

PROJECT MANAGEMENT CAREER DEVELOPMENT

TheraLog

Arnav G, Aditya G, Nikhil K

Happy Hacks 2025

CARB CURATION

AVANEESH D, AMAN S, SID V

BRAIN BREAK

Hamzah Chaudhry, Manav Raghuram

UV

PROTECT

HAPPY HACKS

Queue Smart

Seat-Maker

By: Austin Frankel

ALLEN JOHN
NIKHIL KRISHNAN
AGASTYA KULUVALLI

Joshi, Ved Pattanashetti

SMART LEARN

Vibe Journal

Let your words help
you feel better

By: Dhairya Kochar, Shrihan Gogineni, Darsh Joshi, Ved Pattanashetti

Presented by
Sudhakar Mohan, Anusha Garg,
Arnav Bagga



SAVE OUR Planet

ERSYCYCLE

Sureyan Mitra, Mohan
Bharathnagar, Bhupala
Rao, Rishabh Pandeyan

TeenFeel

Where Feelings meet Freedom

PROJECT
<https://teenfeel.org/>



DORM-CHEF

BY: SIMRAN KAUR AND ISHA NAIR

NUTRI-SCORE
A B C D E

FOOTHILL HIGH SCHOOL
4375 Foothill Rd, Pleasanton, CA 94588

April 8, 2026

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Problem Statement

Skill Gap

Students often learn how to build, but not how to pitch, position, or validate what they create

Risk-Averse Mindset

Many students pursue stable tech careers instead of exploring entrepreneurship and ownership

Application Gap

Most student projects stop at building, without showing real-world value or use.

What is Happy Hacks?

Happy Hacks is a one-day, 12-hour hackathon with a **post-event incubator** for the top teams. Participants identified real-world problems, built functional prototypes, and presented structured pitches to entrepreneur judges. The event raised **\$7,500** in sponsorship funding to support prizes, operations, and continued development after the competition.

OUR SPONSORS

Curry Kona ciena.
FUSION FOOD



Interview Cake



WolframAlpha



desmos

Project Goals

H

**Harness a Diverse
and Engaged
Competitor Base**

A

**Apply Business
and Presentation
Thinking**

C

**Cultivate
Measurable Skill
Development**

K

**Kickstart
Implementation
Through
Incubation**

Key Metrics

75 competitors attend

75% of teams score 80/100 or higher overall on the judging rubric

70% of competitors indicate a measurable increase in technical or business proficiency

1 product launch that successfully gains traction

MILESTONE 1 Planning

Jan 3rd - April 17th, 2025
Set Foundations; Organized Resources

MILESTONE 2 Marketing

Feb 8th - April 24th, 2025
Increased Event Exposure; Gathered Sign-ups

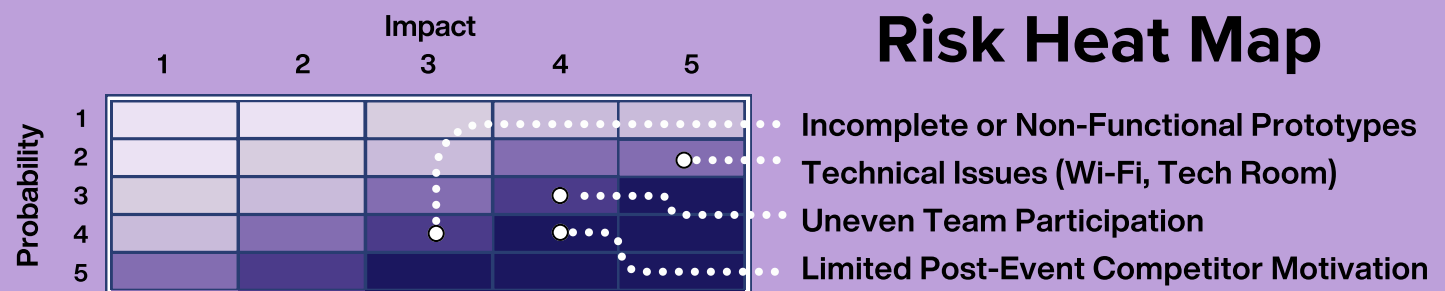
MILESTONE 3 Executing

April 26th, 2025
Executed Event; Fixed Problems in real time

MILESTONE 4 Following Up

April 26th - June 9th, 2025
Continued Engagement; Evaluated Impact

Monitoring



Risks

Schedule

Teams falling behind or sessions running late could disrupt the event flow. This risk was managed by creating a detailed schedule with clear milestones.

Budget

Overspending on materials, technology, or prizes was a potential risk. Organizers controlled this by planning a comprehensive budget in advance.

Quality

Inconsistent project outcomes or uneven judging could reduce the event's impact. We fixed this through guidance.

Evaluation of Key Metrics

88

competitors **attended** the Happy Hacks event

78%

of teams **score 80/100** or higher overall on the judging rubric

86%

of competitors indicated an **increase in technical or business proficiency**

1

event winner gained **traction** after launching their product

Recommendations for Future Projects

1

2 Judge Panels to expedite total presentation duration

2

Longer event to allow more time for project development

3

Establish a centralized web domain for project hosting

II. INITIATING

A. Statement of the Problem

Innovation in technology cannot be accomplished by technical ability alone. Entrepreneurs must connect technical execution with **product strategy, user value, and clear communication.** In fields such as product development, entrepreneurship, and digital marketing, employers and investors increasingly look for people who can both **build solutions and explain why they matter.** However, many high school students in the Bay Area are developing **fragmented skill sets.** As technical proficiency becomes more accessible, many students **excel in coding, web development, and advanced topics like machine learning** but lack experience in **pitching, market thinking, and understanding customer needs.** Employer data reflects this imbalance: while technical proficiency is high, skills such as **communication, teamwork, and critical thinking** are valued more but less developed (**Figure 1**). At the same time, some students develop leadership and business skills but lack **hands-on product experience,** creating a divide between **builders** and those who can only **communicate or code.** Successful employees and entrepreneurs are **well-rounded,** with proficiency across the categories in **Figure 1.** As **industry uncertainty** rises, many students choose **traditional, lower-risk careers** over entrepreneurship and innovation, drawn to a steady salary rather than an **entrepreneur's variable income (Figure 2).** *Happy Hacks* addresses this gap by providing a **structured environment** where students can **build, position, present, and grow technological solutions as viable products.**

Competency	Employers	
	Importance	Proficiency
Communication	96.1%	53.5%
Critical Thinking	96.1%	55.9%
Teamwork	93.9%	81.5%
Career & Self-Development	65.6%	43.2%
Professionalism	89.4%	50.3%
Leadership	45.0%	31.0%
Technology	71.7%	72.0%
Equity & Inclusion	70.0%	63.3%

Figure 1 (Source: Minnesota State University)

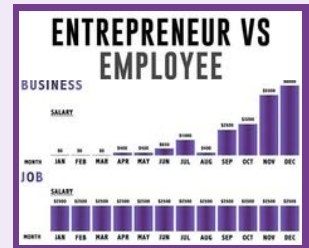


Figure 2 (Source: Donevogel)

“Growing up in the Bay Area, I thought my **only option was a FAANG desk job.** It felt like there was this **pressure to chase prestige,** and I never dared to consider anything remotely different.
- Sahil Deshmukh, Grade 11

B. Project Scope

PROJECT CONTEXT

THE STELLAR HACKS' MISSION:

To create **interdisciplinary hackathon experiences** that merge **technology** with **other fields of study,** helping students apply **cross-disciplinary skills** to **real-world challenges.**

As a **student-led nonprofit organization** dedicated to making hackathons **free and accessible** for high school students, **Stellar Hacks** has differentiated itself by expanding the traditional hackathon model into **distinct fields.** **Stellar Hacks** has hosted **2 prior hackathons:** **Stellar Hacks I** connected technology with **astronomy and aerospace engineering,** tasking competitors to build a space asteroid detection system, while **Brainstorm** extended that approach into **neuroscience and bioengineering** and connected winning students with professors from **Harvard and UC Berkeley.** Continuing our mission to bring together different disciplines, *Happy Hacks* focused on connecting technology to **entrepreneurship** by allowing participants to find a market niche, develop a creative solution through a **technological tool,** and present a pitch to a **panel of 3 judges** with entrepreneurial experience with winning teams using prize money to start their company in a mini-incubator.

PURPOSE

Happy Hacks was designed as a **beginner-friendly 12-hour hackathon** for middle and high school students. Participants worked in teams to identify a **real-world problem**, build a **functional prototype or working model**, and present a **structured pitch** to judges. The event was intended to simulate the **early stages of product development** in a focused, one-day format that was challenging but still accessible to **younger and less experienced students**. Rather than expecting polished final products, Happy Hacks emphasized **problem selection, solution design, usability, and clear communication**, giving students a realistic introduction to how ideas move from **concept to presentation** through the entrepreneurial experience.

RATIONALE

Happy Hacks was created to give students a more **applied innovation experience** that went beyond **technical building** alone. Many students have opportunities to learn **coding or related technical skills**, but fewer chances to use those skills in a setting that also requires **product thinking, feasibility, teamwork, and presentation**. The event was intentionally structured to combine these elements in a way that was manageable within a **single day**. By focusing on **prototypes** instead of fully developed products, Happy Hacks made the experience more **accessible** while still requiring participants to think critically about the **value, purpose, and practicality** of what they created. This helped introduce students to a more complete view of how **ideas are developed and communicated** in real-world settings.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

Participants gained practical experience in **teamwork, prototyping, time management, entrepreneurship and structured pitching**. Teams divided responsibilities across **coding, design, and presentation**, worked within a **12-hour time limit**, and developed solutions around clearly defined **users and use cases**. Students also benefited from exposure to peers across **seven schools** and from seeing a range of approaches to **problem-solving, collaboration, and product design**. In addition, the event helped participants build confidence in **working under pressure, organizing ideas quickly, and communicating them clearly and persuasively**. For the **top 3 teams**, the experience extended beyond the event through post-event incubation support, creating a pathway for continued **development, refinement, and potential real-world traction**.

III. PLANNING AND ORGANIZING

A. Project Goals

H

Harness a Diverse and Engaged Competitor Base

Target: Secure 75+ competitor sign-ups with a focus on diverse backgrounds and skill sets.

Why this target matters: A larger, diverse pool of participants ensures a wider range of perspectives and innovative solutions, which is essential for creative problem-solving. It also allows us to maximize our impact with more participants.

A

Apply Business and Presentation Thinking

Target: Ensure at least 75% of teams receive a score of 80/100 or higher overall, specifically excelling in the Pitch Clarity and Business Viability categories.

Why this target matters: Participants must learn not only how to build a technical solution but also how to articulate its value and commercial potential to stakeholders.

C

Cultivate Measurable Skill Development

Target: Ensure at least 70% of competitors indicate a measurable increase in technical or business proficiency scores through pre- and post-event assessments.

Why this target matters: This shifts the focus from simple participation to actual growth. It ensures the event functions as an educational engine that grows participant capability.

K

Kickstart Implementation Through Incubation

Target: Support the top 3 teams through funding and judge mentorship, with at least 1 team demonstrating real-world traction through active users or consistent revenue.

Why this target matters: This extends the event beyond a one-day competition and creates an incubator-style pathway for the strongest projects.

B. Human Resources Management



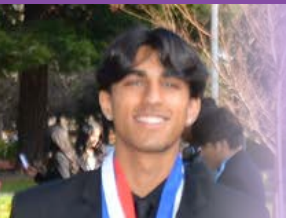
Allen John | Operations Member

Skills: Organization, problem-solving, accountability

Strengths: Reliable, adaptable, steady under pressure

Responsibilities: Run operations, track tasks, oversee event-day execution

The **operations team** managed all **logistics, scheduling, and event-day coordination** to ensure *Happy Hacks* ran smoothly. They booked the **venue**, organized **supplies**, communicated internally with our team, and troubleshooted problems to support our **participants and judges**. Throughout the planning process, the **operations team** maintained a **task tracking sheet** and afterward compiled **operational insights** for future events.



Agastya Kuluvali | Head of Marketing

Skills: Communication, relationship-building, initiative

Strengths: Confident, hardworking, optimistic

Responsibilities: Recruit judges, manage promotion, coordinate follow-ups

The **marketing team** led all **promotion, branding, and public communication** to drive strong **participation and community engagement**. They managed the **Stellar Hacks Instagram account**, spearheaded **outreach**, and delivered clear **updates, reminders, and expectations** to keep students informed in the buildup to the event. Afterward, they compiled **engagement metrics** and gathered **feedback** to follow up on the event.



Nikhil Krishnan | Head of Finance

Skills: Financial management, organization, analytical thinking

Strengths: Detail-oriented, timely, fiscally responsible

Responsibilities: Tack budget, report finances, oversee sponsor donations

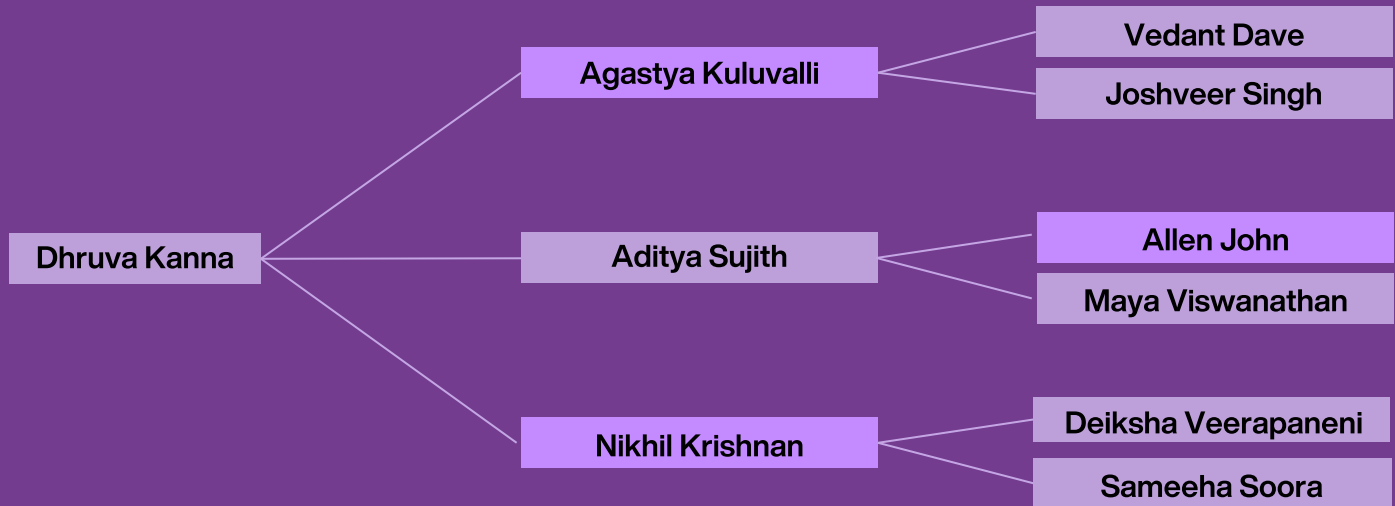
The **finance team** coordinated **budgeting, purchasing, and financial tracking** to ensure our resources were used efficiently. Through a **centralized payment sheet**, they maintained clear **approvals** to keep our operations on track. Furthermore, they secured **prize money** by reaching out to **sponsors**. After the event, they compiled **financial summaries** and evaluated **cost efficiency** to guide future **decision-making**.

Stellar Hacks Map

CEO

Program Leads

Junior Organizers



Happy Hacks was built through the joint efforts of a **committed and diverse team**. Participants were selected based on **demonstrated commitment and relevant strengths**. Our organization heads matched these individuals to responsibilities that best aligned with their **skills and interests**.

We coordinated mainly through **Slack**, with **Dhruva** as the **main point of contact** for the full team and the **primary communicator** during the event. Dhruva was also kept in the loop on task progress by our **program leads**. We held **weekly 45-minute Slack calls**, and the program leads checked in **daily** throughout all event preparation to resolve issues and make changes as needed. Team members were expected to complete tasks by the **agreed deadlines**, post updates, and confirm with their respective **project lead** so others could move forward, and to acknowledge messages **within 24 hours**. Our hardworking team was the powerful force behind the success of **Happy Hacks**, and this project would not have been possible without them.

C. Schedule

i. Milestones

MILESTONE 1 – PLANNING EVENT

Our planning phase focused on getting the event essentials like a venue, judges, and funding secured to ensure that we could keep true to our promise of keeping the event free and competitive for all who attended. Staying organized and being persistent in our outreach was crucial to succeeding in this milestone.

Venue & Logistics

In **February**, we booked our **venue (Figure 3)** and confirmed with staff on which **school entrance** would be **open** on that day. Nearer to the event, we sent competitors and judges a map of the campus, highlighting the entrance that would be open. After our sign up form closed, we updated the venue on the number of **tables and seats** required based on **finalized participant counts**. We secured **local restaurants** willing to cater on **April 26th**. After further discussion, they were comfortable with a **rough estimate** of **90 attendees**, and a confirmation call on the **day of the event** for the exact count.

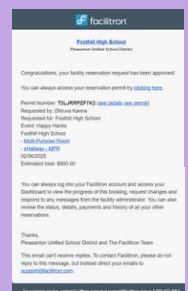


Figure 3

Figure 4

Judge & Speaker Outreach

We began **judge outreach emails** in **February** to start building our **panel** early. As the event got closer, we sent **judge reminder emails** to keep everyone informed and on schedule, and we created **judge rubrics (Figure 4)** to ensure a **fair and consistent evaluation process**. We also coordinated with **Mr. Lipman**, a history teacher at **Foothill High School**, to borrow his podium for the event, and **Mr. Friesen**, an engineering teacher, to borrow five of his power strips.

OUR JUDGES



Vandita Joshi
CEO
Faro



Sathyan Iyengar
CEO
MajorDomo Inc.



Navneet Yadav
Co-Founder
Rigor AI

Participant Outreach & Registration

Sign-up forms (Figure 5) were released on our website in **February** with all relevant event information so students could register early, and responses were populated onto a Google Sheet. We sent a **participant reminder email** with additional details closer to the event date to make sure all competitors felt prepared and informed heading into April 26th.



Figure 5

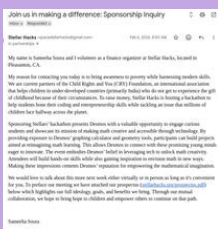


Figure 6

Sponsorships & Budget

We sent **business outreach emails (Figure 6)** to attract **external support**, and deposited all incoming **business donations** to **The Hack Club**, a **501 (c)(3)** that fiscally sponsors **Stellar Hacks** and helps manage our finances. On the **budgeting** side, we started by preparing a **rough cost estimation** to identify key expenses, then **finalized our budget** amounts once we had confirmed **competitor counts** to work with.

MILESTONE 2 – MARKETING EVENT

With sign-ups open, our focus shifted to maximizing visibility and driving registrations. We executed a multi-channel marketing strategy spanning social media, physical flyers, and direct outreach to reach students across different schools and platforms.

Flyer Distribution

To widen our **marketing reach**, we chose to target not only **online social media platforms**, but also create **physical flyers (Figure 7)** that could be distributed to **local schools**. Because of our team's diverse backgrounds from **four different school districts**, we were able to contact **10 different middle and high schools**, who granted us permission to place posters on their campuses. Across these schools, we placed over **50 posters** over a span of **two weeks**.



Figure 7



Figure 8
(Clickable TikTok)

Social Media Marketing

To maximize our event's visibility, we took a **playful approach** to **social media marketing** by aligning our content with **youth Instagram and TikTok trends (Figure 8)**. We supplemented our campaign with **two \$50 paid promotion TikToks** and **one \$50 paid promotion Instagram reel** to drive awareness. This strategy proved highly effective, garnering **27.8k views** on **TikTok** and **350+ followers** on **Instagram** during our campaign period.

Text Threads

We also communicated directly through **WhatsApp group chats (Figure 9)** and email to reach students in our networks. We leveraged dedicated **Middle School and High School group chats**, utilizing **Dark Social Marketing** to distribute event information to students who may not have seen our social media, ensuring no part of our audience was left out.

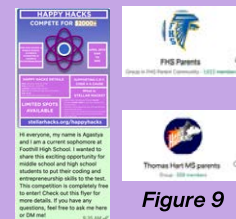


Figure 9

Sign-Up Form:

During the **marketing phase**, we monitored **sign-ups** closely. In particular, we tracked the **"How did you hear about us?"** field to identify which **marketing efforts** were actually driving registrations. This allowed us to see in real time which channels—whether **social media, flyers, or word of mouth**—were most effective, and adjust our **outreach strategy** accordingly throughout the campaign.

MILESTONE 3 – EXECUTING EVENT

On **April 26th**, all of our planning and outreach came together for event day. Our team managed all **on-site operations** to ensure **Happy Hacks** ran smoothly from start to finish.

Event Day Operations:

On **April 26th**, we successfully executed **Happy Hacks**. After months of **planning, outreach, and coordination**, the event came together as a **full-day competition** where student teams tackled **real business challenges** for a chance to win over **\$2,000 in prizes**. Our team managed all **on-site logistics**, from coordinating with **judges** to overseeing **catering, check-in, and presentations (Figure 10)**. The smooth execution of the event was a direct result of the **thorough groundwork** laid during our **planning and marketing phases**.



Figure 10

MILESTONE 4 – FOLLOWING UP

After the event, we focused on closing out our commitments and maintaining relationships with everyone involved. This included **recognizing contributors, distributing prize money, fulfilling our philanthropic goal, and checking in on our winners**.

Appreciation & Feedback:

Immediately following the event on **April 26th**, we sent out **thank you notes** to our **judges (Figure 11), sponsors, and volunteers** in recognition of their time and contributions. We also held **winner and judge follow-up meetings** to celebrate results, debrief on how the event went, and gather **feedback** to improve future iterations of competitions like **Happy Hacks**.

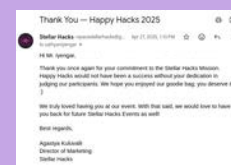


Figure 11

Prize Distribution & Philanthropy:

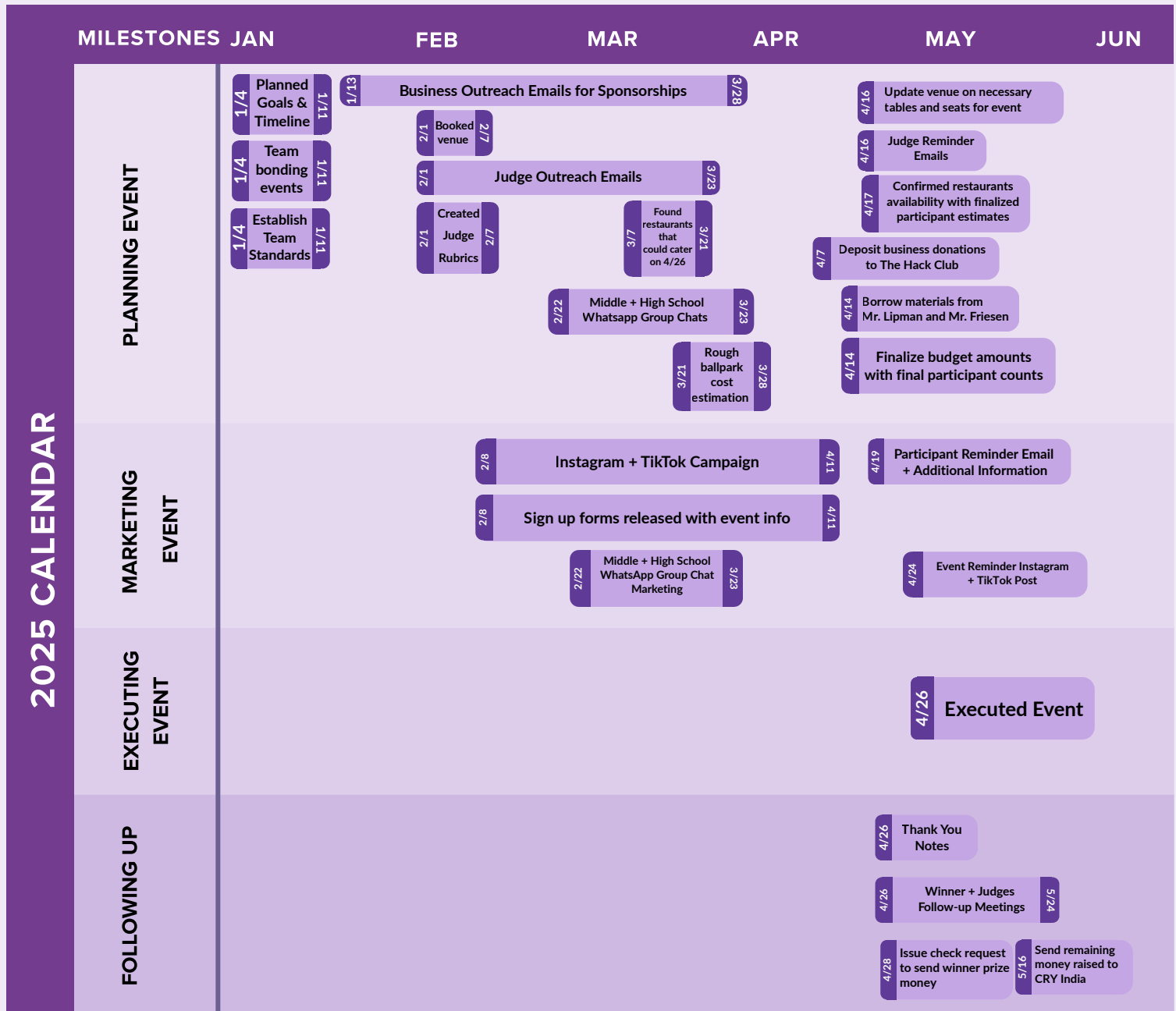
We issued a **check request** through **The Hack Club** to ensure winners received their **prize money** promptly. After all Happy Hacks expenses were paid for, we issued another check request to donate the **remaining funds** to **CRY India**, fulfilling the **philanthropic mission** central to our event.

Winner Progress:

Throughout **May**, available program leads conducted follow-up calls with our **top three winners** again, this time to check in on how they were applying what they learned from the competition after months. In doing so, we assessed **Happy Hacks'** long-term impact beyond event day.

ii. Timeline

We constructed a **Gantt Chart** to accurately lay out a comprehensive timeline of Happy Hacks, including preparation, the hackathon itself, and the additional steps we took once the event finished.



D. Quality Management

Diverse Competitor Base | Goal: 75 Competitors

Participation was tracked through **sign-ups** and **attendance records**. Marketing included **social media**, **school outreach**, and **flyers** across campuses. A centralized **Google Sheet** was used to monitor **sign-ups** over time, compare **outreach results**, and match registered students to actual attendance. Our **competitor base** was also diverse, attracting students from **seven schools** and **grades 6 through 12** (Figure 12).

Figure 12

Business Communication | Goal: 75% at 80+/100

The quality of our project's impact was directly correlated to our **competitors' efforts** and **project quality**. Competitors' project quality was measured using a **standardized judging rubric** that evaluated **problem definition, solution design, feasibility, and pitch clarity**. Each team was scored out of **100** by **entrepreneur judges** to ensure **consistency** and **real-world relevance**. The goal of having at least **75% of teams score 80 or higher** set a clear benchmark for developing **well-structured, complete prototypes** within the **12-hour timeframe**. This threshold balanced **rigor with accessibility**, ensuring it was achievable while still requiring **strong ideas** and **effective presentation**.

Increase in Business & Technical Proficiency | Goal: 70%

This was measured by subtracting the average of **self-reported confidence scores** over **5 questions** on our **sign-up form** by the average of **self-reported confidence scores** over **5 questions** on our **end-of-event feedback form**. The 5 questions asked about participants' confidence in performing certain **technical and business-related skills** (Figure 13).

Business and Technical Confidence Levels

After competing in HappyHacks, on a scale of 1-5, how confident are you in your ability to...

1 2 3 4 5
(Not Confident at all) (Highly Confident)

Identify a real-world problem and define a specific target user *

1 2 3 4 5
(Not Confident at all) (Highly Confident)

Build a functional tech product within a constrained timeframe *

1 2 3 4 5
(Not Confident at all) (Highly Confident)

Pitch a product's value and business viability *

1 2 3 4 5
(Not Confident at all) (Highly Confident)

Evaluate whether a solution is feasible given budget and time constraints

1 2 3 4 5
(Not Confident at all) (Highly Confident)

Integrate both technical and business thinking into a single cohesive product *

1 2 3 4 5
(Not Confident at all) (Highly Confident)

Figure 13

Incubation Implementation | Goal: 1 Team with Traction

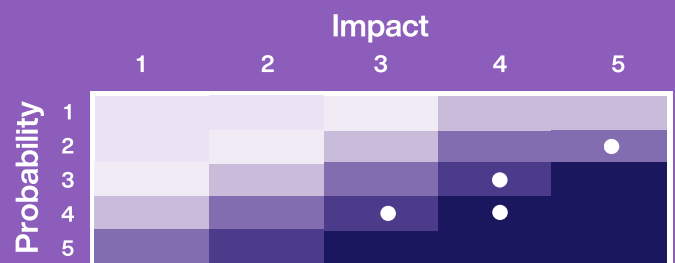
Post-event quality was measured through the progress of the **top three teams**, who received **funding and mentorship** from judges. Success was defined as at least **one team** demonstrating measurable real-world traction through **consistent revenue generation** or significant amounts of **active users** following the **incubator phase**. This target was **ambitious for high schoolers**, but core to the entrepreneurial spirit to turn a **prototype to a product**. Progress was tracked through **follow-up communication** and updates from participating teams after our event had concluded.

E. Risk Management

Happy Hacks relied on **coordination across competitors, organizers, and venue logistics**, where small failures could cascade into schedule disruption or reduced program quality. We **applied proactive risk management** by identifying high-impact risks early, locking dependencies, assigning clear ownership, monitoring readiness, and maintaining schedule flexibility **to fix issues without lowering standards**.

Below, we included a risk heat map, displaying the significance of each issue listed above. Categorizing each risk's severity allowed us to prioritize the risks we deemed more detrimental.

Risk	Probability	Impact	PI Score
Incomplete or Non-Functional Prototypes	3	4	12
Uneven Team Participation	4	3	12
Technical Issues (Wi-Fi, Tech Room)	2	5	10
Limited Post-Event Competitor Motivation	4	4	16



Negligible
 Minor
 Moderate
 High
 Critical

Potential Risk	How We Would Be Affected	Mitigation Strategy
Incomplete or Non-Functional Prototypes	Teams may be unable to demonstrate a working solution during judging , which weakens overall project quality and limits their ability to clearly communicate value .	Encourage teams early to scope down to a single core feature and provide check-ins during the event to guide feasibility. Emphasize that a working prototype is prioritized over complexity.
Technical Issues (Wi-Fi, Tech Room)	Connectivity issues, device failures, or lack of charging ports of participants or the Foothill Tech Room's projector disrupt development time and could prevent teams from completing or presenting their projects effectively.	Designate a tech support lead from our volunteers , prepare backup devices , and confirm Wi-Fi stability and bring power strips borrowed from teachers ahead of the event to minimize disruptions.
Uneven Team Participation	Unequal workload distribution may lead to incomplete deliverables, reduced team efficiency, and lower overall project quality .	Encourage teams to assign specific roles early (development, design, presentation) and informally monitor progress to ensure balanced contribution across members.
Limited Post-Event Competitor Motivation	Teams may not continue developing their projects after the event, reducing long-term impact and limiting success of the incubation phase .	Provide clear follow-up communication, highlight available funding and mentorship , and encourage continued engagement for top teams.

F. Budget

Prior Fundraising Experience

Stellar Hacks built on its experience from **two previous events**, where the team successfully secured sponsorships by sending emails showcasing its educational impact on the **local community** and **tax-deduction benefits**. These earlier events established a track record of delivering **structured, high-quality experiences** and maintaining **professional communication** with sponsors, raising a combined total of **\$6,000**. As a result, new and returning sponsors had increased confidence in supporting **Happy Hacks**, recognizing **Stellar Hacks'** ability to execute events and maximize the value of **sponsors' contributions**.

Funding Acquisition Strategy

Funding for **Happy Hacks** was secured by reaching out to **hundreds of companies**. The team contacted companies whose mission was closely aligned with **education**, particularly highlighting the event's focus on **student development, real-world skill building, and interdisciplinary learning**. Sponsors were offered visibility through **branding, recognition during the event**, and alignment with an **educational initiative** supporting future innovators. One of our biggest sponsors, **Desmos**, generously funded **\$4,000** toward the execution of our event (**Figure 14**). Additionally, **Stellar Hacks** operated under the **fiscal sponsorship** of **The Hack Club**, a registered **501(c)(3)** (EIN: **81-2908499**), allowing sponsors to make **tax-deductible contributions**, which significantly strengthened our **fundraising efforts**.

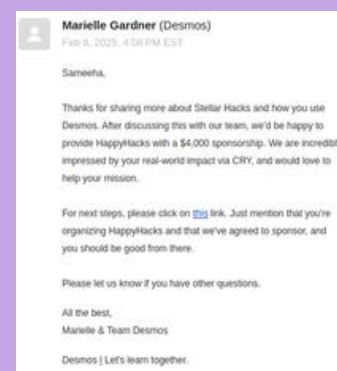


Figure 14

The successful company sponsorships are shown below. Beyond receiving **\$7,500 in funding**, communication with **local organizations** further optimized spending. For example, after reaching out to **CurryKona** for a sponsorship, they were unable to provide direct funding but provided **catering** at a **significantly reduced rate**, offering both bulk pricing and an additional discount due to alignment with the event's mission. This not only reduced costs, but also enhanced **participant satisfaction**, as the food was well-received.

Our Sponsors



ciena



Interview Cake

Total
Fundraised

\$4,000 + \$2,000 + \$1,000 + \$500 = \$7,500

Budget Allocations

Budget allocation was intentionally structured to prioritize **participant experience** while keeping the event **free** and still having funds to support **CRY India** and their **educational goals**. The largest portion of funding was directed toward the **prize pool**, reinforcing the **incubator-style model**, attracting **competitors**, and incentivizing **project development** beyond the event. Finalizing our **food and venue** platforms were also key priorities to ensure a **smooth and engaging experience** for **88** participants and our **10** team members.

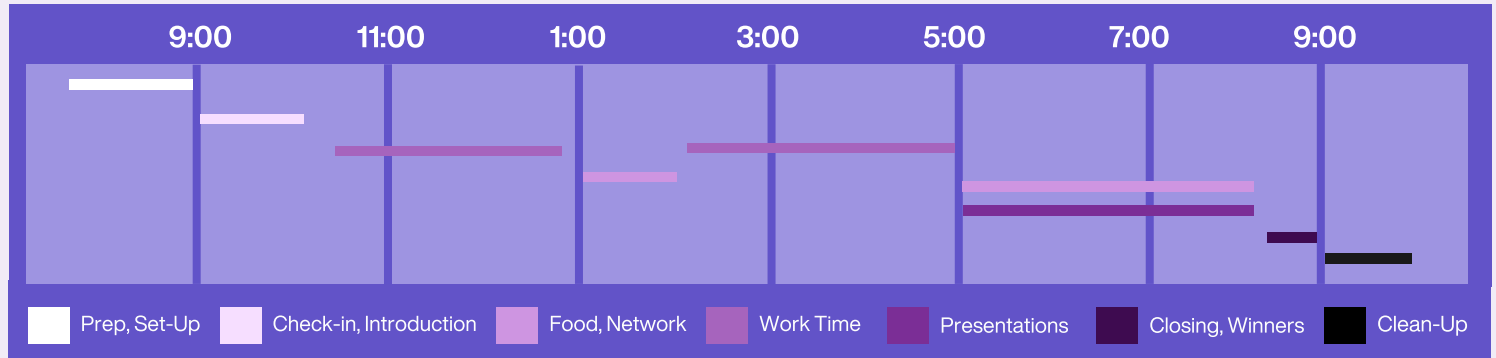
Expenses Category	Expected (\$)	Actual (\$)	Notes
Prize Pool	\$2,250.00	\$2,250.00	\$1,000 (1st), \$750 (2nd), \$500 (3rd)
Meal 1: Pizza My Heart	\$728.75	\$626.22	Lunch expected: 20 18" pizzas Lunch actual: 17 18" pizzas
Meal 2: CurryKona (40% total discount)	\$814.23	\$712.45	Dinner expected: 112 burritos Dinner actual: 98 burritos
Venue: Foothill High School Multi-Purpose Room (MPR)	\$900.00	\$900.00	Most competitors were from Foothill HS
Marketing Materials	\$150.00	\$150.00	Paid TikTok + Instagram Promotion
Water Bottles (3 40 ct. packs)	\$16.50	\$16.50	Water refill station at our school (1 bottle per person)
Name Stickers (200 count)	\$6.05	\$6.05	Used to identify and keep track of participants
Judge Gifts (3 Gift Bags)	\$126.46	\$126.46	Tissue Paper + 3x (Amazon Gift Cards - \$25, Gourmet Chocolate, 3 Playing Card Decks, Small Notepad)
Printing Materials (Flyers, Signs), Tables, Chairs, Team T-Shirts, Projector, Power Strips, Podium and Microphones	\$0.00	\$0.00	Borrowed from teachers or the Stellar Hacks Team, bought in previous events, or provided by venue
Total Expenses	\$4,985.94	\$4,781.63	
Remaining Funds	\$2,514.06	\$2,718.37	Donated to CRY India

Actual expenditures were **lower** than initially **projected** due to some registered participants **not attending** the event. This was **anticipated** and actively managed by **tracking attendance** and **updating our catering partners** with slightly adjusted order quantities on the day of the event to **reduce unnecessary costs**. After covering all **operational expenses**, remaining funds were donated to **CRY India with sponsor awareness and support**, reinforcing the organization's commitment to expanding **educational opportunities**.

IV. EXECUTION

Happy Hacks - April 26

Due to the tight schedule of our Hackathon, we created a **Gantt Chart** to display our approach when organizing the agenda. Additionally, we created detailed descriptions for every phase of the event day.



7:30 AM

Arrived early and set up

Team members were expected to arrive at **7:30 AM**; most arrived on time and began setup, including arranging **tables and chairs**, testing **microphones, lighting, and sound** through the **tech booth**, and installing **signage** directing competitors to the **MPR**. Everyone also wore their **Stellar Hacks branded t-shirts** so that competitors could easily identify team members and ask for help if needed.

9:00 AM

Participants checked in

Participants started arriving at the venue at **9:00 AM**. Our **logistics team** conducted check-in by verifying competitors through a centralized **Google Sheet**, handing them a **name sticker** and a printed copy of our **event schedule (Figure 15)**. All team members were required to constantly monitor **Slack** for updates. The **operations team** launched the **opening ceremony slideshow** by pairing **Allen's** computer to the **MPR projector**.



Figure 15
(Clickable PDF)

9:15 AM

Opening Ceremony Started

At this point, **23 teams** had checked in out of the **33 that signed up**. **Happy Hacks** still started on schedule with the **opening ceremony (Figure 16)**, where participants were briefly reminded of the event's **schedule, judging criteria, sponsors, and expectations**. During this session, **Dhruva and our program leads** emphasized the importance of creating solutions that combined **technical execution** with **real-world value**, and encouraged competitors to ask questions and seek help from the team when necessary. Competitors then dispersed, getting to work at their **designated tables**. At the end of our opening ceremony, **28 teams** were in attendance. Their tardiness was excused due to their confusion after coming in through an unexpected entrance and finding it difficult to find the MPR. We also called our vendors to update them with exact food quantity numbers.



Figure 16

Work Session 1

Work Session 1 marked the beginning of **active project development**, where teams focused on **brainstorming ideas** and defining a clear **problem statement**. During this session, participants collaborated to identify **target users**, explore **potential solutions**, and begin outlining their **tech product concepts**. A picture of a few groups was taken by our **operations team** in the **tech booth (Figure 17)**. When navigating the **entrepreneurial process**, competitors were strongly advised to identify an **unpopulated target niche** grounded in the given **time frame** to ensure **market potential**.

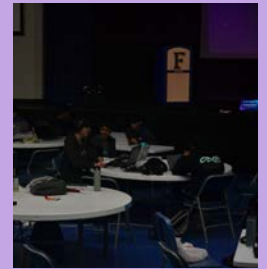


Figure 17

Lunch

Lunch was provided by **Pizza My Heart**, picked up by Aditya at 12:30 PM, and offered to the competitors at 1:00 PM. Competitors had to show us their name sticker for us to track who had gotten food and ensure no competitors tried to get seconds. It was not only a valuable break for students to recharge and socialize, but also an **informal environment** where teams could exchange ideas and receive **peer feedback**.

Work Session 2

Work Session 2 gave contestants **three hours** to develop and finalize their **code/product** and **presentation materials**. Participants defined their **problem**, demonstrated and explained their **solution**, discussed the **industry** and competitors, and outlined feasibility using the prize money as capital. Judges arrived at 4:30 PM and the marketing team stood near the school entrance we had sent to them ahead of time, guiding them toward the MPR. In the next 45 minutes, we clarified judging and event details and let judges roam around, asking questions to groups that caught their eye. Nearing the end of the **work phase**, all participants were required to complete the **submission form by 5:05 PM**. Unfortunately, one team was unable to submit on time with an **unfinished product**, resulting in **disqualification** from presenting. A **final submission process** was implemented on our website, redirecting participants to a **Google Form (Figure 18)** which compiled all submissions onto a centralized **Google Sheet**.

The form contains several sections for team information and project details. The first section asks for team member names. The second section asks for the team name. The third section asks for a contact number. The fourth section asks for the average grade level of the team. The fifth section asks for the school the team is attending. The sixth section asks for the type of participation (individual or team). The seventh section asks for the project submission (uploading files). The eighth section asks for a paragraph project description. The ninth section asks for questions.

Figure 18

Presentations & Dinner

We transitioned from our **work phase** to **dinner and presentations (Figure 19)**. Each presentation was **5 minutes long**, with **4 minutes of presenting** and **1 minute** for judge questions. Demos of the product were left to participant discretion, most opting to **give the judges their computer to explore the product** while **describing features** to avoid technical issues. Between presentations, we left a **1-minute buffer** for the next group. Because we had **27 groups** presenting, **dinner ran concurrently** so groups that were not presenting could eat while waiting or after they had already presented, making the most of our available time.

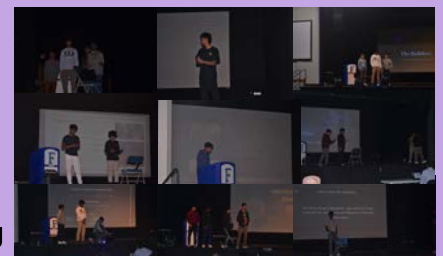


Figure 19

8:00 PM

Our **presentations concluded** and the judges convened to **rank their scores**. Notably, this was **15 minutes ahead of schedule** because **only 27/33 teams** that signed up presented. During this time, judges averaged their **individual scores** for each group and discussed **notable qualities**. After this process, they set aside their **top three teams** and handed their scoresheets to our team. While the judges deliberated, competitors wrapped up **dinner** and socialized. After collecting the **judge rubrics**, we added the **top three scoring teams** to our slides and printed **certificates** with each **group's name, individual names, and placement** with the printer Maya brought (**Figure 20**).



Figure 20

8:15 PM

Dhruva, our **CEO and MC**, began our **closing ceremony** by reiterating our gratitude toward our **sponsors**, without whom we would not have been able to host the event. Dhruva also thanked our **judges** for their commitment to the **Stellar Hacks mission**, calling each one up to the stage and presenting them with a **goodie bag** with thoughtful gifts. The judges took the stage and said a few words about how proud they were of all competitors for their efforts. Dhruva then moved on to **awards**, announcing placements from **third to first** and presenting **certificates** to winners. The presentations of the winning teams are shown to the right. In **third place, Seat-Maker** was a smart **seating chart generator** that optimizes arrangements based on **group sizes and preferences** (**Figure 21**). In **second place, QueueSmart** was a **digital queue management system** that allows users to track **wait times** and businesses to optimize **flow** (**Figure 22**). In **first place, DormChef** was a **constraint-based cooking platform** that helps students create meals from **available ingredients, time, and resources** (**Figure 23**). Dhruva lastly urged all the teams to fill out the **feedback form** to gauge the impact of our event on, dismissed all of the teams other than the three winning teams, and thanked them for their effort and hard work before they left the venue.



Figure 21 (clickable pdf)



Figure 22 (clickable pdf)



Figure 23 (clickable pdf)

8:45 PM

Winners wrote down their **email addresses** so we could **mail cash prize checks**, split evenly amongst **team members**. Each winning team met with a **judge** who would help them use the **prize money as capital** and launch their company. After scheduling **follow-up meetings** on **Google Calendar** (**Figure 24**) based on both **students' and judges' availabilities** and inviting **Stellar Hacks** to observe and improve for future events, judges and winners departed after being thanked once more. The hackathon may have ended, but **clean-up** was yet to be done. Our team stayed behind for another **45 minutes** to pack up **decorations, fold tables, and stack chairs**, returning the **Multi-Purpose Room** to the tidy state we found it in. We also packed **excess food** and returned a **podium** borrowed from **Mr. Lipman**, a history teacher at **Foothill High School**, to his classroom with the help of a **janitor**. Because our entire team stayed behind, we completed the **clean-up process** quickly and headed home.

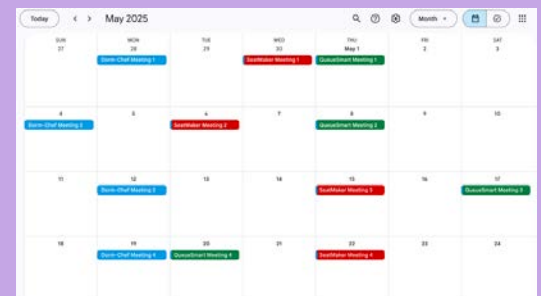


Figure 24

Following Up

Following up with participants entailed making sure **winners** were paid their **prize money** and after all purchases went through, we transferred our remaining funds to donate to **CRY India** to fulfill our **philanthropic mission**. The main focus of this stage was meeting with our **winners** to coordinate their **business ventures**. Program heads joined **twelve meetings** in total—one per week for each team over **four weeks**—where they worked on launching their **platforms**, expanding their **product ideas** with **expert mentorship**, and creating **integrated marketing campaigns** to reach their **target audiences**.

We had one successful project that is still active to this day, **Seat-Maker**, and we maintained close contact with the developer, **Austin Frankel**, even after the **follow-up incubator program**. Over the course of the incubator, Austin joined in **four one-on-one, hour-long meetings with mentor Navneet Joshi**, where they refined the app's **functionality**, improved the **user interface**, and worked on launching the product to the **App Store** (Figure 25). They also **developed a marketing and launch strategy**, including a dedicated social media presence to engage potential users and build awareness. With this guidance, Seat-Maker officially launched as an app in July 2025, and Austin stayed in touch with Navneet, asking occasional questions about navigating post-launch support and updates. To date, the app has achieved over 10,000 downloads, over \$1,500 in total revenue, and continues to be used by organizers seeking smart, data-driven seating solutions.



Figure 25
(Clickable Link)

V. MONITORING AND CONTROLLING

A. Monitoring

i. Schedule and Phase Monitoring

A **centralized, color-coded Google Calendar** (Figure 26) tracked preparation tasks, deadlines, student–interviewer pairings, practice sessions, and interview-day logistics. Automated reminders reduced conflicts and ensured accountability. **Weekly Progressive Reviews were held to verify team completion of task**, and flag issues early so adjustments could be made without impacting quality.

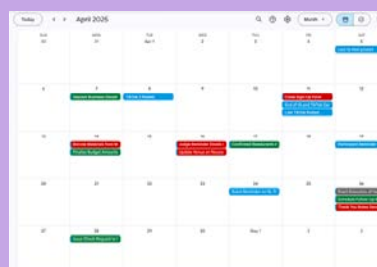


Figure 26

- Finance team
- Operations team
- Marketing team
- All three teams

ii. Budget Monitoring

The **project budget** was primarily allocated to **prize money**, **food**, and the **venue**. Most spending was executed by **Nikhil and Dhruva**, with all purchases communicated to the team beforehand to ensure alignment. We relied on **Hack Club Bank**, a **nonprofit, open-source neobank** accessible through our **fiscal sponsorship**, which provided tools to process **deposits**, send **checks**, view **account balances**, and issue a **Stripe-powered credit card**. All transactions were tracked in a **spreadsheet** and reconciled with the **Stellar Hacks** account balances in **Hack Club Bank's** system. As Stellar Hacks raised more than it spent, a **buffer of over \$2,000** was maintained and later donated to **CRY India**.

iii. Quality Monitoring

Tracking the **quality and effectiveness** of *Happy Hacks* was essential to our project's success. We monitored **team progress** and **task completion** through **Slack**, ensuring **daily updates** and timely resolution of issues. Starting from the **brainstorming phase**, we kept **Google Forms, Docs, and Sheets** organized in a **Drive folder**. **Attendance** and **participant registration** were tracked using a **Google Sheet**, while **email** was primarily used to communicate with **judges, sponsors, and competitors**. We also held regular **team meetings**, created dedicated **Slack channels** for the **operations, marketing, and finance** teams, and maintained a shared **Google Calendar** to monitor **milestones and deadlines**. Throughout all phases of **planning and execution**, this combination of tools allowed us to maintain **high standards** and quickly address any challenges.



B. Controlling

During execution, we tracked issues **as they surfaced** and **documented the corrective actions taken** to protect interview-day quality and timing.

Issues Encountered

<u>Event Navigation & Entry Confusion</u> Some participants parked in our school's secondary parking lot and entered through entrances closer to that lot rather than the main entrance communicated prior to the event. These entrances lacked signage leading to the MPR and were unstaffed near the start of the event, causing confusion and delays as participants navigated hallways seeking directions.	<u>Direction & Product Development</u> Many teams struggled to clearly define a problem and identify a specific target user, often jumping into development without validating a real need. This led to solutions that were technically complete but lacked practical application and strong user alignment.
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Actions Taken

<u>Event Navigation & Entry Confusion</u> Organizers redirected participants as they arrived, but initial confusion slowed the start for some teams. For future events, we plan to place clear signage at all major entrances, assign volunteers to cover multiple access points, provide pre-event maps, and implement QR codes or digital directions to guide participants more efficiently.	<u>Direction & Product Development</u> To address this, the hackathon was structured around clear themes, with detailed problem-statement guidance and examples of strong, user-centered ideas shared before the event. During the event, a judging rubric, milestone check-ins, and mentor feedback sessions ensured teams continuously refined both their problem and solution. Organizers also made announcements reinforcing the importance of user value and practicality, resulting in more focused and realistic final products.
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VI. CLOSING THE PROJECT

A. Evaluation of Key Metrics

Competitors at Happy Hacks	Teams scoring an 80/100 or higher on the judge rubric	Competitors indicating an increase in technical and business proficiency	Winning team that had a product launch find success in traction
88	78%	86%	1

Competitor Attendance

We had **88 competitors** attend out of **102 total sign-ups**, reflecting a strong **event retention rate of 86%**. These numbers indicate that our **marketing** effectively reached participants and that **pre-event communication** encouraged high attendance, which, in turn, contributed to a **competitive environment** with active participation across teams.



Exceeded Evaluation of:
Key Metric 1

Pitch Quality and Business Viability

After presentations concluded, we reviewed the **judge rubrics**, which showed that we had reached our objective of **78% of competitors scoring 80/100 or higher**. According to our rubric, this score indicates a **strong solution with minor gaps**. Our **top team** scored a **93/100**, indicating an **exceptional product** across all areas of **tech and business**.



Exceeded Evaluation of:
Key Metric 2

Tech and Business Proficiency

This was calculated by comparing **self-reported proficiency scores** from the **sign-up and feedback surveys**. The survey had responses from **57 competitors**, and our **86% figure** is based on this group. **Social desirability bias** (answering favorably) and **self-selection bias** (respondents who volunteer may not represent all participants) are factors that may have caused our data to slightly overstate **improvements**.



Exceeded Evaluation of:
Key Metric 3

Incubator Product Launch

The **top three teams** received an **incubator experience** with **funding and judge mentorship**. This helped extend the event beyond a **one-day competition** and fostered a clearer **pathway to launch** the strongest teams' ventures. Notably, our **third place team** found success in gaining **real-world traction**, **launching on the App Store**, generating **four figures in revenue**, and garnering **1,000 active users** in the year after the **incubation**.



Met Evaluation of:
Key Metric 4

B. Lessons Learned

Initiating

Strengths: Identified a **clear and relevant gap** between students' ability to build technical solutions and their ability to apply them in real-world contexts, which gave the event a **strong and focused direction**. This helped ensure the event emphasized both **creation and practical application** from the start.

Weaknesses: Underestimated how much guidance participants would need to **turn ideas into realistic, user-focused solutions**.

Planning	Strengths: Designed an event that effectively balanced technical development with business thinking, supported by structured judging criteria and mentor input. This helped create a more intentional experience where participants were guided toward both building and validating their ideas. Weaknesses: Didn't fully anticipate how differences in team skill levels would affect pacing and overall outcomes.
Execution	Strengths: The time constraint kept teams engaged and encouraged quick decision-making, iteration, and active participation, resulting in a high-energy environment. It also pushed teams to prioritize core features and focus on delivering a complete concept. Weaknesses: Some teams focused too much on refining ideas instead of building and testing their solutions.
Monitoring	Strengths: Tracking metrics throughout the event helped ensure teams were meeting key benchmarks and staying aligned with goals. It also allowed judging to stay structured and reflect the success of our hackathon. Weaknesses: While metrics captured overall outcomes effectively, they didn't fully explain why certain teams performed better or worse, limiting insight into specific areas for improvement.
Controlling	Strengths: Adjustments during the event, such as clarifying expectations or offering guidance, helped keep teams aligned with objectives while maintaining overall flow. This allowed issues to be addressed quickly without disrupting the competition. Weaknesses: Most adjustments were reactive rather than planned, highlighting the need for more built-in checkpoints and buffer time throughout the event.

C. Recommendations for Future Projects

1. 2 Judge Panels to expedite total presentation duration

Although we provided dinner during presentations, participants still sat through approximately **two and a half hours**, which reduced **engagement**. As this was our first hackathon with this many teams, we had to adjust the **schedule** after seeing final attendance counts, with **33 planned teams** and **27 presenting**. Had all teams shown up and submitted on time, we would have run behind schedule. To avoid this, in our next hackathon, we plan to split presentations into **two judge panels** and use **z-scoring** to determine results, followed by a **final deliberation period** where both panels meet to discuss scores. Each panel would have **two to three judges**, requiring us to leverage our **network of past judges** to bring in enough **industry professionals**. We would also book an additional facility such as the **Small Gym**, so presentations can run **simultaneously**. Participants could choose to watch whichever presentations interest them most, since the two locations are in close proximity.

2. Longer event to allow more time for project development

Although teams built **functional prototypes** within the **12-hour timeframe**, many were limited by time, resulting in **simpler or incomplete projects**. In future hackathons, we plan to expand to a **weekend format**, running two days from **8 AM to 11 PM** each day. This extended schedule would give teams more time to **develop, test, and refine** their ideas, leading to **higher-quality projects** and **stronger presentations** that better align with our goal of **real-world impact**.

During the event, teams hosted projects on their own computers or across different platforms, leading to **inconsistencies** and **technical issues** during presentations. In some cases, demos worked on a team's device but failed on ours due to **missing dependencies** (required software libraries) or **environment differences** (variations in setup, operating system, or installed software). In future hackathons, we plan to require all teams to deploy their projects to a **centralized web domain** we manage, so each project runs as a **live, accessible version** online rather than only on individual devices. This ensures a **consistent production environment** (a standardized setup where software runs the same for everyone), reduces **compatibility issues**, and minimizes cases where demos fail despite working locally.

Figure 28

20