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**Dealblazer and Hey Nghbr To...**

# DEALBLAZER AND HEY NGHBR TOP 2025 ENTREPRENEUR BOOT CAMP PITCH COMPETITION

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Ten early-stage founders took bold steps toward turning their ideas into thriving businesses this summer through Ann Arbor SPARK's Entrepreneurial Boot Camp, a hands-on program built to help innovators validate markets, refine their business models, and tell their story with confidence.

After weeks of intensive mentoring, market testing, and business model development, the Summer/Fall 2025 cohort celebrated their progress at the annual Boot Camp Celebration and Pitch Competition on October 15. The event marked the culmination of a program designed to help founders of early-stage, technology-driven companies validate their business ideas and define next steps toward commercialization.

This year's competition featured startups spanning industries from AI and SaaS to digital health and fashion tech. **Dealblazer**, an AI-powered transaction management platform for real estate professionals, took home the \$25,000 grand prize, while **Hey Nghbr Inc.**, creator of the community commerce platform Nodifire, earned the \$10,000 runner-up award.

"Another great cohort of entrepreneurs!" said Loren Townes, Jr., Ann Arbor SPARK's director of entrepreneurial services. "This group came in ready to learn — curious, coachable, and hungry to find real product-market fit. It was truly inspirational seeing them uncover what makes their product or model stand out — and keep refining how they tell that story each time."

SPARK's Entrepreneurial Boot Camp combines mentorship, market feedback, and strategic planning into a fast-paced learning experience. Each team works closely with seasoned coaches from the Michigan **Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Tech Team**, diving deep into customer discovery and the fundamentals of building a sustainable business.

"Every Boot Camp reminds me why I love being a coach for the program," said Melanie de Vries, SBDC Tech Team coach. "It was inspiring to watch these teams really lean into customer discovery—getting out there, listening to customers,

challenging their assumptions, and reshaping their ideas with purpose. You could see their clarity grow week by week as their business visions became sharper and more grounded in real insights. That progress truly shined through in the phenomenal Best of Boot Camp pitches.”

For many participants, Boot Camp serves as their first true test of market readiness. Kaylin Eighmey, founder of Dealblazer, said the experience has been transformative: “As a first-time founder, the mentorship, coaching, and resources SPARK has provided and continues to provide have been absolutely invaluable. We wouldn’t be making the progress we are today without their support. SPARK has been instrumental in helping build us a strong foundation, and I highly recommend it to any early-stage founder.”

Runner-up Hey Nghbr Inc. also reflected on the program’s impact. “Boot Camp pushed us to get out of our own heads and listen to real customers,” said Jasmine Criswell, founder of Hey Nghbr. “That process helped us refine our model and make sure it truly solves a real-world problem.”



The event also featured guest speaker Eric Schwartz, tenured professor at the University of Michigan and co-founder of BlueConduit. As one of SPARK’s own success stories, Schwartz brought things full circle — sharing real, down-to-earth wisdom about what it takes to build something meaningful and make the most of unique opportunities to create real impact.

## 2025 BOOT CAMP PARTICIPANTS

- **Dealblazer** – An AI-powered transaction platform that acts as each real estate agent's personal TC, seamlessly managing deals from offer to close while giving brokers real-time visibility into company health.
- **Hey Nghbr (Nodifire)** – A community commerce platform that turns local word of mouth into measurable economic impact for neighborhood businesses.
- **Down2Chill** – A social networking app designed to eliminate social isolation and make real-world socializing effortless.
- **Lucidity** – An AI-powered reporting platform that helps digital marketing agencies save hours on client reporting by automatically generating clear, actionable insights.
- **Future You Photo Booth** – AI-powered habit coaching and visualization to help women in midlife see, choose, and become their healthiest future selves.
- **Machine AI Solutions** – A SaaS platform that helps small and mid-sized manufacturers transition from manual, siloed operations to smart, data-driven factories.
- **ModaX AI** – An AI-powered fashion design and discovery platform that lets creators and consumers design, explore, and try on fashion virtually.
- **PVM – Prenatal Vitality Monitor** – Developing a next-generation fetal monitoring system that tracks fetal heart rate, blood pressure, and movement during labor.
- **Skilt, Inc.** – An AI-powered microlearning platform that helps users master new skills through personalized, bite-sized, interactive lessons.
- **ZYQ.ai** – An AI-driven commercial lending platform that streamlines loan origination and underwriting for community banks and credit unions.

For over 20 years, SPARK's Entrepreneurial Boot Camp has helped launch and shape hundreds of startups across Southeast Michigan. With its focus on customer validation and business fundamentals, it has become one of the region's most impactful accelerators for emerging tech ventures. Boot Camp plays a vital role in advancing SPARK's mission to build a pipeline of high-growth startups positioned to create jobs, attract investment, and strengthen Southeast Michigan's innovation economy.

To learn more about Ann Arbor SPARK's Entrepreneurial Boot Camp, visit the [program page \(https://annarborusa.org/spark-services/startup-services/entrepreneur-boot-camp/\)](https://annarborusa.org/spark-services/startup-services/entrepreneur-boot-camp/) or read more about its [impact on early-stage founders \(https://annarborusa.org/news/ann-arbor-spark-entrepreneur-boot-camp-a-launchpad-for-startups/\)](https://annarborusa.org/news/ann-arbor-spark-entrepreneur-boot-camp-a-launchpad-for-startups/).

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