



## What We Do

**Next Generation Tech (NGT)** is a program of the Pinellas Education Foundation conducted in partnership with Connect-IT 360. Its goal is to give high school students in Pinellas County the chance to learn essential life and career-building skills through the development of an IT product that solves a community or business problem.

Next Generation Tech identifies, teaches, mentors and inspires high school students who possess the talent and drive to create innovative, technology-based solutions to challenges they have identified. The program emphasizes developing innovation and creativity in young people, empowering them to build tomorrow's technology solutions.

All high school students are welcome to participate. Each student team participates in workshops that help take their idea and turn it into a product prototype while learning from a diversified group of industry experts. After finishing their third workshop, the teams pitch their product to vie for the grand prize at an awards competition in April. Students have the opportunity to win start-up money and gain real-world tech and business skills, developing products with genuine marketplace potential. Think *Shark Tank* blended with *American Idol* with a tech focus, with students – guided by mentors – creating viable products to bring to the market.

## Our Impact by the Numbers

- 1** The first “Shark” from hit show *Shark Tank*, Kevin Harrington, who holds a Zoom session with the winning team to offer sales insights
- 2** The number of days students exhibited and networked at prestigious Synapse Summit 2020
- 24** The number of mentors and judges from local companies such as Malwarebytes, Raymond James, Tech Data, Nielsen, Achieva, Wells Fargo, Catalina, and GTE Financial
- 115** The number of students who competed in 2019-20
- 15,000** The amount of start-up money awarded to winning teams

## A Story of NGT Innovation

To say the range of prototypes created by NGT students is impressive would be an understatement. Their work includes mobile apps, web apps, video games, virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), Internet of things (IoT), and artificial intelligence (AI).

The 2020 NGT participants faced an even greater challenge, forced to present their product pitches online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a fitting example of innovation at work, with the annual NGT awards show also taking place virtually. The students adapted with ease, and top honors (\$10,000, \$3,500 and \$1,500, respectively) went to:

- **ClimaTrek:** a team from Palm Harbor University High School (PHUHS) for a blue-tooth weather monitoring device.
- **Purfect Fetch:** Lakewood High's team invented an app to help in adopting pets.
- **BARCC:** This PHUHS team won for an app to assist in pet ownership and training.

*“I work for a Silicon Valley company and I've seen a lot of start-up products that are not nearly as polished as what NGT students put together,” said mentor Mathew Thomas of Malwarebytes.*

# MORE ABOUT NEXT GENERATION TECH

## Program & Objectives

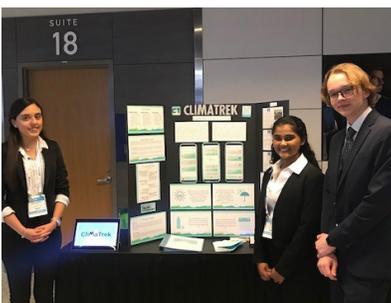
The learning outcomes fostered by NGT closely align with 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. These are a series of higher-order skills, abilities, and learning dispositions – all of which are required for success in 21st century workplaces by educators, business leaders, academics, and governmental agencies. In fact, a survey conducted by the American Management Association (AMA) identified three top skills necessary for their employees: critical thinking, communication and collaboration, each of which is central to the NGT program.

“NGT is a program and competition designed to link technology with the business world,” says Robyn Mussler, founder and director of NGT, as well as founder and president of the nonprofit Connect-IT 360. “It allows high school students to develop software, cultivate career opportunities, work closely with mentors from local businesses, and learn skills such as project management, business analysis, problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, communication and collaboration.”

What’s different between Next Generation Tech and other programs is that it functions like the real world, where developing software takes more than coding. It is truly a team sport, a process that cannot take place in a vacuum. By getting involved in Next Generation Tech, students learn about different career paths. They work directly with mentors, who serve in a variety of roles at companies such as Tech Data, Raymond James, Nielsen and Malware Bytes. They help guide students through the entire process, taking an idea from concept to prototype.

## Key Steps in the Process

- The timeline spans the seven months of the school year.
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- Once accepted into the program, students start with an idea, survey customers, determine requirements, design the user interface and architecture, build the program, test it and, finally, launch it.
- Mentors help guide students throughout.
- Each month, students are taught a new phase of product development, with workshops held monthly.
- Students begin preparing product pitches by December, working in teams of 3 to 5 students. They are encouraged to find teammates with complementary skills.
- Developing effective pitches are a vital step, giving students the skills to present before judges in the Next Generation Tech competition – determining who moves on to the final round in late April.



The top three winning NGT teams for 2019-20: ClimaTrek, Purfect Fetch and BARC, earning start-up prize money of \$10,000, \$3,500 and \$1,500, respectively.



**Pinellas Education  
Foundation**

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