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USAII's Global AI Hackathon 2026

STUDENT PREP GUIDE FOR THE QUALIFIER

aihackathon.usaii.org

What is this guide for?

This guide helps you understand the steps to participate in the USAII® Global AI Hackathon — and gives you hands-on practice for the Qualifier so you feel confident and ready before **June 7.**

Step	When	What to do
1	**April 26**	Register on Devpost and create your participant profile. Devpost is where you'll submit your final project.
2	**April 26 – June 6**	Recruit your team. Teams are 2–5 students. You can team up with students from other schools or countries.
3	**April 26 – June 6**	Prepare! Complete this practice guide, attend USAII boot camps, and review the challenge topics.
4	**June 7–10**	Complete the Qualifier — a short 30 minute online assessment. All registered teams must complete this step.
5	**June 14**	Hackathon Kickoff at 10:00 AM ET. Attend live or watch the recording. Challenge briefs are revealed here.
6	**June 14–21**	Select your challenge direction and build your AI project. Use mentors and Discord for support.
7	**June 21**	Submit your project on Devpost by 11:59 PM ET. No late submissions accepted.
8	**June 22–25**	Judging takes place. You don't need to do anything — just wait for results.
9	**June 13**	Qualifier results announced. Teams that advance will be notified by email with instructions for the Hackathon.
10	**June 27**	Awards Showcase at 10:00 AM ET. Winners announced live. Watch the stream!

What is the Qualifier?

The Qualifier is a short written assessment your team completes online between June 7–10. It takes about 30 minutes and does not require any coding or building.

You will be given a real-world scenario and asked a series of short questions about:

- The problem and who it affects
- Why AI could help and how
- What you would build
- What risks exist and how you'd handle them
- Where humans should stay in control

> ***Good news:*** *Scores are based on your thinking, not your writing style. Short, clear, and specific answers score better than long, vague ones. Responses have word limits.*

Practice: Try the Qualifier Yourself

Read the scenario below, then answer each question. Use the tips in the right column to guide your response. The scenario for the actual Qualifier will be different.

Practice Scenario: Learning & School

Most schools teach every student the same material at the same pace — but students learn differently, fall behind for different reasons, and rarely get the individual attention they need to catch up. Teachers are stretched thin and often don't know which students are struggling until it's too late. Design an AI solution that helps students learn more effectively or helps teachers identify and respond to learning gaps before they become serious problems.

Question	What to Answer	Tips for a Strong Answer
Problem (50 words max)	What problem are you solving? What makes it hard for students or teachers?	Be specific about the gap. Not just 'students struggle in school' — try: 'Middle school math teachers have no way to see which students are falling behind until they fail a test.'
Target User (30 words max)	Who specifically experiences this problem?	Pick one clear user — student, teacher, or both. 'Students' alone is too vague. Try: '6th-grade students who miss class due to illness and fall behind with no way to catch up.'
Why It Matters (40 words max)	Why is this problem frustrating, expensive, or harmful if not solved?	Describe the real consequence for the student or teacher. What happens when a learning gap goes undetected for weeks? What does falling behind cost a student long-term?
Why AI? (40 words max)	How could AI help in a way a worksheet or a teacher checking in manually couldn't?	Explain the scale or pattern-detection advantage. Example: 'A teacher can't track 30 students' daily progress individually — AI can spot patterns across assignments and flag who needs help before a test.'
AI Capability (select up to 2)	Which AI capability might power your solution?	Think about what the AI actually does. Pattern detection fits identifying struggling students. Recommendation systems fit suggesting next steps. Generative AI fits personalized explanations or practice questions.
Solution (60 words max)	Describe your idea at a high level — what does it do, for whom, and how?	Name the tool type, who uses it, what they input, and what comes out. Example: 'A teacher-facing dashboard where students complete short daily check-ins. AI analyzes response patterns and flags students showing early signs of confusion for the teacher to follow up.'
Risk (40 words max)	What is one realistic risk or concern with using AI in a school setting?	Think about students specifically. Generic answers like 'AI could be wrong' score low. Specific ones score high — e.g., 'AI might flag a student as struggling based on missed inputs, not actual confusion, leading a teacher to intervene unnecessarily.'
Mitigation (40 words max)	How would you reduce or manage that risk?	Name a concrete design choice. Not just 'review the AI.' Example: 'Show teachers the specific data points behind each flag so they can judge whether to act, rather than treating the alert as a definitive diagnosis.'
Human Role	Where should humans remain in control instead of AI deciding?	Be specific about who decides what. Example: 'The AI surfaces patterns and suggests which students to check in with — but the teacher decides how and when to intervene. AI never communicates directly with students or parents.'
Pitch	Complete this sentence: We are building an AI-powered solution that helps [who] so they can [what].	Name a real user and a concrete outcome. Example: 'We are helping middle school teachers identify struggling students earlier so they can intervene before a small gap becomes a failing grade.'

Best practices for Qualifier Answers

DO	AVOID
Name a specific user (e.g., 'seniors over 70 living alone')	Say 'people' or 'community members' as your user
Explain WHY AI — not just that AI helps	Use buzzwords without explanation ('machine learning will analyze data')
Describe a real, specific risk tied to your idea	List 'AI might be biased' as your only risk — it's too vague
Offer a concrete mitigation (a design decision, not just 'test it')	Say 'test before using' as your mitigation — that's not a design decision
Say exactly where a human stays in control — and why	Say 'humans should oversee the AI' with no further detail
Keep answers short and clear — use all your words wisely	Write long paragraphs — clarity beats length every time

How your Qualifier is scored

Six areas are scored on a 0–5 scale, then combined into a score out of 100:

- **Problem Understanding (25%)** — Is your user specific? Is the problem real?
- **AI Reasoning (25%)** — Is AI the right tool? Do you explain why?
- **Solution Coherence (20%)** — Does your idea hold together logically?
- **Responsible AI (15%)** — Did you identify a real risk and a concrete mitigation?
- **Human Oversight (10%)** — Did you identify a specific human role?
- **Communication Clarity (5%)** — Can we understand what you're proposing?

Quick checklist before you take the Real Qualifier

Before June 7, make sure you have:

- Pre-registered at aihackathon.usaii.org
- Created your Devpost profile (opens April 26)
- Formed or started recruiting your team (2–5 students)
- Practiced the qualifier format using this guide
- Attended a USAII boot camp session
- Reviewed the challenge topic areas so nothing surprises you at kickoff

Challenge Overview: Know Your Track

The full challenge briefs are revealed at the Hackathon Kickoff on June 14, 2026 at 10:00 AM ET. But you can start thinking now. Here is a preview of what each track will be working on.

> ***Note:*** *These are pre-briefs only. Complete challenge directions with specific problem statements, data guidance, and deliverable requirements will be shared live at the Kickoff. Use these previews to start thinking — not to start building.*

HIGH SCHOOL TRACK — Grades 9–12

AI for Everyday Good

Build AI tools that help people find support, understand information, or take environmental action in their local community.

Challenge Directions:

- **Community:** Help is Hard to Find — Make Support Obvious
- **Environment:** Make Climate Action Local and Real

UNDERGRADUATE TRACK

AI for Life & Work

Build decision-support tools, navigation systems, or AI assistants that help people manage life, work, and essential services.

Challenge Directions

- **Productivity:** Build the "Second Brain" for Real Life
- **Public Services:** Fix Systems People Depend On

GRADUATE TRACK — Master's & PhD

AI for Systems & Society

Build advanced AI systems for risk detection, policy simulation, community readiness assessment, or infrastructure optimization.

Challenge Directions:

- **Human Safety & Protection:** Build AI Systems That Protect People from Harm
- **Public Systems & Policy:** Build AI That Helps Communities Make Better Decisions

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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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