

Help is Hard to Find

High School Track (Grades 9–12) | AI for Good in Your World



What You're Building

An AI-powered tool that helps students, families, or community members find or understand support more clearly — turning confusing information into plain language, checklists, and clear next steps.



Build window: June 14–21, 2026 | Teams: 2–5 students | Format: Fully virtual, global

The Problem

Every community has support systems — food assistance, mental health services, housing help, school programs — but they are often **difficult to navigate**. People miss out on help not because it doesn't exist, but because information is scattered, language is complex, and systems aren't designed for people under stress. Misinformation also spreads quickly, making it even harder to know what's true and what to do next.

Your Mission

Build an AI-powered MVP that helps students, families, or community members find or understand support more clearly. Choose ONE direction below:

Direction A: Crisis-to-Action Translator

Turn confusing or stressful information into plain language, a checklist, and clear next steps.

- Translate complex documents into simple explanations
- Identify what matters most for the user
- Guide users toward the right immediate action
- **Examples:** School notices, government letters, hospital discharge instructions, food assistance forms, housing eligibility documents

Direction B: Rumor vs. Reality Tracker

Help people evaluate local claims and understand what is true, misleading, or unverified.

- Check claims against credible sources
- Explain why something is trustworthy, misleading, or unverified
- Help users make informed decisions under uncertainty
- **Examples:** School threat rumors, unsafe product claims, disaster misinformation, local service closures
-  Note: Direction B is more advanced. A simplified approach — flagging claims for human review rather than auto-verifying — is completely valid.

Who You're Building For

Your user: a student, parent, caregiver, or community member — someone under stress who needs quick, clear, and trustworthy guidance.

Guiding question: How might we use AI to make local support easier to understand, trust, and act on — especially in moments of confusion or stress?

What a Strong Solution Looks Like

- Focuses on a **real, specific user** and situation
- Uses AI to **simplify complexity**, not just display information
- Shows a clear flow: user input → AI processing → helpful output → action
- Is **realistic and usable** in everyday life
- Includes at least one **responsible AI safeguard**

⚠ Common Mistakes — Judges will mark down:

- Vague users: 'people' or 'everyone' is not a user. Name a specific person (e.g. 'a parent receiving an eviction notice')
- Generic risks: 'AI could be biased' without explaining how or for whom
- Solutions that don't explain WHY AI is needed over a simple web search

Data & Technical Approach

You may use:

- Public service directories (e.g. local resource listings, 211.org)
- School communications or sample documents
- Government websites, forms, and public health guidance
- **Synthetic examples** (mock messages, posts, or documents — you don't need real data)

⊘ Avoid: making legal or medical decisions for users, or using sensitive personal data.

Responsible AI Requirements

Every submission must include all three:

1. One Realistic Risk — e.g. misinformation, bias, incorrect advice, over-reliance
2. One Concrete Mitigation — e.g. confidence indicators, source transparency, human review option
3. Human-in-the-Loop — identify one decision your AI does NOT make, and explain why a human should remain in control

AI Capabilities You May Use

- Natural Language Processing (NLP) — understanding and generating text
- Summarization — condensing long documents into key points
- Classification — true/false, urgent/not urgent, trustworthy/questionable
- Retrieval — finding relevant sources or documents
- Recommendation systems — suggesting the right next resource
- Generative AI — plain-language explanations or translations

Real-World Partner Inspiration

You may draw inspiration from organizations such as:

- United Way · Feeding America · Crisis Text Line · UNHCR · International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- 211.org (U.S. service navigation) · Citizens Advice (UK) · Turn2Us · Benefits Data Trust

What to Submit on Devpost

Devpost Field	What to Include
Qualifier Approval Code	Enter your 8-character code sent via email after passing the AI Qualifier (e.g., XX26-Q7H9K2M1). Submissions without a valid code will be disqualified.
Project Description	A complete description of your solution, the problem you solved, and who it helps.
Track & Challenge Selection	Select your track (High School / Undergraduate / Graduate) and your challenge number.
AI Architecture Explanation	Describe: (1) Inputs — what data goes in, (2) AI capability used (e.g., chatbot, classification, recommendation), (3) What processing happens, (4) Outputs — what the user receives.
Human-in-Loop Design	What is one decision your AI does NOT make? Explain why a human must remain involved at this point.
Responsible AI Guardrail	What is one risk in your system and how did you reduce it? Examples: bias, misinformation, misuse, over-reliance, exclusion.
Tools Used	List all AI tools, models, APIs, and any AI coding assistance. Indicate which are free vs. paid.
Data Disclosure	What data did you use? Include datasets, APIs, or synthetic data. If synthetic, explain how it was created.
3–5 Minute Pitch Video	A video covering: (1) the problem and user, (2) how your AI works, (3) a live or recorded walkthrough, (4) your responsible AI choice.
Working Demo or Walkthrough	A functional prototype, chatbot, workflow demo, interactive mockup, simulation, or decision-support model.

 Your video should show: (1) the problem and user, (2) how your AI works, (3) a walkthrough, (4) your responsible AI choice.
Your prototype does not need to work perfectly. A walkthrough showing real AI output is sufficient.

How You'll Be Evaluated

Dimension	Weight	What Judges Look For
Problem Understanding	30%	Is the problem real and clearly explained? Is there a specific user?
AI Reasoning	20%	Does AI meaningfully help solve the problem? Why is AI needed?
Solution Design	20%	Is there a clear input → AI → output flow? Is the system understandable?
Impact & Insight	20%	Does this help someone take a better action?

Dimension	Weight	What Judges Look For
Responsible AI	10%	Is there awareness of risks and a thoughtful safeguard?

💡 Judge's Lens: Each judge reviews 10 teams in ~15 minutes. Lead with your problem and user — don't bury them. Judges want to understand WHO is helped and HOW within the first 30 seconds of reading.

Impact

The strongest projects will:

- Reduce confusion in stressful moments
- Help people move from **uncertainty** → **clarity** → **action**
- Increase trust in information and support systems
- Make real help easier to access in everyday life

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need coding experience?	No. You are encouraged to use no-code and low-code AI tools. What matters is your thinking, not your technical stack.
Can my team be from different countries?	Yes! Teams of 2–5 can span different schools, cities, and countries. Register together on Devpost.
What counts as a prototype?	Anything that demonstrates your AI working: a functional app, a chatbot walkthrough, a workflow demo, an interactive mockup, or a clearly narrated simulation. It does not need to be production-ready.
What should my video show?	Cover four things: (1) the problem and user, (2) how your AI works, (3) a live or recorded walkthrough of your solution, and (4) your key responsible AI choice.
Do paid AI tools give an advantage?	No. Judging rewards reasoning and design thinking, not technical resources. Open-source and free tools are equally valid.
What happens after submission?	Submissions go through AI screening, then judge review (Round 2), then a final panel (Round 3) for the top 10 teams per track. All teams receive results by email.
Can I use AI tools to help build my project?	Yes. You must disclose which AI tools you used in your submission. Using AI to help build does not disqualify you — transparency does.
When will I know if I qualified?	Qualifier results are released June 11–13. You will be notified by email and can also check your status on the hackathon platform.
What if I choose Direction B and can't build a real fact-checker?	That's fine. A tool that presents claims alongside source links and lets users decide — rather than auto-verifying — is a valid and thoughtful approach.
Do I need to cover every example listed?	No. Pick ONE specific scenario and do it well. Depth beats breadth.

Questions? Contact us at aihackathon@usaii.org or join our Discord: discord.gg/ePjenJnyh4
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