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MONTANA CHAMBER FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES 2026 PROSPECTS AWARD WINNERS
Statewide Youth Entrepreneurship Competition Awards \$40,000 in Prizes to Montana Students

Helena, MT – The Montana Chamber Foundation proudly announced the [2026 winners](#) of *The Prospects* youth entrepreneurship competition during a virtual awards ceremony on April 23rd. Now in its sixth year, this premier statewide initiative received 200+ entries and awarded \$40,000 in prizes to students and schools across Montana, celebrating bold ideas and real-world ventures from K-12 students.

Top winners in the high school categories—*New Business and Existing Business*, will advance to the final round of competition for the coveted Grand Champion title and additional prizes: \$5,000 for first place and \$2,500 for second place and additional money for third, fourth and fifth. The final pitch competition will take place in person on May 18th at Montana State University's Jake Jabs College of Business and Entrepreneurship in Bozeman.

"Montana continues to be one of the top entrepreneurial states in the nation and the Montana Chamber of Commerce is working to ensure Montana maintains that ranking," said Todd O'Hair, President and CEO of the Montana Chamber of Commerce. "We are proud of the students that competed in our program, and we are excited to see them in person. Entrepreneurs create wealth and opportunities in rural and urban Montana and Montana business leaders know that an entrepreneurial mindset also creates the next generation of business leaders".

This year's competition featured a range of categories for high school students:

- **New Business Idea:** Students were challenged to develop an original concept for a new business and present a business and marketing plan.
- **Existing Business Idea:** Students who already run their own small business pitched their business idea and outline plans for future growth and sustainability.
- **Project 406:** Participants were tasked with addressing a specific issue affecting their community and presenting a plan for improvement. The five areas students could focus on were community beautification and engagement, schools, childcare, housing, and mental health awareness.
- **School Enterprise:** Student-led businesses operated through classes, clubs, or schools were highlighted with participants explaining the purpose of the business and opportunities for improvement or expansion.
- **Market Day:** Any students who developed a business through the Montana Chamber Foundation's Market Day program was able to showcase their efforts in this category.

K-8 students had their own set of categories:

- **Design Challenge (Kindergarten–8th):** Students combined three provided images to create an original product or idea.
- **Hack My School (Kindergarten–8th):** Students were asked to take a deep dive into their school and come up with a realistic and attainable solution to make their school better for all.
- **Vacant Lot (Kindergarten–8th):** Similar to the previous category, students examined their communities and developed ideas to revitalize vacant lots, unused buildings, or underutilized spaces in their community.
- **Existing Business Idea (Kindergarten–8th):** Young entrepreneurs presented their existing businesses and shared plans for growth and long-term sustainability

“Every year I look forward to this; this is the highlight of my year. I’m always so impressed with all of the passion and commitment that goes into these ideas”. Paul Hopfauf, Board President of the Montana Chamber Foundation.

“Montana small businesses are the backbone of our communities,” said Bill Coffee, CEO of Stockman Bank. “We are honored to be a part of the 2026 Prospect Awards, recognizing and celebrating the future business dreams of our Montana students.”

The Montana Chamber Foundation remains committed to cultivating the state’s future business leaders through programs like *The Prospects*, ensuring Montana remains one of the nation’s top states for entrepreneurship.

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About the Montana Chamber Foundation

The [Montana Chamber Foundation](#) is the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established by the Montana Chamber of Commerce to fund business education and encourage entrepreneurship among Montana K–12 and undergraduate students, participate in research projects, host events that promote economic development opportunities, and administer funds that support workforce readiness and entrepreneurship programs in the Treasure State.

The Foundation maintains direct relationships with members of the Montana University System, Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI), individual teachers and public school districts, Career and Technical Student Organizations (CSTO), and other nonprofits supporting student education.

For more information, visit: www.montanachamber.com/montana-chamber-foundation/

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