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Welcome to the CU Boulder **High School New Venture Challenge (HSNVC) – powered by FirstBank**. We are so happy to have you involved in this transformative program!

We're grateful to our coaches for empowering young innovators through mentorship and support, and to our students for actively engaging in the program and transforming those opportunities into growth, achievement, and community impact.

By participating in this challenge, teams will think creatively, build confidence, and develop solutions to real-world challenges... AND have the opportunity to compete for **\$25,000 in scholarships!**

As you prepare for the exciting journey ahead, here's a handy checklist to guide you through:

HSNVC: TO-DO'S

By Sat, Feb 14

- Venture Coaches register here: <https://bit.ly/2026HSNVCVentureCoach>
 - NOTE: Each team must have a coach who is 18yrs+ to guide the team's progress and serve as a primary point-of-contact. Coaches are welcome to represent multiple teams.
- Students form into **Venture Teams of 1-5 members**, brainstorm their initial idea, and nominate a student to be the CEO
- The student CEO registers on behalf of their team: <https://bit.ly/2026HSNVCStudentCEO>
 - NOTE: Only one student per team should complete this step
- Refer to this instructional video for guidance:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3UTAI9edu4M>
- Review the [HSNVC RULES & REGULATIONS](#)

Now through Weds Mar 25

- Coaches and teams collaboratively work through **Learning Process: Stage 1-5**. See 'HSNVC Additional Details' section below for more details. You may navigate this process in a manner that best fits your teams' needs, backgrounds, resources, and goals.
- Begin preparing to submit virtual **Competition Materials**, which consist of 1) a 1-2 page Executive Summary + 2) a ~4 minute video pitch.

- Refer to the **HSNVC Official Rubric** below for guidance. Judges will use this rubric to rate teams, so for best success, closely follow these guidelines:

HSNVC Rubric	
Scale of 1-6	
1: Strongly Disagree	
2: Disagree	
3: Slightly Disagree	
4: Slightly Agree	
5: Agree	
6: Strongly Agree	
Topics	Score 1-6
Promising Idea	
There is a clear need or problem is being addressed.	
The idea provides a solution to a validated problem.	
There is a clear way to make money or create impact.	
Progress	
The venture has proven they understand their customers through customer discovery interviews. More is better	
The venture has identified who their first customer is and how they will sell to the customer.	
The venture has demonstrated traction in the market (prototype, MVP, pilot, website, social media, app, etc.)	
Presentation	
The company presented a clear, compelling, professional, logical presentation - and answered questions thoroughly.	
TOTAL SCORE	

- OPTIONAL: I'd also like to bring your attention to an **online ai resource** that may be of interest. It can be a helpful tool for various aspects of the process including initial ideation, market analysis, cost structure, and more. <https://www.sparkrockets.com/>

HSNVC: TO-DO'S (cont.)

By Weds, March 25

- Student CEO updates the team's **Venture Profile** (if needed). Make sure all team members are included and details are up-to-date (e.g. venture name, contact info, etc.)
 - Create Venture Profile here: <https://nvc.startuptree.co/company/add/>
 - Update venture Profile here: <https://nvc.startuptree.co/>
 - Refer to this instructional guide to adding team members and venture coach info: <https://support.startuptree.co/forum/1682/How-to-Add-Team-Members-to-a-Venture/Project>
- Student CEO submits the team's **Round 1 Virtual Competition Materials** online via the Startup Tree platform.
 - Submit competition materials here: <https://bit.ly/2026HSNVCRound1>
- 1) Executive Summary** (1-2 pages):
 - This is a written explanation of the venture. It should give a concise, general overview of the problem you are seeking to address, the target market, and your proposed solution.
 - File must be in **.pdf format**
 - For guidance, refer to the [EXECUTIVE SUMMARY TEMPLATE](#)
- 2) Video Pitch** (~4-minutes):
 - The video can be as simple as a voiceover of the slide deck, or students may choose to appear on camera and get creative with the format.
 - Upload the video pitch to a platform like YouTube or Vimeo and share the link in this form. *Be sure the sharing setting will allow anyone to view the video.*
 - The two most important components are:
 - **The opportunity/problem** - describe the issue you are seeking to address, why it is a problem, who it impacts, etc.
 - **The solution** – describe how your venture or idea solves the issue, what makes it unique, your marketing strategy, etc.
 - For guidance, refer to the [HSNVC COMPETITION RUBRIC](#)

HSNVC WHAT'S NEXT...

Weds, April 1

- **HSNVC Round 1 Virtual Competition Materials will be reviewed online** by a panel of judges between March 26 and April 1.

- **Finalists will be notified** by April 1. Selected teams will be invited to compete in-person at the HSNVC Final Competition on Sunday, April 19.
- Finalists come together for the **in-person HSNVC Final Competition** at the CU Boulder campus for a full day of fun – including a campus tour and pitching to a live panel of judges and spectators. Classmates, family, and friends are welcome!
- Lunch will be provided and an awards ceremony will close out the day
- The Final Competition will take place in two rounds:
 - **Morning Round:** student teams will present in small breakout rooms to a live panel of judges. Panelists provide feedback and then deliberate over lunch break to select the top 5-6 teams. (5 min presentation + 5 min Q&A).
 - **Afternoon Round:** everyone attends the championship pitch session to cheer on the top 5-6 teams as they present to the audience and judges. (5 min presentation + 10 min Q&A).
- Each of the teams selected to proceed to the afternoon round will be awarded a portion of the **\$25,000 prize pool** to be applied towards future tuition at CU Boulder.

HSNVC LEARNING PROCESS

Learning Process: Stage 1-5

Venture Coaches and Venture Teams are welcome to navigate through the learning process in a manner that best fits their needs, backgrounds, resources, and goals.

During the months leading up to the competition, we generally recommend that participants engage in the following:

- **Stage 1: Exploration & Problem Identification**
Students begin by thinking creatively to identify problems and potential solutions
- **Stage 2: Creation & Solution Development**
Students form into teams, start working on their solution, and create a Minimum Viable Product (MVP), prototype, or basic mockup of the app/website/platform/concept
- **Stage 3: Customer Discovery & Validation**
Students engage in widespread customer discovery to validate and refine their ideas. The more interviews, surveys, and feedback collected, the better!
- **Stage 4: Product & Pitch Development**
Students refine their MVP, prototype, or mockup, based on feedback from customer discovery and start building their pitch
- **Stage 5: Venture Registration & Deliverables Preparation**
Students create and refine their materials and gear up for competition

HSNVC DISCUSSION POINTS & INSPIRATION

Discussion Points & Inspiration

Here's some helpful questions/tips to consider as you are working through the Learning Stages:

1 Define the Problem & Your “Why”

Start here. A strong venture solves a real problem for real people.

- What problem or opportunity are you addressing?
- Can you clearly explain the problem AND your solution in simple terms?
- Why do you care about solving this? What's your personal connection or passion?
- Where and when does this problem occur? Why does it exist in the first place?
- What is the scope of the issue (local, statewide, national, global)?
How many people are affected? Is it growing or shrinking?

👉 Tip: If you can't explain the problem simply, keep refining.

2 Understand Your Customer

Great ideas are built around people's real needs.

- Who is affected by this problem?
- What are their key characteristics (age, income, lifestyle, habits, etc.)?
- What are their pain points? How does the problem impact their daily life?
- Who is your ideal customer specifically?
- Who might be helpful partners to expand your reach or impact?

👉 Must-do: Interview potential customers. Thoughtful customer discovery is essential for success.

3 Clarify Your Solution & Value

Make it crystal clear why your idea matters.

- What is your value proposition?
- Can you explain it in 2–3 simple sentences (like you're talking to a first grader)?
- What benefit does your solution provide that others don't?

👉 Rule of thumb: Simple > complicated.

4 Competition & Differentiation

Know your landscape.

- What existing solutions or competitors are out there?
- How is your product/service different or better?
- Remember: competitors aren't always direct (ex: a coffee maker competes with a coffee shop).

👉 Tip: If alternatives exist, explain clearly why someone would choose you.

5 Marketing & Sales

How will people actually find and buy from you?

- How will customers learn about you? (social media, word-of-mouth, referrals, etc.)
- What channels best reach your target audience?
- What is your sales pitch? How will you grab attention?
- How can customers purchase or access your product/service easily?

👉 Make it easy: If it's hard to buy, people won't.

6 Pricing, Costs & Sustainability

Make sure the numbers work.

Pricing

- How much will you charge?
- One-time or recurring payments?
- What incentives encourage purchases?
- How does your price compare to competitors?

Expenses

- What does it cost to make or deliver your product/service? (materials, tools, transportation, rent, employees, your time, etc.)
- What are fixed costs (stay the same) vs. variable costs (change with volume)?

Profitability

- What is your margin after expenses?
- How will you make this sustainable long term?

👉 Goal: Competitive AND profitable.

7 Timeline & Goals

Map out your path forward.

- What is your current stage?
- What are your next steps, and how long will each take?
- Where do you want to be in 3 months, 1 year, 5 years?
- Do you plan to grow or expand?
- What does success look like to you personally?

👉 Tip: Break big goals into small, doable steps.