NASA just launched a $1 million Moon Base Student Challenge to award cash prizes to students that solve lunar base problems

BY: Chelsea Gohd

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NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman unveils the Moon Base Student Challenge to a crowd gathered in the rocket garden at the KSC visitor center on Nov. 8, 2026. (Image credit: Chelsea Gohd)

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — NASA has officially launched the Moon Base Student Challenge, asking students to help build humanity's future on the moon. And there's $1 million in prizes up for grabs for the winners.

To build and sustain a base on the moon, NASA will have to solve a myriad of problems. And they're looking to the next generation for help, the space agency's chief Jared Isaacman said Sunday (Nov. 8).

"We are inviting students from across the country to help solve some of the problems that stand between humanity and a permanent presence on another world," Isaacman said. "We're putting 1 million in prizes together to support the best ideas and recognize the teams behind them."

Isaacman made this announcement wearing his blue flight suit from the rocket garden at NASA's Kennedy Space Center Visitor Center amidst the agency's MAX POWER air show event. Just the day before, he flew fighter jets in that suit and even jumped out of a plane, skydiving into the event. Soon after this announcement, he was flying another fighter plane above the crowd.

The audience for this announcement was filled with students of all ages. Some young children wearing costume spacesuits squeezed as close as they could to the front of the room while teenagers considering their futures listened intently. It was clear that Isaacman's presence and words were landing with this group.



NASA unveils $10 billion in moon base contracts, new lunar missions and the 'PROMISE' of a nuclear-powered rover

But what moon base challenges does NASA want to see these students tackle? In short, all of them.

"The moon base will allow us to conduct groundbreaking science, test new technologies, and prepare again for where we inevitably go next, which is the red planet," he said. "But before any of that can happen, we have an awful lot of problems that need to be solved."

"We need ways to generate power through the long lunar night. We need to protect our astronauts from that incredibly harsh and dangerous and demanding environment on the surface. We need to move people and equipment around on the surface and support human life three days away from Earth," Isaacman said, illustrating just a few of the big issues that present with the concept of a moon base.

How will it work?

This challenge is open to high school and post-secondary students based in the U.S. For participating students, they will form teams that will work on an idea from one of six different technical topics related to creating and running a moon base. These six topics include power systems, habitats, communications, mobility, life support and astronaut safety.

This will be what Isaacman described as a "multi-phase competition that mirrors how ideas are developed actually in the aerospace industry."

"Teams will first submit concepts, then they're going to refine them, and finalists will have the opportunity to present their solutions directly to NASA leaders and stakeholders," he further explained.

"The prize money is great for sure, but the real opportunity is to work on problems NASA is actively trying to solve right now, so students don't need to wait to graduation to contribute to that effort," Isaacman added.

A long road ahead

Right now, NASA has a long road ahead of them before a moon base is actually built. In mid-2027, the agency is planning to launch its Artemis III mission which will see a crew of four astronauts practice rendezvous maneuvers with two different lunar landers. If all goes to plan, this will be followed by Artemis IV landing humans on the moon's surface for the first time since the final Apollo mission in 1972.

The agency is making these big steps forward to not just a crewed return to the moon, but a sustained, long-term return to the moon. However, knowing that a fully-fledged moon base is still firmly in the future, they are banking on the ingenuity, creativity and passion of.

If you're a student or know a student interested in participating in this challenge, you can **find more information on NASA's website here**. Interested students can register until Jan. 25, 2027.