



Clockwise from upper left: MuniMod Coordinator John Dailey explains the format for the final judging session of the competition. Steven J. Vancore, principal with VancoreJones Communications, captures the students' attention with his expert tips for perfecting your pitch. First and second place winners representing SocialSafe (FSU) and Quisha (FAMU), respectively, with the judges panel. Students hard at work finalizing the back-end coding for their innovative apps before the demo hall kicks off.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY HOLLY MCPHAIL, FLORIDA LEAGUE OF CITIES

CIVIC TECHNOLOGY

MuniMod 4.0

Students vie for best solutions to cities' challenges

by Jenna Tala
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The **MuniMod** program has grown in popularity, and this year brought together teams from 11 Florida universities to compete in the state's largest civic-tech competition. Three years ago, the Florida League of Cities launched MuniMod, which challenges college students to think critically about municipal functions and create cutting-edge technology and service delivery solutions to address common issues.

Students, selected by their individual educational institutions, participated in webinars, conference calls and one-on-one meetings with civic leaders to gain an understanding of municipal government and learn what problems challenge Florida cities. Then, applying this knowledge, the students had, on average, 13 weeks to develop innovative solutions to those problems.

THE EXPERIENCE

All of the students' work culminated in a 24-hour "Experience" held at FLC University in Orlando on April 7-8. This final stretch began at noon on Saturday as teams claimed their stations and began building their final prototypes in hopes of winning the \$10,000 grand prize.

The League provided advisers and mentors on-site as the students progressed through the day and into the night with lightning talks and high-energy activities. The competitors represented diverse backgrounds and disciplines including engineering, computer science, public administration, business economics and political science.

League President Gil Ziffer, a Tallahassee commissioner, and First Vice President Leo Longworth, Bartow vice mayor, welcomed competitors and reminded them that their innovations have the ability to change the way government operates for the next 20 years.

The first speaker, **Steven J. Vancore, principal at VancoreJones Communications,** helped teams finalize their presentations with concrete how-to advice for delivery and pivoting, a technique to use during a question-and-answer session. Next, **Matt Broffman, director of innovation with the City of Orlando,** inspired the competitors to see their products through the eyes of a municipal administrator and to not just explain how it works but to describe the benefits to the community.

At 9:00 a.m. Sunday, the six judges arrived at the MuniMod "Demo Hall" to casually explore all 11 innovations. The judging panel included Ziffer and the following:

» **Toni Bleissweiss**, president of the Florida Local Government Information Systems Association and digital strategist for Lee County Clerk of Court

» **Gary Bruhn**, president of the Florida League of Mayors and mayor of Windermere

» **Gwen Keough-Johns**, president of the Florida Association of City Clerks and city clerk of Mount Dora

» **Mike Lester**, technology transfer partnership manager at NASA

» **Jim Hanson**, president of the Florida City and County Management Association and town manager of Orange Park

Competition was fierce. Ultimately five of the 11 teams passed to the second round: Florida A&M University, Florida Gulf Coast University, Florida International University, Florida State University and the University of Miami.

Each of the remaining teams then had five minutes to present its new technology and five minutes to answer any questions posed by the judging panel. The teams were evaluated on the following five categories: product idea, functionality, scalability, potential impact and presentation.

The judges were thrilled with the new solutions and impressed with the dedication of the student teams. At noon, once the judging was completed, the League hosted the closing ceremonies and announced the winner of the MuniMod 4.0 competition.

THE WINNERS

After intense deliberation by the judging panel, Ziffer presented **Florida State University** with the \$10,000 grand prize for **SocialSafe**. SocialSafe is a GPS-enabled safety app designed to reduce intimate partner violence by empowering potential victims to reach out to friends and family in a safe, discreet way before a situation escalates. However, when it does, the app has built-in mechanisms to alert law enforcement, provide critical data via text message to assist in locating a victim, and produce audio and visual evidence of an incident.

The second-place team from **Florida A&M University** received \$5,000. The team developed a solution to managing and marketing municipally owned event venues such as park pavilions and splash pads to community centers and amphitheaters. The team's solution, **Quisha**, which is a blend of the entrepreneurs' names, utilizes 360-degree video, mobile-friendly forms and process automation to make the resident's experience more customer-focused and efficient.

AN ENORMOUS SUCCESS

Finding its start as a regional pilot program, MuniMod is now a statewide success. All involved are proud of these student teams and cannot wait to see what next year's participants will create.

By starting with education and using it as a base to identify opportunities for problem solving, MuniMod is bridging the gap between passionate entrepreneurs and the reality of city governments' most current challenges. These students are using technology to help cities throughout Florida and potentially nationwide.

Likewise, the League is continuing its tradition of engaging citizens of Florida, specifically young adults, in civic education.

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MuniMod
Civic Life, Modernized.

THE TEAMS AND THEIR PRODUCTS

FIRST PLACE WINNER

Florida State University: SocialSafe is a GPS-enabled application designed to reduce intimate partner violence by allowing users to send discreet alerts to friends and family before a situation escalates. It includes built-in mechanisms to provide first responders key information if needed.

SECOND PLACE WINNER

Florida A&M University: Quisha is an online service designed to improve the utilization and booking of government venues. Using 360-degree videography and process automation, it improves the user experience and eliminates excessive paperwork.

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University: Florida's Expedited Relief Network (FERN) is an application connecting communities in need with resources after a storm. It uses an advanced algorithm to predict what resources a community will need based on a unique set of indicators.

Florida Atlantic University: Augmented Reality Utilities Application (ARUA) is a mobile-friendly application designed to locate underground pipes and wires with ease, which allows municipal governments to locate breaks and disruptions quickly and effectively.

Florida Gulf Coast University: Hurri-CAN is a mobile application designed to improve emergency management communication. Working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and a GPS-enabled platform, it stores the latest information on shelters, evacuation routes and updates on mobile devices that is accessible even when Wi-Fi isn't.

Florida International University: Fire 360 is a training program designed for improving firefighter communication and procedures. It utilizes augmented reality to create real scenarios in lieu of testing based on pen and paper or live simulations that often result in injuries.

University of Central Florida: COMMUNITY is a mobile-responsive, fully customizable application designed to enhance communications between residents and their local officials.

University of Florida: Optimum Recycling is a subscription-based recycling service for high-density housing designed to assist local governments in reaching target recycling mandates.

University of Miami: Event Guard is a GPS-enabled application designed to enhance public safety at live events such as parades or concerts. In the event of an emergency, the app provides clear channels for law enforcement communication directly to the user.

University of South Florida: Shltr-Aid is an application designed to connect resources to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

University of West Florida: CityAQUA is an application providing information in real time on water quality reports for every major water body including springs, lakes, rivers and beaches.