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Lt. Gov Debuts Pitch Competition for High School Entrepreneurs

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Photo Courtesy the Lt. Gov.'s office.

By Courtney Gabrielson

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Rhode Island Lieutenant Governor Dan McKee has [announced](#) a pitch competition that's open to student founders.

"The Lt. Governor Entrepreneurship Challenge," as the program is formally known, boasts \$9,000 in scholarship winnings to the champion.

McKee, who announced the competition in early April, cited a recent meeting of lieutenant governors from around the country as inspiration for the challenge. During that gathering, Kentucky's Lt. Gov. Jenean Hampton highlighted a similar successful program throughout the state's high schools.

"We want to highlight the skill and talent that lives in the state of Rhode Island."

"That's where the idea came from," McKee said in an interview with Rhode Island Inno. "Our office is promoting entrepreneurship and small businesses, and we visit businesses all the time; this is the perfect match, in my opinion, for the work that we're doing to support small businesses in the state of Rhode Island."

And, of course, the students. "The idea is that we raise some dollars from the credit unions to create scholarship money, and now we're out introducing ourselves to all the high schools in Rhode Island, encouraging their entrepreneurs to participate in this event."

The competition works like this: Interested students, from public, private, at-home or charter Rhode Island schools, submit business plans, highlighting their startup or idea. A team of local business people examines the applications and selects five finalists sometime in June.

Come August, those top five student entrepreneurs will give their pitch on [Advance Rhode Island](#), a local TV show. Judges will include representatives from [Millennial Rhode Island](#), a state organization dedicated to helping better integrate the business community with its millennial participants.

"Our organization was created to help support and retain young professionals living in this state," said Aiyah Josiah-Faeduwor, executive director at Millennial RI. "That starts before graduation — we want to support students' dreams in Rhode Island and invest their energy and passion here. Through this scholarship opportunity, we hope to elevate eager entrepreneurial-minded students on their journey to success."

McKee added that students of all kinds are encouraged to participate.

"If you have any inclination that you would like to be entrepreneurial in businesses or nonprofit efforts ... we'd say, 'Get it on paper,'" he continued.

Entrepreneurs don't have to be solely tech-focused, either. McKee cited examples of Rhode Island students using goat milk to make creams and soaps sold across the country or creating a popular bowtie line. Their work would be welcome in the competition, even though it's not necessarily all STEM-based.

The only real stipulation for interested participants? That the applicant be a Rhode Island resident.

"Our overall idea is: We want to highlight the skill and talent that lives in the state of Rhode Island," McKee continued. "We want to encourage that skill and talent to stay in Rhode Island, and develop their business ideas. We want to make sure we are networking and connecting with these young people [so they know that] this is a place that, when it's time to open shop, they can do so right here in Rhode Island."

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