

FAQ for the Verizon Innovative Learning app challenge.

Absolutely, positively no coding required.

What is the app challenge?

The app challenge, part of Verizon Innovative Learning, is a nationwide contest in which middle and high school students are challenged to develop concepts for mobile apps that solve a problem in their community. It's a unique, hands-on activity that teaches collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, and entrepreneurship, as well as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) skills and coding. It builds on students' excitement about technology and aims to equip them with skills they need to succeed in the jobs of the future.

What are the important dates?

Registration opens	August 1, 2016
Submission deadline	November 18, 2016
Best in Nation and Fan Favorite winners are announced	February 15, 2017

Who can enter?

Teams of students affiliated with schools and nonprofit groups/clubs can enter the contest, along with an adult advisor.

The students must be in grades 6 through 12, and the teams must have five to seven members plus their advisor. Teams can register with their school (public, private, or parochial) or any nonprofit group or club that is tax-exempt under section **501(c)(3)** of the Internal Revenue Code. They must be located in the United States. [Here are more details](#) about who can participate.

Who can be a team advisor?

The team advisor must be at least 18 years old and be an employee of the school or nonprofit organization that is hosting the team.

What do advisors do?

Team advisors are responsible for completing the registration, authorization, and release forms and for mentoring the team throughout the app challenge. Advisors can register as many teams as they want.

How many teams win, and at which levels?

- Provided there are qualifying entries, one middle school and one high school team from each state and the District of Columbia win at the Best in State level.
- 24 teams win at the Best in Region level.
- Eight teams win at the Best in Nation level.
- One team wins the Fan Favorite award.

What steps do we take to enter the app challenge?

It's simple to enter:

- Gather your team.
- Complete the [registration](#), authorization, and release forms.
- Read the [rules](#).
- Identify a problem in your community that you want to solve.
- Develop your app concept (see below).
- Create your submission (see below).

What are the contest rules?

Read the Official Rules and Guidelines for the 2016–2017 contest [here](#).

Do teams need expertise in building a mobile app?

No. Teams do not build an app to enter the app challenge – the contest is about the concept only. Judges evaluate essay/video submissions

based on how well the team has researched and presented its concept. After a team wins at the national level, members learn coding from MIT experts who help them get their app ready to launch in an online app marketplace.

What does it mean to “create an app concept”?

To create an app concept:

- As a team, look around your school or community and brainstorm about a few different problems your app could address.
- Research other apps that address these or similar issues.
- Brainstorm about how you could improve on existing solutions to these problems – or how you could create entirely new solutions.
- Decide which problem to focus on.
- Develop your solution and its features.
- Assign tasks to your team members.
- Create your concept submission, which consists of an essay and a video (see next question and answer).

What is a concept submission?

A concept submission consists of essay responses and a video.

- **Essay responses:** Submit written answers to questions about the problem your app would tackle and the features that make your solution unique.

- **Video:** Create a three-minute video that demonstrates your team's vision for its mobile app concept, showing why this problem is meaningful to your team and how your app concept will help solve it. Be sure to demonstrate your team's unique personality and approach. Upload the video to YouTube or Vimeo. In the title, include the hashtag #VZAppChallenge.

What do the judges look for in a winning concept?

Judges are looking for:

- Original ideas
- Comprehensive research
- Innovative solutions
- Clear explanations
- Creative presentations

Your idea should address a problem or need that has affected your team or school personally, or that your team is in a unique position to solve.

- For example, a 2014 Best in Nation winning team developed the **Hello Navi** app to help their blind classmate navigate around the school.
- A 2015 Best in Nation winning team developed **Safe & Sound** to help their friends and family members who struggle with stress, anxiety, and depression.
- A 2015 Best in Region team developed a concept called **Remember Me**, inspired by a team member's aunt who suffers from

Alzheimer's, which would help memory-impaired people recognize their loved ones.

These teams' concept submissions were successful because they understood their problem deeply through first-hand experience. Their intimate knowledge of the problem helped them conduct more complete research and explain their solutions more clearly. For more stories and example videos, see the **Inspiration** section of the app challenge website.

Your essay responses should be thorough, well-written, and edited for correct grammar and spelling. To create your video, use the **resources** for ideas on how to effectively present your app concept.

Make sure your concept provides an **innovative approach**. Do not create concepts for apps that already exist, or that have been recognized as previous app challenge winners, such as:

- Homework/study schedulers
- Calorie counters/exercise logs
- Finding volunteer opportunities
- Weather trackers
- Navigation/traffic apps

How are winners chosen?

A panel of judges, including educators and industry experts assembled by the Technology Student Association (TSA), evaluates the concept submissions according to these **judging standards** to identify winners at the Best in State, Best in Region, and Best in Nation levels. All Best in State winners are also eligible to participate in the Fan Favorite contest.

What are the prizes?

Everyone is a winner! Just by participating, young people gain:

- Experience working on a real-world STEM project
- Teamwork and collaboration skills
- Critical thinking, creative problem solving, and entrepreneurship skills
- Character development, including empathy and grit
- Skills addressed by educational standards

State- and national-level winners get these amazing prizes:

- Best in State winning teams receive a \$5,000 for their school or nonprofit group/club program and mobile tablets for every team member, plus the opportunity to compete for Best in Region and Best in Nation.
- Best in Nation and Fan Favorite teams receive an additional \$15,000 award for their school or nonprofit group/club, in-person coding training from MIT experts, and an all-expenses-paid trip to the National TSA Conference for each team member and a parent/guardian in the summer.

What is the Fan Favorite contest?

All Best in State teams are eligible to compete for the title of Fan Favorite, which is chosen by popular vote. The teams' video submissions are posted on the [app challenge website](#), and the public is invited to [vote](#) for their favorite. The Fan Favorite winning team receives the same prizes as the Best in Nation teams.

How does the app challenge build skills for jobs of the future?

There is broad consensus that for students to succeed in the jobs of tomorrow, they will need skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, creative problem solving, and more. The app challenge is a hands-on project that:

- **Builds teamwork:** Teams of five to seven students work together to identify a problem, assign roles and responsibilities, and create an innovative solution. Team members hold each other accountable for their responsibilities. Students present their solution as a team.
- **Teaches critical thinking:** Students use research and analysis skills, as well as STEM knowledge, in identifying problems and devising their solutions.
- **Builds character:** By searching for problems that need solutions, students practice empathy.

Can we enter the app challenge again if our school has entered in the past? What if we won in the past?

If your school or group has entered teams in the past, we encourage you to enter again! If your team won Best in State or Best in Region, by all means, try again this year for Best in Nation.

Schools or nonprofit groups/clubs can enter teams each year. However, if your team won Best in Nation, those team members are not eligible to participate again. But we hope you'll use your expertise to mentor another group in your school or community.

What happens after the winners are chosen?

After the Best in State winners are chosen, they receive their prizes (a \$5,000 award for their school or nonprofit group/club, plus tablets for each team member). They go on to compete for Best in Region, and regional winners in turn compete for Best in Nation. All Best in State teams may compete for the Fan Favorite award, which is chosen through crowd voting.

After the Best in Nation teams are announced, coding experts from MIT visit the winners' schools or nonprofit groups/clubs and train students to use MIT App Inventor to build their apps. The teams work in person and virtually with MIT experts to get their apps working by June 1. Then the Best in Nation winning teams travel (all expenses are paid for each team member and one parent/guardian) to the National TSA Conference in the summer, where they demo their apps in person.

Some great and surprising things can happen to the winning teams, too. For example:

- A winning team from 2013, the Quest Math team from the Bronx Academy of Promise, was featured in a **Verizon commercial**.
- A winning team from 2014 was featured in a Verizon online campaign and **documentary**.
- Two winning teams, **Hello Navi** and **Safe & Sound**, demonstrated their apps at the White House Science Fair – and got to meet Bill Nye the Science Guy!

Visit the **Past Winners** section of the app challenge website to read about these stories and more.

When the working apps are live, who owns the intellectual property?

The apps are owned by the students who created them. Verizon does not own the intellectual property.

Are they available free for download, or is there a fee? If a fee is charged, who keeps the profit?

Students can offer the apps for free or they can charge a fee. It's completely up to the winning team. One team, **Hello Navi**, even sold its app to an investor.