

INDEPENDENT INNOVATOR CHALLENGE



STUDENT HANDBOOK

A How-To Guide



GETTING STARTED

The **Independent Innovator challenge** (I.I.C.) is an annual challenge designed to provide K-12 students from across the United States a pathway to the US National Innovator Challenge (NIC). It is a place for innovators to share, compete, and be celebrated for their brilliant solutions.

MISSION STATEMENT:

To inspire and cultivate a new generation of innovators who will lead the way to a better future for all.

HOW WE DEFINE INNOVATION

The Oxford Dictionary defines “innovation” as the introduction of new things, ideas, or ways of doing something. At the IIC & NIC, we broaden this definition to include significantly improved methods, ideas, systems, or products. This encompasses enhancements, changes, or additions to current innovations that significantly improve upon them or perform the same function in a unique way.



EXAMPLES OF INNOVATION:

Some examples of innovations: prototype, app, idea, social good program, service, process, ...or yours could be different from these and we encourage you to apply!

- Writing Instruments:
 - Early Innovations: Styluses in ancient times.
 - Modern Developments: Ballpoint pens, gel pens, felt-tip markers.
- Timekeeping Devices:
 - Early Innovations: Sundials and water clocks.
 - Modern Technology: Smartwatches with digital functionalities.
- Computers:
 - Early Machines: The abacus and Charles Babbage’s Analytical Engine.
 - Personal Computers and Beyond: Development of modern high-speed processors.
- Medical Technology:
 - Ancient Practices: Herbal medicines.
 - Modern Advances: MRI machines, telemedicine.

In addition, you can also combine existing products to create unique innovations, such as a Spork (Fork + Spoon) or a Community Fridge (Social Good Program).



ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To ensure a fair and inclusive competition, the IIC sets forth the following eligibility criteria:

- **Age Range:** Open to students aged 5-19 residing in the U.S.
- **Educational Status:** Participants must not have graduated from high school.
 - Exceptions include
 - High school students concurrently taking college courses
 - Students who entered the qualifying round challenge while in high school
- **Originality:** Submissions must be student-designed. Advisor involvement is permitted but should be limited to guidance.
- **Participation Limit:** Individuals may only register one innovation per challenge.
- **Entry Path:** Any student in the United States of America is eligible to enter the IIC.
- **Team Limits:** Must register as an individual or team (up to three students)

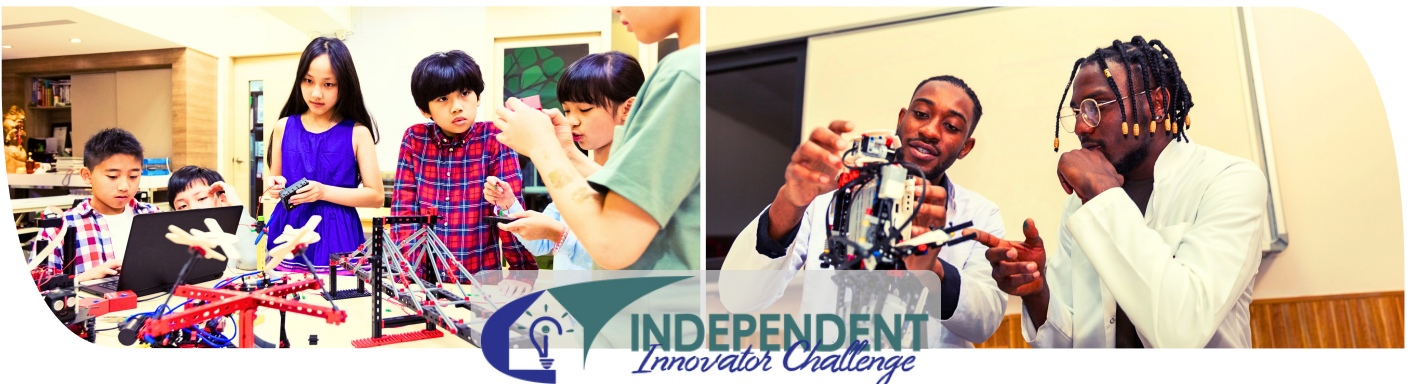
Note: If your situation does not fit these criteria, please contact us at nic@hewittlearning.org for guidance.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

The IIC values teamwork and collaboration. Individuals or teams are eligible to participate in the IIC. Here are the guidelines for team participation:

- **Team Composition:** Teams of up to three students are eligible. Larger teams may collaborate, but only three representatives may officially register for the challenge.
- **Recognition:** All team members, regardless of the number, will be recognized for their contributions and eligible for opportunity prizes.
- **Residency:** At least one team member must be a U.S. resident.
- **Age Criteria:** All members must meet the age eligibility requirement. Teams will be evaluated in the age category of their oldest member.
- **Role Definition:** During registration, each team member's role in the project must be clearly defined.

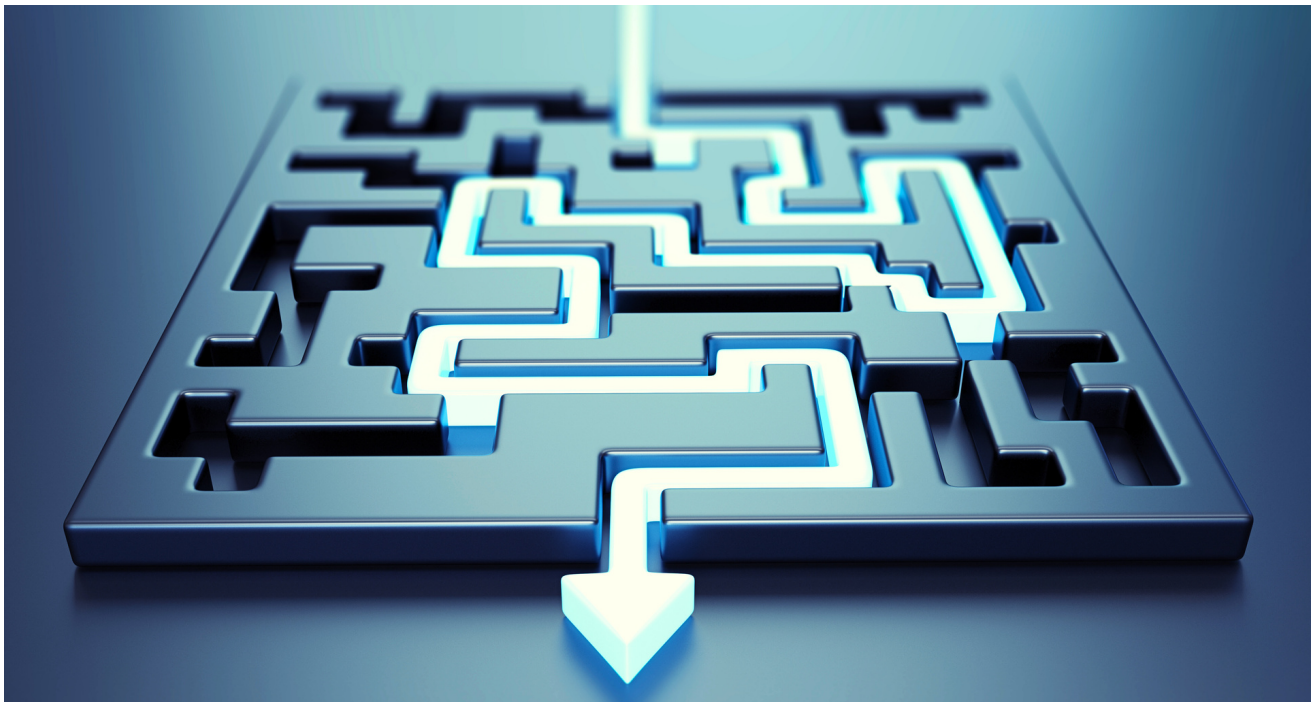
Encouragement: We encourage teams to embrace diversity in skills, perspectives, and disciplines to enrich their innovation journey.



HOW TO QUALIFY

At the IIC, we encourage students to harness their creativity and problem-solving skills to develop innovative solutions. To qualify for the challenge, participants must:

- **Develop an Innovation:** Create a solution that addresses a real-world problem. Projects should introduce new things, ideas, or ways of doing something; including significantly improved methods, ideas, systems, or products. Your innovation should be tested and refined based on feedback.
 - Note: Innovators may (but do not have to) create a unique innovation for the IIC. They may show an innovation they created for another program, or an innovation they have shown before at IIC, providing there has been significant improvement to the innovation.
- **Prepare Submission Materials:** This includes a pitch video, photographs, and a detailed description of your innovation.



ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- **Round #1 Advisory Panel Review:** Submissions will be evaluated using the categories described later in the handbook. Feedback will be provided to guide improvements.
- **Round #2 Live Event:** Top submissions will be invited to present at a live Zoom event where students will present their projects to other competitors and adult advisors. Standout innovators will earn awards, including an invitation to the US National Innovator Challenge (NIC).

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

- **Pitch Video** - A 60 second video pitch or commercial that can be used to highlight your innovation on social media.
- **Logbook/Journal** - Documenting the journey of your innovation.
- **Registration Fee** - A \$30 nonrefundable fee per team member.
- **Participant's information** - Including name, gender, grade, city, parent name(s), participant's role, and email for each member of the team.
- **Project information** - Including the name of your idea, app, or prototype, a corresponding description, the problem it solves, how your idea, app, or prototype works, a list of who helped.
- **Image for Judges** - An image of your innovation that enables judges to understand more about your innovation. The image should not contain information that would damage your Intellectual Property rights.
 - **Example images:**
 - Idea: a small portion of your blueprint, diagram, illustration, or outline of idea saved as a PDF
 - App: screenshot(s) of a portion of your code as well as screenshot(s) of your user interface
 - Prototype: picture(s) that show the critical pieces
 - Social good program or service: flow chart or high level business plan
 - Process: process diagram/chart
- **Image for Public Display** - An image of your innovation that does not contain proprietary information and which can be used in public places.
- **Visuals** - a slide deck not longer than 6 slides saved as PDF or .pptx, or an image of a tri-fold display board



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PRE-REGISTRATION CHECKLIST

Before you embark on your innovation journey with IIC, ensure you have:



- **DEVELOPED YOUR INNOVATION:**

- Documented your journey in a logbook or journal.
- Identified a problem you're passionate about solving.
- Conducted thorough research and brainstorm solutions.
- Developed and refined your innovation.

- **PREPARED TO MARKET YOUR INNOVATION**

- Researched potential markets for your innovation.
- Understand why users would need your innovation.
- Came up with a captivating name for your solution.
- Created a 60 second pitch video highlighting your project.

- **BEFORE REGISTERING**

- Prepare a 6 slide presentation detailing your innovative process as well as your innovation.
- Create an image for your project.
- Sign up at: <http://independentinnovators.com/>
 - Submit a registration for each teammate
 - Note: the team will be in a advisory panel based on the age of the oldest member of the team
- Pay the non-refundable \$30 registration fee (per participating student) and upload the required pieces

- **AFTER REGISTERING**

- Regularly practice your presentation and refine your pitch.
- Stay informed about critical dates and deadlines.



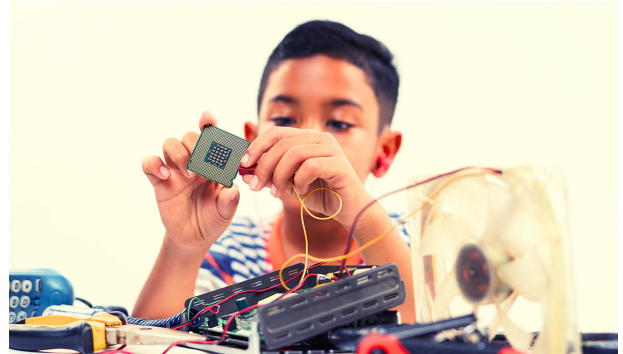
WHAT THE JUDGES WILL BE CONSIDERING

There are important stages in your innovation process which the judges will want to understand. You should address the following list of questions in your logbook and be prepared to talk about them with the judges during your presentation. Highlights may also appear in your pitch video and/or slide deck.

THE PROBLEM

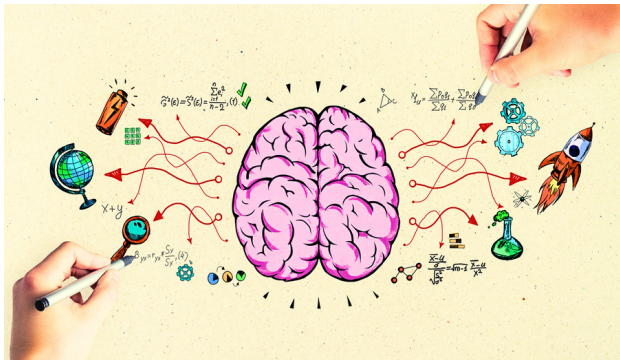
IDENTIFYING & UNDERSTANDING

- What is the problem that the innovator is addressing?
- How did the innovator discover and identify the problem?
- Has the innovator identified the underlying causes or contributing factors to the problem?
- Does the innovator demonstrate an understanding of the potential impact of the problem?



IDEATING & BRAINSTORMING

- What techniques or strategies did the innovator use to generate ideas?
- How diverse and creative were the ideas generated during the brainstorming process?
- How did the innovator ensure that the brainstorming process embraced multiple perspectives?



RESEARCHING

- What credible sources did the innovator consult in their research?
- How effectively did the innovator make use of the information gathered from their research?
- How did the innovator utilize AI or other technological tools in gathering and analyzing data related to the problem?

EMPATHIZING

- Did the innovator explain how the experiences and perspectives of different groups are affected by this problem?
- In what ways did the innovator integrate feedback or insights from potential users into their understanding of the problem?

THE SOLUTION

GENERATING POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- What range of potential solutions did the innovator explore?
- How was AI, other technologies, or other resources used to enhance the creativity and effectiveness of the solutions?
- Did the innovator identify multiple, diverse possibilities for addressing the problem?



CHOOSING THE SOLUTION

- Did the innovator consider how different stakeholders or users would react to the chosen solution? How did this influence the decision-making process?
- What makes this solution stand out from the other ideas considered?



ORIGINALITY

- How is the innovation unique, novel, and creative?
- How is it distinguishable from prior ideas, apps, or prototypes and from those of their peers?

INNOVATIVE PROCESS

- How has the innovator shown adaptability in refining the solution based on new information or feedback?
- What strategies were employed to navigate and overcome challenges encountered during the development process?
- How well-developed are the innovator's ideas?
- Does the innovator provide clear and detailed explanations of how their ideas could work in practice?



RESEARCH/VALIDATION

IMPACT

- How significantly does this innovation solve the identified problem or improve upon existing solutions?
- What measurable benefits (social, environmental, economic) does this innovation offer?
- Are there any potential negative impacts or unintended consequences of this innovation? How are they addressed?



AUDIENCE

- Who is the target audience or beneficiary of this innovation, and how well is it tailored to their needs?
- How did the student determine the audience for their innovation? Was there any market research or analysis involved?
- In what ways has the student ensured that their innovation is accessible and usable by the intended audience?



ORIGINALITY (NEW/NON-OBVIOUS)

- What elements of the innovation are novel, and how do they differ from existing solutions or ideas?
- How has the student demonstrated that their innovation is not an obvious solution to those familiar with the subject area?
- In what ways has the innovation challenged conventional approaches or introduced a new perspective?



COMMUNICATION

LOGBOOK/JOURNAL

- Did the innovator explain the design process clearly and in a detailed manner (from identifying the problem through testing and refining the product, app, or idea), including evidence of critical thinking and problem-solving?
- Did they identify anyone who helped?
- Did they identify any materials used and how they obtained those materials?



VISUALS

- Did the presentation slide set have strong visual appeal?
- How effectively do the visuals aid in understanding the innovation and its functionality?
- Do the visuals enhance the audience's engagement and comprehension of the project?



PITCH VIDEO (FOR FIRST ROUND)

- Does the pitch video clearly and concisely present the innovation, its purpose, and its benefits?
- How engaging and persuasive is the pitch in garnering interest in the innovation?
- Does the video demonstrate a good understanding of the target audience and effectively communicate to them?

OUTLINE OF SOLUTION

- Did the prototype, model, code, outline, and/or diagram clearly communicate the key characteristics of the innovation?
- How clearly and coherently does the outline explain the innovation, its intended impact, and the implementation strategy?
- Does the outline effectively convey the unique aspects of the solution and its advantages over existing solutions?
- *Note: Outside assistance is acceptable so long as the innovator is driving the process and documents any outside help.*

PRESENTATION AND Q&A (FOR LIVE EVENT)

- Did the innovator understand the questions and answer them clearly, fluently, and with confidence?
- Did the innovator present their own thinking and demonstrate originality?
- Does the presentation cover all critical aspects of the innovation effectively in an organized and engaging manner?

FAQS

Q: Am I eligible to participate in the US National Innovator Challenge?

A: Eligibility for the NIC extends to students aged 5 to 19 residing in the U.S. This includes high school students taking college courses, but not full-time college/university students.

Q: How do I qualify to participate in the NIC?

A: Innovators are selected to advance from partner organizations. Students who do not have another qualifying event may qualify through the Independent Innovator Challenge (IIC).

Q: What will the first round look like?

A: In the first round, advisors assess each submission based on specific categories, evaluating logbooks, PowerPoint presentations, videos, and images. Participants receive feedback highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Top innovations advance to a live Zoom event.

Q: What will the live event look like?

A: The live event features an advisory panel session with 2-10 projects per panel, conducted in a Zoom breakout room. Participants present for 3 minutes using their PowerPoint slides, followed by a 5-minute Q&A session. The advisory panel typically takes 60-100 minutes.

Q: Do I need to prepare everything by myself?

A: Participants are responsible for creating all content. Assistance in learning skills like PowerPoint creation or prototype development is allowed but must be documented in the journal and presentation.

Q: Are there specific presentation tools required for the NIC?

A: While PowerPoint is common, Google Slides is also acceptable. However, presentations in Prezi format are not currently supported. Ensure your presentation is uploaded in a format that can be easily operated by the facilitator (.pdf or .pptx).



FAQS (CONT.)

Q: How should I format my presentation slides for easy facilitation?

A: Presentations should be saved in a format that allows smooth advancement by the facilitator, such as .pptx or .pdf for PowerPoint or Keynote, and public sharing settings for Google Slides.

Q: What should be included in my Presentation Slides?

A: Your slides should concisely highlight the key aspects of your innovation process, idea, app, or prototype, limited to a maximum of 6 slides. They serve as a digital version of a display board. Please see the Tips and Tricks document for more examples.

Q: May I enter myself or must I enter through my school?

A: Participants can enter either independently or as a representative of their school.

Q: May we enter as a Team?

A: Yes, team entries are welcome. Please refer to the Team Requirements section for more details.

Q: Can I make changes to my registration once I have submitted?

A: In most cases, we are not able to accommodate changes after submission. If you have technical difficulties, please contact us at nic@hewittlearning.org

Q: Is the use of AI permitted in research and presentation for the IIC?

A: Yes, AI can be utilized for research and presentation, provided its use is ethically sound and clearly documented.

Q: How can I protect my Intellectual Property (IP) related to my NIC project?

A: It's important to understand and adhere to US IP laws. You might consider consulting with a legal professional to discuss a provisional patent or other forms of IP protection for your innovation.

Note: It is sole responsibility of the creator(s) of their Innovation to determine whether their innovation requires protection, what type of protection it may require. It is the sole responsibility of the creator to contact the appropriate legal professionals to secure any or all protection they deem necessary.



SUBMISSIONS CHECKLIST



Logbook

- Identifies each step in the innovator's journey
- Includes a clear explanation of the Idea, App, or Prototype
- Highlights any key research and/or diagrams
- Is clearly labeled and organized
- Identifies any resources used or people who helped
- Is saved as a scanned image, PDF, or typed document

Visuals

- Slide deck is no more than 6 slides long
 - Includes presenter(s) name(s) & name of innovation
 - Describes the product, what problem it solves, & who will benefit from the innovation (including an image or diagram)
 - Explains what makes it unique & how the idea, app, or prototype originated
 - Highlights any market research, branding, or other relevant information
 - Is saved as a PPT or PDF
- .jpg picture to be used publicly with no private information
- .jpg picture or .pdf visual of innovation for judges to use

Pitch Video

- Communicates both the problem and the solution in a creative way
- Is 60 seconds long
- Contains the innovation name and the name(s) of the innovator(s)
- Captures the attention of the viewer
- Is uploaded to YouTube

PARTICIPANT COMMUNITY GUIDELINES

HONEST COMMUNICATION

Participants of the NIC are expected to engage in honest and respectful communication, which includes::

- **Adherence to Civility:** All interactions should align with our Code of Civility.
- **Accuracy in Statements:** Ensure that factual statements are accurate and opinions are genuinely held.
- **Legal Compliance:** All communications must comply with applicable laws in both the United States and any country from which they are posted.
- **Respect and Self-Respect:** Treat yourself and others with respect in all interactions.

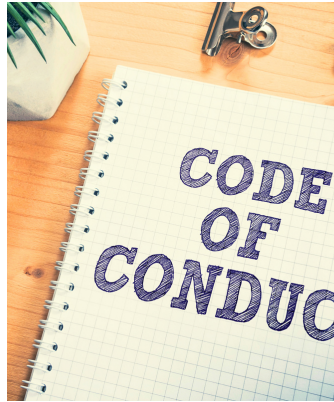
We require that all I.I.C. participants treat other people with respect. Any use of Communication Services (see the Code of Civility) to threaten, harass, stalk, or abuse others using these services is unacceptable and is strictly forbidden.

PROTECTING PRIVACY

- **Be Mindful of Personal Information:** Exercise caution in sharing personal information such as home addresses or contact details. Consult NIC staff for advice on sharing information safely

NON-DISCRIMINATION AND INCLUSIVITY

- **Commitment to Diversity:** The NIC is dedicated to fostering inclusive communities and promoting diversity. Discrimination of any kind, including based on race, gender, religion, or any other characteristic, is not tolerated.



CODE OF CIVILITY

- **Community Engagement:** By participating in NIC resources and programs, you agree to maintain a positive and constructive environment. This applies to our website, social media channels, and all forms of communication under the NIC.
- **Right to Moderate:** We reserve the right to remove participants or content that violates these guidelines.

CONFIDENTIALITY & INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

- **Ownership of Innovations:** The intellectual property of any innovation created for NIC belongs to its creator(s). It is your responsibility to seek appropriate legal protection if necessary.
- **Sharing Innovations Cautiously:** Be aware of intellectual property laws and consider the implications of sharing your innovation publicly. Avoid disclosing details that could jeopardize future patent opportunities.

Intellectual Property Concerns

What you should know about sharing information about your innovation before you share it with anyone.

Anytime you decide to share your idea or innovation, if you have a scientific discovery or invention that could lead to a patent or any other intellectual property protections, it is best to check your country's patent law before publicly sharing your idea. It is important to understand the intellectual property laws in your country if you have any plans to bring your product to market in the future. When presenting, be cautious about sharing the specific details of what you made and focus on sharing the general operation and benefits of your product.



PARENT/GUARDIAN AGREEMENTS

PHOTO/MEDIA/PRINT RELEASE AGREEMENT

As a parent/guardian/teacher, by registering your child/student for the National Innovator Challenge (NIC), you agree to the following terms:

- Without expectation of compensation or other remuneration of any kind, now or in the future, on behalf of my registered student, I as guardian do hereby give consent, permission, and authorization to Hewitt Learning, including its parent, affiliates, subsidiaries, associations, successors, members, directors, officers, principals, partners, assigns, licensees, designees, and agents, the irrevocable right to use my name, picture, likeness and/or photograph, biographical information and project title (collectively referred to as "Materials"), in all forms and media now known or hereafter developed, and in all manners, including composite representations, for advertising, marketing, trade, editorial, and any other purposes in perpetuity (in digital, web-based, hard-print or otherwise)
- Hewitt Learning's (including its parent, affiliates, subsidiaries, associations, successors, members, directors, officers, principals, partners, assigns, licensees, and designees and agents) use includes, without limitation, any advertising, video footage, recording, publication, website, radio, digital media, print media, or other promotional marketing or media activities, as well as, all film, motion picture and television rights (e.g., free television, pay television, basic cable, subscription, video-on-demand, pay-per-view, syndication, digital streaming, and all other methods of transmission delivery systems and formats).
- Both my registered child and I, as their guardian, hereby further release Hewitt Learning (and its affiliates, subsidiaries, associations, successors, members, directors, officers, principals, partners, assigns, licensees, designees, and agents) from any and all claims or disputes, including damages in any form, for libel, slander, right of publicity, invasion of right of privacy, trademark infringement or false endorsement, breach of contract, or any other tortious claim or persona right associated with Hewitt Learning's use of said name, image and likeness, and further, hereby acknowledge that Hewitt Learning (and its affiliates, subsidiaries, successors, members, directors, officers, principals, partners, and agents) shall have no obligation to use said name, image or likeness.
- This consent is given in perpetuity and does not require prior approval. By completing the online registration and paying the non-refundable registration fee, I hereby grant my child permission to participate in the National Innovator Challenge (NIC) hosted by Hewitt Learning and its affiliates, subsidiaries, associations, successors, members, directors, officers, principals, partners, assigns, licensees, designees, and agents.
- I have been thoroughly informed of the rules and requirements of the NIC and its affiliates.
- I understand and consent to my child being in contact (virtually, in person, or Hybrid) with Hewitt Learning, including its parent, affiliates, subsidiaries, associations, successors, members, directors, officers, principals, partners, assigns, licensees, designees, and agents, for the purpose of judging my child's project.
- I hereby release Hewitt Learning and its parent, affiliates, subsidiaries, associations, successors, members, directors, officers, principals, partners, assigns, licensees, designees, and agents, from responsibility and liability for any damage, injury, or illness that my child may sustain as a result of or in any way connected to my child's participation in the Innovator Challenge and, further, waive any and all rights to assert any claims against Hewitt Learning for any damages allegedly sustained as a result of my child's participation in the National Innovator Challenge.
- Hewitt Learning, including its parent, affiliates, subsidiaries, associations, successors, members, directors, officers, principals, partners, assigns, licensees, designees, and agents, reserves the right to revoke recognition of a project subsequently found to have been fraudulent. Furthermore, in collaboration with the NIC's Student Standards & Ethics Policy, in the event Hewitt Learning, including its parent, affiliates, subsidiaries, associations, successors, members, directors, officers, principals, partners, assigns, licensees, designees, and agents, have paid registrations, fees, or other expenses for a student found in violation of the above policy, such expenses are repayable to the respective Challenge by the student and/or their family. Any and all awards, including but not limited to, trophies, scholarships, items, and/or cash, are revoked by the respective Challenge will be forfeited by the student. The student will not be allowed to compete in future Challenges without written permission from the Challenge Director.



PARENT/GUARDIAN AGREEMENTS



PARENT/GUARDIAN RESPONSIBILITY AND CONSENT

- **Oversight of Child's Participation:** You acknowledge your responsibility for your child's conduct during the IIC or NIC and agree to guide them in adhering to the NIC's standards and community guidelines.
- **Release from Liability:** You release Hewitt Learning from any liability for damages, injuries, or illnesses your child may sustain during their participation in the IIC or NIC.
- **Acknowledgment of Fraudulent Activity Consequences:** In cases of fraudulent activity or violation of NIC's ethics policies, you understand that recognition and awards may be revoked and expenses may be repayable.



BEHAVIOR AGREEMENT

I understand and agree that my child's behavior with regard to their participation in the Independent Innovator Challenge is my responsibility. I will instruct my child in proper behavior and ensure that they respect and adhere to the Code of Conduct, which include the Participant Community Guidelines and the following:

- The content of my child's project submission in the Independent Innovator Challenge shall be age appropriate and non-discriminatory.
- My child's Independent Innovator Challenge project submission must be of a nature where it cannot cause harm to property, animals, my child or other children, and any other adults.
- Plagiarism, defined as when an author attempts to pass off someone else's work as their own, of any type and format, is strictly prohibited.

In the event of (a) behavior problem(s) regarding my child's participation in the Independent Innovator Challenge or failure to adhere to the Participant Community Guidelines, I understand that I will be contacted to correct any problem or issue. In the event a problem or issue cannot be corrected, I recognize my child will no longer be allowed to participate in the Independent Innovator Challenge for the remainder of the event year.

CONSENT AND AGREEMENT FORM

By registering your student/child you agree to the following:

- **Student's Acknowledgment:** "I, [Student's Name], understand the expectations of my participation in the NIC and accept responsibility for my actions and behavior."
- **Parent/Guardian's Acknowledgment:** "I, [Parent/Guardian's Name], as the legal guardian, approve this agreement and have discussed the NIC's ethics and policies with my child."

Signatures:

- **Student:** _____
- **Parent/Guardian:** _____
- **Date:** _____