awarded to the next-best team/s.

About USAII[®]

The United States Artificial Intelligence Institute (USAII[®]) is the world's leading Artificial Intelligence certifications provider for aspiring professionals and leaders at any stage of their career, organizations, institutions, academia, or governments, looking to upskill and reskill their expertise in the ever-evolving Artificial Intelligence domain.

QUALIFIER ROUND

June 7–10

[ACCESS QUALIFIER](#)

LOCATIONS

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