

Fix Systems People Depend On

Undergraduate Track | AI for Life, Learning & Work

What You're Building

An AI-powered tool that helps individuals, families, or community organizations better understand and navigate a public or social support system — turning confusion into clarity and clear next steps.

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

The Problem

People rely on public systems for stability — food assistance, housing support, healthcare, education programs, emergency services. But these systems are often **fragmented, difficult to understand, and hard to navigate** — especially under stress. People miss out on support they are eligible for not because they don't want it, but because the system is too confusing, slow, or inaccessible.

Your Mission

Build an AI-powered MVP that helps individuals, families, or community organizations better understand and navigate a public or social support system. Choose ONE direction below:

Direction A: Benefits Navigator

Help people understand whether they may qualify for a public support program — and what steps to take next.

- This is NOT just a directory of programs — help users interpret rules and reduce confusion
- Translate eligibility criteria into plain language
- Ask relevant questions to guide the user through their situation
- **Examples:** Food assistance, childcare support, education/training benefits, healthcare, emergency relief eligibility

Direction B: Housing Stability Guide

Help renters or housing-vulnerable users understand their options and next steps when facing housing instability.

- This is NOT legal advice — help users understand pathways and take action early
- Surface available options and resources based on the user's situation
- Guide users toward immediate, practical next steps
- **Examples:** Eviction information, rental assistance programs, housing rights education, service referrals, crisis planning checklists

Who You're Building For

Your user: a student, worker, caregiver, renter, immigrant family, or community case manager trying to understand a complex system — often under stress and time pressure.

Guiding question: How might we use AI to make essential systems easier to understand, navigate, and act on — especially for people under stress?

What a Strong Solution Looks Like

- Focuses on a **specific system and user context** — not a generic 'help portal'
- Uses AI to **simplify rules and interpret situations**, not just display information
- Shows a clear flow: user input → AI reasoning → actionable output
- Helps users **take the next step with confidence**
- Reflects real-world constraints (time pressure, stress, uncertainty)
- Includes at least one **responsible AI safeguard**

⚠ Common Mistakes — Judges will mark down:

- Building a resource directory without AI reasoning — show eligibility interpretation, not just a list
- Over-reliance risk ignored: if your tool says 'you qualify,' users may not verify — design against this
- 'Machine learning matches users to programs' without specifying inputs and logic is too vague at undergrad level

Data & Technical Approach

You may use:

- Public government websites and eligibility rules
- Housing or benefits program information (Benefits.gov, HUD, local housing authorities)
- Community resource directories
- **Synthetic user scenarios** — you do not need real user data

⊘ Avoid: providing legal or medical decisions, presenting outputs as guaranteed eligibility or outcomes.

Responsible AI Requirements

1. One Realistic Risk — e.g. incorrect eligibility interpretation, over-reliance, misinformation about rules
2. One Concrete Mitigation — e.g. 'you may qualify' framing (never 'you qualify'), source transparency, human referral options
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 — understanding user situations in plain language
- Retrieval systems — finding relevant programs based on user context
- Classification — eligibility matching and situation categorization
- Recommendation systems — surfacing next steps
- Conversational AI — guided intake with follow-up questions

Real-World Partner Inspiration

You may draw inspiration from organizations such as:

- Code for America · Benefits Data Trust · National Digital Inclusion Alliance · mySociety · World Bank Open Data

Examples of real systems:

- U.S. Digital Service · GovTech Singapore · e-Estonia · Benefits.gov · HousingNOW

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.

How You'll Be Evaluated

Dimension	Weight	What Judges Look For
Problem Understanding	20%	Is the system and user context clearly defined? Constraints acknowledged?
AI Reasoning	30%	Does AI meaningfully simplify navigation or interpretation? Justified approach?
Solution Design	25%	Clear and coherent system from input to actionable output?
Impact & Insight	15%	Does this reduce friction and improve access to services?

Dimension	Weight	What Judges Look For
Responsible AI	10%	Risks identified and mitigated thoughtfully?

💡 Judge's Lens: The strongest submissions show a specific user journey end to end — a real person in a real situation, navigating a real system, arriving at a clearer next step. Walk judges through that journey.

Impact

The strongest projects will:

- Reduce friction in navigating complex systems
- Help people move from **confusion** → **clarity** → **action**
- Improve access to essential services
- Make systems more **human-centered and usable**

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.
Can I build for a country outside the U.S.?	Absolutely. Focus on a public system you know well — your national healthcare system, local housing authority, or social services. Judges value specificity and authenticity.
What's the difference between Direction A and B?	Benefits Navigator focuses on understanding eligibility for programs (what you qualify for). Housing Stability Guide focuses on navigating housing instability (what to do when things go wrong). Choose the one that feels most real to you.

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