



HackIllinois 2026 Attendee Guide

Welcome!

Thank you for participating in HackIllinois 2026! Before you launch into your cosmic journey, review this Astronaut's Guide to Mission Control to help you navigate uncharted galaxies, conquer challenges, and chart a course toward innovation and glory.

The guide is meant to serve as a comprehensive overview of the hackathon. It will cover the vital information you need to know for the event. Additionally, use the table of contents to quickly navigate each section and prepare for liftoff!

We hope this guide answers any questions you might have, but feel free to send a message on Discord or send us an email at contact@hackillinois.org if you have any questions! You can also visit hackillinois.org for more information such as our [FAQ section](#), [schedule](#), and [mentor/judge bios](#).

Note that all times on this document are in CST (GMT - 6:00).



Table of Contents

General Information

- 3 About the Event
- 3 Before the Event
- 4 Event Infrastructure
- 6 Apps
- 7 Check-in
- 7 Event Schedule
- 7 Food Waves
- 8 MLH Resources
- 9 Team Guidelines
- 10 Paths
- 10 Tracks
- 11 Prizes

Project Requirements and Submission

- 14 Judging Overview
- 16 Project Showcase
- 17 HackVoyagers Pitch

Mentoring

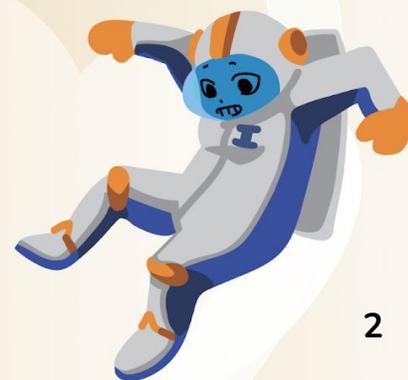
- 18 Mentor Office Hours

Points

- 19 Earning Points
- 20 Redeeming Points
- 20 Point Shop Items
- 21 Engagement Raffle

Additional Information

- 22 Other Resources
- 23 Reimbursement Policy
- 24 Other Policies



About the Event

HackIllinois 2026 is a fully in-person 36-hour-long hackathon running from February 27th to March 1st. During this time, attendees are challenged to build a software project while learning development skills from industry-led workshops and expert mentors.

Before the Event

To-dos

Join our [Discord](#)! If you RSVPed, you should have received an invitation link via email. We will be sending out announcements through Discord, and you can also use our channels to talk to other attendees, network and ask staff any questions!

Download our app! Make sure to download the HackIllinois app ahead of time and **sign-in as an attendee using your GitHub account** — this will streamline the check-in process and make it faster for you to get started with our event! The HackIllinois App is available on both the [Apple App Store](#) and the [Google Play Store](#).

Packing List:

- Student ID / Valid ID if you're non UIUC student
- Reusable water bottle (we will NOT be providing water bottles)
- Laptops & chargers
- Extension Cord
- Warm clothes + change of clothing
- Personal items such as toiletries
- Medication – if needed
- An umbrella (just in case)

Due to safety considerations, DO NOT bring power-heavy, dangerous, or illegal items, including, but not limited to,

- Desktop computers
- Extra monitors
- Weapons
- Alcoholic beverages, drugs, and other illicit substances





Event Infrastructure

Location

HackIllinois will be at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) in [Thomas M. Siebel Center for Computer Science](#). Check-in begins at 2:00 PM on Friday, February 27th in front of the ACM Room (1104). A map of Siebel can be accessed [here](#). Parking information can be found [here](#).



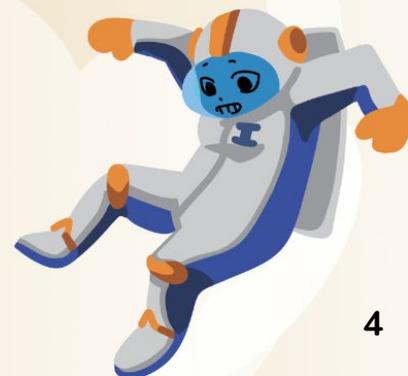
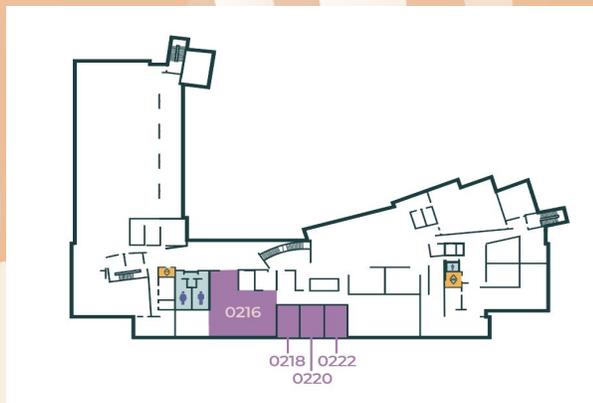
Building Closing and Opening Times

The Siebel Center for CS will close at 1:00 AM every night and will reopen at 7:00 AM. **There will not be sleeping lounges available in Siebel Center for CS after closing times. HackIllinois will not maintain any presence in the building during closed hours.**

The Siebel Center for CS doors lock at 9:30 PM.

You must have an iCard with swipe access to enter the building after.

DO NOT PROP OPEN ANY BUILDING DOORS – please help us keep Hack attendees, staff, and their belongings safe. Attendees caught propping doors open are subject to removal from event.



Event Infrastructure

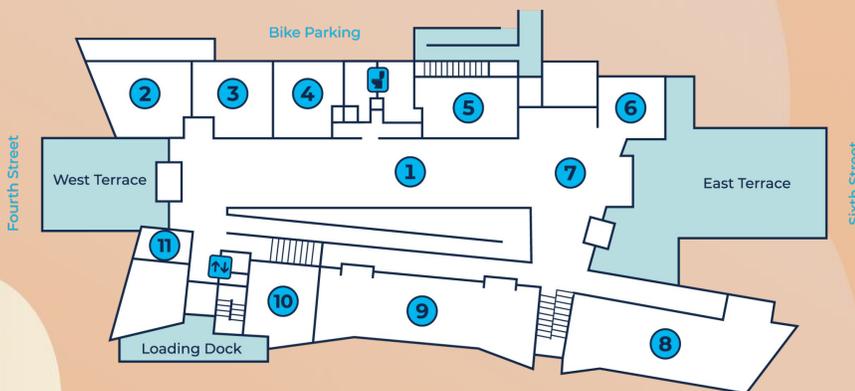
Location

HackIllinois will provide overnight hacking spaces at [Siebel Center for Design](#).

The overnight space is intended for hackers who want to continue working throughout the night. That said, we will also have a designated quiet/rest area if you'd like to take a short break or nap but HackIllinois will **not** provide sleeping materials. If you prefer more traditional lodging, we highly recommend booking a nearby hotel.

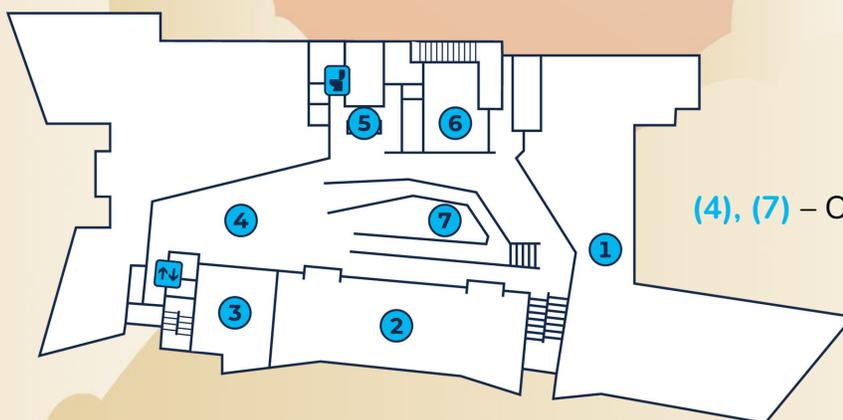
Note: only staff can open the building doors after midnight. If you would like to re-enter, please let us know before leaving.

Main Floor

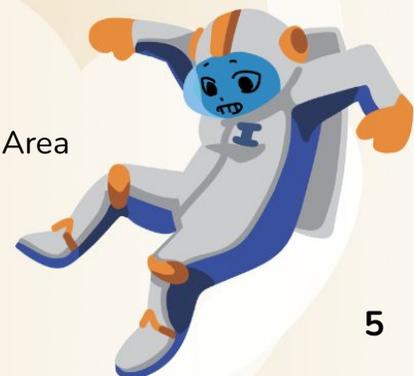


- (11) – Helpdesk
- (9) Sunset Studio – working space
- (8) Sunrise Studio – quiet working space
- (1), (6), (7) – Open Working Area

Lower Floor



- (4), (7) – Open Working Area



Apps

The HackIllinois App

The HackIllinois App is available for download on both the [Apple App Store](#) and the [Google Play Store](#). It'll display the schedule, help you scan codes for points, and redeem those points for items at our Point Shop (read more below)!

Note: You get points by attending mini-events, workshops, and company showcases. Points translate into prizes! Learn more in the [Points Section](#).

HackIllinois Social Media

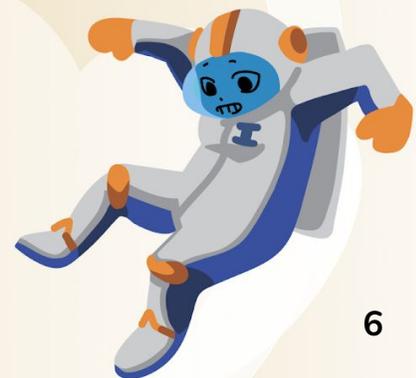
Follow the HackIllinois [Instagram](#) to learn more about HackIllinois. You'll get an opportunity to see the work that goes into making the event a possibility through insights from teams, behind the scenes footage, and more!

Discord

You can use our [Discord](#) server to communicate with attendees and company representatives, get help from mentors, and receive event reminders. To join our server, please check your email—you should have received an invite if you RSVPed! Accept our Terms and Conditions and you'll be good to go!

Wi-Fi

If you do not attend UIUC, please use the "IllinoisNet-Guest" network. When you connect, a browser window will open and prompt you for information.



Check-In

Check-in for HackIllinois will be on the first floor atrium of the Siebel Center for Computer Science building on Friday, February 27th from 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM. If you are unable to check in during this time, you are free to go to the check-in desk any time during HackIllinois.

Please download the HackIllinois app ahead of time and sign in as an attendee using your GitHub account — this will streamline the check-in process and make it faster for you to get started with our event! As you approach the front of the check-in line, please pull up your profile on the HackIllinois app to show to the staff checking you in.

Event Schedule

HackIllinois is excited to present a large variety of events, including technical workshops, fun mini-events, and thrilling game-based challenges. You can find the schedule for this weekend on our [website](#) and our app!

Food Waves

Each attendee will be assigned a Wave (1 or 2) that can be viewed on the app. We will be calling up attendees by their wave number to receive meals, and you will receive a notification on the HackIllinois app when your Wave is being called up. A dietary and allergen information guide will be linked in the app prior to each meal and will include details for all food being served throughout the weekend.



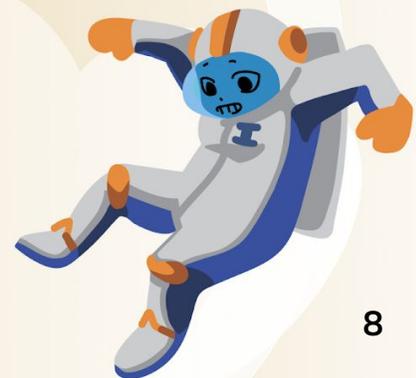
MLH Resources

This year, HackIllinois is proud to partner with Major League Hacking (MLH) to help support you throughout the weekend! MLH is the official student hackathon league and will be providing resources, mentorship, and support to ensure you have an amazing experience.

Here's how you can connect with MLH during HackIllinois:

- **On Discord:** Visit the **#ask-mlh** channel to ask questions and get support.
- **MLH Help Desk:** Find an MLH representative in person in the First Floor Atrium.
- **Hardware Hub:** Located next to the MLH Help Desk, it offers materials for Mechathon participants. You can find the full list of available hardware [here](#).
 - Please note: Supplies may be limited. We strongly encourage you to check out only materials you need *early* rather than waiting until the last minute.

All participants are expected to follow the MLH Code of Conduct, which helps ensure a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for everyone.



Team Guidelines

The guidelines for team formation are as follows:

- Teams can have up to **4 members**. Note that you do not need a team to compete, although we strongly recommend hacking with others for the best Hackathon experience!
- All team members **must be accepted, RSVPed, and checked in**.
- Teams need to be finalized by end of **Friday, February 27th**. If your team has at least 1 general attendee, then your submission will automatically be considered for the **General Path**. However, all teams may still compete for Company Sponsored Tracks.

Creating a team is as simple as asking a friend to join your project. We also have a team formations channel on Discord and will host an in-person team matching event to help you look for teammates.

Note: You can submit a **Team & Track Pre-Confirmation** by 02/28 (Saturday) 11:59 PM to earn 25 points!

Date & Time	Event	Location
February 27th, 8:30 PM - 9:30 PM	Team Matching	Siebel Center for Computer Science 0218

When you submit your project through Devpost, make sure to add every teammate to your project submission so that we can award them prizes!

We cannot award prizes to people who are not on the Devpost submission.



Paths

When you were accepted to HackIllinois, you were admitted as either a **HackVoyager** or a **General** attendee. This is your **Path**. By submitting a project, you are eligible to win the prize designated for your respective Path. Note: If your team has at least 1 general attendee, then your team submission will automatically be considered for the General path.

Path Prizes

Path	Prize
General	\$2,500
HackVoyagers	\$5,000

Tracks

You can also submit to a **Track** by tailoring your project to a theme or guideline provided by our company sponsors. Tracks are **optional** and your project does not need to fall under the scope of one. That being said, building and submitting a Track project qualifies you for that Track prize *in addition* to your Path prize!

Note: Each project may only submit to AT MOST ONE Track. If you submit the project to multiple Tracks, the team will be disqualified.

This year, HackIllinois 2026 is proud to announce tracks sponsored by Stripe, Modal, Caterpillar, and John Deere!

Detailed Track Info: <https://go.hackillinois.org/tracks>



HackIllinois Prizes

In addition to our path and track prizes, we have:

- Best Beginner Hack: All beginner teams (at least half of the members are first time hackers) are automatically considered.
- Most Popular: Determined by attendee voting on Devpost.

Participants may submit to up to **2** of the following categories:

- Best Social
- Best UI/UX
- Most Creative
- Most Useless

Company Prizes

Participants may submit to up to **3** of the following categories:

- Best Use of Cloudflare Developer Platform
- Best Use of OpenAI API
- Best Use of Capital One Nessie (API)
- Best Use of Supermemory
- Best Use of Solana
- Best Use of Actian VectorAI DB
- Best Deployed on Aedify

MLH Prizes

- Best Use of Gemini API
- Best Use of ElevenLabs
- Best Use of Snowflake API
- Best Use of DigitalOcean
- Best Use of Presage
- Best .Tech Domain Name

Full Prize List: <https://go.hackillinois.org/prizes>



Prayer Accommodations

A room will be reserved throughout the hackathon as a dedicated prayer and reflection space for all attendees. Participants are encouraged to use the room for religious observance, prayer, and spiritual practices in a quiet and respectful environment. The space may also be used for meditation or brief personal reflection, but its primary purpose is to support the religious needs of attendees during the event. No sign-up is required, anyone may enter when needed, and we kindly ask everyone to help preserve a peaceful, accommodating atmosphere.

- **Siebel Center for CS:** Room 2124
- **Siebel Center for Design:** TBD



Project Requirements and Submission

Submitting Your Project

Use the [HackIllinois Devpost](#) to submit your project!

Submission Checklist

To qualify for submissions, you will need to meet these criteria:

- Everyone on your team **must be registered, RSVPed, and checked in for HackIllinois.**
- You must submit your project before the submission deadline (**Sunday, March 1st at 6:00 AM CST**).
 - We recommend submitting earlier so that you don't miss the deadline. Late submissions will not be accepted.
- You must be registered with only **one team**.
- Your team must have **four members or less**.
- Your project must have been created **during the 36 hours of the event**.
- Your project must have only been submitted to HackIllinois 2026.
- **At least one team member** must be physically present at the **Project Showcase** to demo the project.
- **All team members** must be physically present for the **HackVoyagers Pitch** presentation unless prior approval has been granted via email. If you are requesting an early departure, please submit this [form](#) by the end of day on **Friday, February 27th** in order to be considered for approval.
- Your project submission on Devpost must contain a public GitHub Repository, a video demo or presentation video (made unlisted or public) that is no longer than 3 minutes, and a description addressing the respective track.

Failure to adhere to these may result in disqualification; final discretion lies with HackIllinois staff. If you are unsure about anything related to Devpost Project Submission, please contact us through contact@hackillinois.org or the Help Desk role on Discord!

Judging Overview

Track & Path Judging

Attendees must present at the Project Showcase to be eligible for a path prize. The General Path, HackVoyagers Path, Company Tracks, and additional prizes will be judged by a science fair-type project showcase.

Inspired by the hit TV series Shark Tank, the HackVoyagers Pitch is focused on promoting entrepreneurship in technology by having top 7 HackVoyager teams pitch their project to a panel of judges. The HackVoyagers Pitch will take place at **Room 0216**. It will be streamed to watch on [YouTube](#).

Note: All group members must be HackVoyagers for the project to qualify for the HackVoyagers Pitch.

Structure

6:00 AM: Devpost Submission – After submitting your Devpost at 6:00 AM, please **check your email and Discord regularly**, as communication regarding your room allocation and other instructions will be sent through the channels.

9:00 AM – 11:30 AM: Devpost Track Judging (General + HackVoyagers)
During the Project Showcase, teams will present their project and answer any brief questions judges may have for a maximum of 5 minutes. **At least one team member must be physically present** to demo the project.

12:00 PM - 1:30 PM: HackVoyagers Pitch (Sponsored by Fulcrum) & Project Showcase Continued

All team members must be physically present for the HackVoyagers Pitch presentation unless prior approval has been granted via email. If you are requesting an early departure, please submit this [form](#) by the end of day on **Friday, February 27th** in order to be considered for approval.

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM: Closing Ceremony (Awards)



Judging & Criteria

Judging is based on four criteria:

- **Idea & Creativity**

Judges will evaluate the originality and thoughtfulness of your concept. Strong projects introduce a novel twist, combine ideas in unexpected ways, or approach a problem in a way that stands out and demonstrates “out of the box”.

- **Product Design**

Judges will assess usability, user flow, and visual clarity. The best projects are intuitive, accessible, and thoughtfully designed so users can understand and interact with them without extensive explanation.

- **Execution and Technical Quality**

Judges will consider how well your project works and the quality of your implementation. Projects should function reliably, demonstrate technical skill, and reflect sound engineering decisions within the hackathon timeframe.

- **Impact & Intent**

Judges will evaluate the clarity of your project’s purpose and its value to users. Strong submissions clearly address a real problem, meaningful need, or intentional statement.



Project Showcase

HackIllinois' Project Showcase is akin to a science fair. You will have the opportunity to showcase your innovative projects to our esteemed judges!

Note: **ALL TEAMS** (regardless of HackVoyagers Path or General Path) that have submitted a project will present **in-person** during the **Project Showcase**

Format

1. Plan to arrive at the event location at least 15 minutes (8:45 AM) before the official start time so that we can go over the showcase format. **If you arrive over 10 minutes past the official start time, your project will be disqualified and removed from final consideration.**
2. Each team will receive your room assignment and team number via email on **Sunday morning** so please be on the lookout.
3. During this 120-minute time period, you can present your projects to judges and receive feedback for your project. Please limit your presentation to 5 minutes:
 - a. You will have 3 minutes to present your project. After 3 minutes, we will ask you to wrap up your presentation within two sentences.
 - b. The judging panel may conduct a 2-minute Q&A session following the presentation.



Top 7 HackVoyagers Pitch

Inspired by the hit TV series Shark Tank, the Top 7 HackVoyagers Pitch is focused on promoting entrepreneurship in technology by having teams pitch their HackIllinois project to a panel of judges. Moreover, **in the past, our company sponsors have reached out to standout presenters to further invest in and develop their projects!**

Note: Teams selected to be a part of HackVoyagers Pitch will be notified by **11:30 AM Sunday, March 1st** via email.

Format

1. Lunch will be prepared in **Siebel 0216** for Top HackVoyager teams at 11:30 AM.
2. Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before the official start time. However, you can arrive earlier for lunch.
3. At 12:00 PM, we will enforce a strict no-laptop, no-talking rule to ensure all teams have an equal amount of time prepare.
4. You will be given up to **12 minutes** to present to judges and receive feedback for your project.
 - a. You will have 7 minutes to pitch your project.
 - b. The judging panel will conduct a 5-minute Q&A session following the presentation.
5. Your presentation materials may include anything that can be projected and shared as a link. Still, keep in mind that time is limited and too many presentation materials will take up time!

Note: The HackVoyager Pitch will be closed to only selected teams and the judging panel. We WILL be livestreaming the showcase on [Youtube](#).



Top 7 HackVoyagers Pitch Details

Attention Hackers!

The moment of truth is approaching. The **FulcrumGT HackVoyagers Pitch** is where your code meets the real world. We aren't just looking for a cool demo, we want to see a vision that can survive outside the hackathon bubble.

When you step onto that stage, stop thinking like a coder for a second and start thinking like a **Founder**. Your goal is to convince the "Sharks" that your project isn't just a weekend project.

The Recommended Pitch Deck: To give your team the best shot at "funding," ensure your pitch covers these core pillars:

- **Problem:** Define the pain point clearly. Why does it matter right now?
- **Solution:** What have you built, and what is your **Unique Selling Proposition?** Why is your way better than everything else?
- **Vision:** What is the "North Star" of your project? What big change are you trying to bring to the world?
- **Technical Implementation:** Show us the engine under the hood. How did you build it, and why is your tech stack the right choice for the job?
- **Market Opportunity:** How big is this? Show us the potential scale and the specific audience you are targeting.
- **Competitors:** Don't ignore them! Acknowledge who else is in the space and explain your "moat" i.e. what keeps them from doing what you do?
- **Business Model:** How does this make money or sustain itself? Even the best ideas need Benjamins.
- **Growth/Future:** What happens on Monday morning? Tell us your roadmap for scaling and future features.



Mentoring

During HackIllinois 2026, you might need to seek some technical help and advice from mentors.

Our mentors provide technical advice and help attendees in-person and virtually. Stay tuned on our website for more information about each mentor including their background and skills!

Mentor Office Hours

- Link to [Mentor Office Hours Schedule](#)
- In-person mentors will be located in **Siebel 2406**, and you may ask any of them for assistance on your projects.
- You may ask for help in the **#office-hours-text** Discord Channel by using the @Mentor tag.
 - When you receive a response from a mentor, you should then proceed to use one of the Mentor Room Voice Channels or direct message with your mentor to chat privately.
- You can earn 50 points the **first time** you consult with a mentor by asking them to show their scannable QR code .

We ask that you be gracious and patient when seeking help from mentors. Our mentors have kindly volunteered their time to help attendees have a meaningful experience at HackIllinois. **No abusive language directed at our mentors will be tolerated and doing so will result in disqualification from participating in HackIllinois 2026.**



Points

Earning Points

Attendees can engage in workshops, mini-events, and other activities to earn points! Here is a breakdown of all possible ways to earn points at HackIllinois 2026, but you can also check the schedule on our website or app for the point values of attending specific events!

Event/Activity	Point Value
Company Expo / RSP Expo	10 points per company booth
Workshops / Tech Talks / Track Intro	75 points
Mentor Office Hours	50 points (redeemable once)
Solar Search	50 points per booth x 4 booths
Cosmic CTF Challenge	10 points per task x 6 tasks
Astral Exhibition	25 points per booth (except solar soccer 50 pts)
Poker / Clash Royale Tournament	50 points each
Side Quests	20 points each
Duels	2 points → lose, 5 points → win, cap 75 points



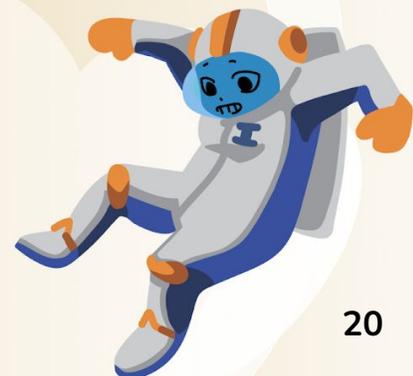
Redeeming Points

Attendees can exchange points for exciting items and raffle tickets at the Point Shop (located by the ACM Office Room 1104). You can reserve an item by purchasing it via the app and showing the given QR code at the Help Desk.

Point Shop Items

Check out the Point Shop on our app to see available items and their prices!

Items	Price (Points)	Items	Price (Points)
Mission Fuel		LEGO small/LEGO big	1300/1500
Rock Candy / Fruit Snacks / Bars	30	Mugs	800
Chips	50	Celestial Tech	
Chicken Ramen	100	JBL Speaker	1500
Alien Artifacts		XBOX Controller	1000
Aliens Smiskies	30	Projector Light	900
Temporary Tattoos	40	LED Strip Lights	1400
HackIllinois Specialties		Digi Camera/Instant Camera	1900/1700
Past Hack Stickers	15	Test Of Fate - Raffles	
Past Hack T-Shirt	100	LED Floor Lamp	100
Cosmic Comfort		Instant Pot	230
Mini Plushie	500	Ninja AirFryer	230
Fleece Blanket	600	Apple HomePod mini	130



Where and When?

Location: Next to the Help Desk, near the ACM Office, Siebel 1st Floor

Opens: February 27th, 6:00 PM

Closes: March 1st, 10:30 AM

*Point shop closes at 1:00 AM every night and reopens at 9:00 AM the next day

Engagement Raffle

Points accumulated throughout the event count towards your Tier. Higher Tiers are eligible for better prizes through a raffle. Engagement Raffle winners will be announced at the **Closing Ceremony**. Prizes will **ONLY** be distributed in person **Sunday March 1, 3–3:30 PM** at the Help Desk.

Gold Tier	Silver Tier
Sony XM5	\$150 Steam Gift Cards
LeetCode Pro Subscription	Dinner for 2 up to \$100
LEGO Space Shuttle Set	Cooking knife set + \$75 doordash gift card
300 Hz Gaming Monitor	Yearly subscription to streaming service of choice
Pair of shoes of your choice up to \$200	Bronze Tier
Yearly AI Subscription of choice up to \$200	North Face Borealis Backpack
	YETI Rambler 20 oz Cocktail Shaker



Other Resources

Sponsor:

- All sponsor resources are linked [here!](#)

Full Stack:

- [Mern stack](#)
- [CRUD apps](#)
- [Building CRUD apps with MERN](#)

Backend:

- [MongoDB](#)
- [FastAPI](#)
- [Supabase](#)

Frontend:

- [React.JS](#)
- HTML/CSS for simplicity

AI/ML

- <https://streamlit.io/> allows you to rapidly build and showcase machine learning and data science web apps.
 - [Example](#)
- [OpenRouter](#)

Presenting & Pitching Projects

- [Helpful tips](#)
 - For our Project Showcase, timing is very important.
 - Check out the [Project Showcase section](#) to see more info.



Reimbursement Policy

For HackIllinois 2026, we are excited to offer travel reimbursements to qualifying attendees. To be considered for reimbursement, participants should have opted-in during registration for HackIllinois.

To qualify for reimbursement, attendees **must** meet the following criteria:

- Receive an acceptance to HackIllinois with a specified reimbursement amount notified in their acceptance portal.
- RSVP 'Yes' to attend HackIllinois.
- Attend HackIllinois 2026 in person.
- Submit a **qualifying project**.

Please be aware that failing to meet any of these requirements will result in disqualification from receiving any reimbursement.

The determination of reimbursement amounts is influenced by several factors, including but not limited to an applicant's geographic location and their distance from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign campus. Although a preliminary reimbursement amount may be indicated upon acceptance, please understand that this amount is not guaranteed and may be subject to adjustments based on the final review of eligibility criteria.

For further questions regarding travel logistics or reimbursement, please email contact@hackillinois.org.



AI Policy

Use of AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot, or other LLM-based tools) is allowed but transparency is required.

- You must clearly disclose any AI tools used in your project.
- Include a README section explaining:
 - Which tools you used
 - What they generated or assisted with
- Your project **must not be a simple wrapper, reskin, or minimal modification of an existing AI tool.**
- Judging will focus on what you created over the weekend, not just the tools you used.

Failure to properly credit AI usage may result in disqualification and can be reported to MLH.





Terms & Conditions

By registering for this event, you are agreeing to the [HackIllinois & MLH terms and conditions](#).

Thank you for your interest in our event! We look forward to seeing your projects, and happy coding!

Contact Information

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns during the event please feel free to reach out to us at contact@hackillinois.org, type @Help Desk in any of our Help Channels or create a ticket via Discord, or come to our in-person help desks at Siebel, located right outside of the ACM Office (1104)!

Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to read through this guide. For more details and the official event schedule, please refer to the HackIllinois website [here](#). We hope you have an enjoyable time at HackIllinois 2026 and launch something stellar!

