VOUCH

BUSINESS PLAN - January 2026

The Proof-of-Work Protocol for the Next Generation

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CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

1.0 Executive Summary - Vouch.

Vouch is a competency-based employment platform that solves the "Experience Paradox" for university students: *you can't get a job without experience, and you can't get experience without a job.* By offering a marketplace of "Work Bounties" these are simulated, real-world projects from actual companies. Vouch allows students to build a verifiable "Proof-of-Work" portfolio that supersedes the traditional resume.

Our multi-sided platform serves two primary customers: **Universities**, who need to improve graduate employability rates to justify tuition ROI, and **Corporations**, who are desperate for pre-vetted talent in a "Skills-First" economy.

Vouch is incorporated as a Delaware C-Corp and is seeking **$100,000 in pre-seed funding** to develop its MVP (Minimum Viable Product) and secure its first 10 university partnerships. Our competitive advantage lies in our proprietary **AI Evaluation Engine**, which validates student work at scale, creating a defensive data moat that static job boards like LinkedIn cannot replicate.

1.1 Mission

Our mission is to bridge the widening gap between Academic Theory and Professional Competency. In response to increasing labor market volatility, Vouch empowers students to build a verifiable "Proof-of-Work" portfolio through real-world simulations. We ensure that graduates leave university equipped not only with a degree, but with the proven confidence and practical skills required to deliver immediate value in the contemporary workplace.

1.2 Keys to Success

There are plenty of indicators that must react positively in order for Vouch to succeed. The 3 main factors are

1. **User Engagement:** Students need to be motivated to do the work on top of the school work already provided.
2. **Data Integrity:** Ensuring the work students upload is original and not plagiarized (using AI detection)
3. **Brand Authority:** Making sure a "Vouch Profile" carries the same weight as a college transcript to HR teams.

1.3 Objectives

To track our growth during our initial launch phase, We've established three measurable objectives for success.

1. **Market Adoption:** Secure pilot-partnerships with 10 major/mid-size universities and 25 corporate "bounty-providers" (targeting Fortune 500 and high-growth startups.)
2. **Product Validation:** Achieve a 75% Hiring Success Rate, where students complete anywhere from 1-5 bounties, and secure an internship or entry-level role within 6 months of graduation.
3. **Scalable Assessment:** Successfully deploy an AI-driven "Evaluation Engine" capable of grading 10,000+ student work artifacts monthly with a 95% correlation to expert-feedback.

2.0 Company Summary

Vouch is a Delaware C-Corporation headquartered in New York, NY. We are an early-stage EdTech software company focused on verifying student competency through simulated work environments. The company was founded to address the growing inefficiency in entry-level recruiting and the devaluation of traditional university degrees.

2.1 Company Ownership

Charles Vargas, CEO: 51% ownership (Majority Shareholder)
Co-Founder/CTO: 30% ownership
Reserved Employee Option Pool: 19% (Reserved to attract future top talent and early advisors)

Rationale: We have chosen a C-Corp structure to facilitate future venture capital investment, as this is the industry standard for high-growth SaaS startups.

Our long-term exit strategy looks toward an acquisition by a major HR-Tech incumbent (e.g., LinkedIn, Workday, or Handshake) or a traditional publisher (e.g., Pearson) seeking to enter the skills-verification market within 5–7 years.

2.2 Start-up Summary

Our start-up phase focuses on "Lean Methodology," minimizing overhead while prioritizing product development.

- **Funding Requirements:** We are seeking an initial pre-seed injection of **$100,000** (via grants, competitions, or angel investment) to cover our first 12 months of operations.

- **Key Start-up Expenses:**
  - **Legal:** $8,000 (IP protection, Privacy Policy drafting for student data).
  - **Development:** $7,000 (AWS Hosting credits, Google API tokens for the grading engine).
  - **Marketing:** $5,000 (Website branding, demo video production).
  - **Operational Cash:** $80,000 (Runway for 12 months of lean operations).
- **Assets:** Our primary assets are intangible: The proprietary "Grading Algorithm" code and the intellectual property of the "Vouch Score" methodology.

3.0 Products

Vouch is a Software-as-a-Service platform that bridges the gap between higher education and corporate hiring. We offer a "Simulated Workplace" environment where students solve real-world business problems to earn verifiable credentials.

Our Core Features:

1. **The "Bounty" System:** Unlike static job boards, Vouch hosts "Bounties" short-term, non-sensitive projects uploaded by corporate partners (e.g., "Analyze this Q3 dataset," "Debug this Python script," or "Design a social media asset").
2. **The Live Stack (Sandboxed Environment):** Students execute these tasks directly within the Vouch platform, which integrates with industry-standard tools like Slack, GitHub, Figma, and SQL. This ensures that students are tested on their ability to use *actual* workplace tools, not just answer multiple-choice questions.
3. **The Vouch Score (Dynamic Credentialing):** Upon completion, student work is graded by our AI "Evaluation Engine" (checked for technical accuracy) and peer-reviewed by senior students. This generates a **Vouch Score**, a dynamic rating of a student's **Reliability**, **Technical Proficiency**, and **Collaboration**, which serves as a "Proof-of-Work" alternative to a GPA.
4. **University Dashboard:** Faculty and Career Centers receive a dashboard to monitor student engagement and identify "at-risk" students who may have high grades but low practical employability skills.

The Vouch Score

**Technical Skill
(Accuracy of work)**

**Collaboration
(Peer review scores)**

**Reliability
(On-time delivery)**
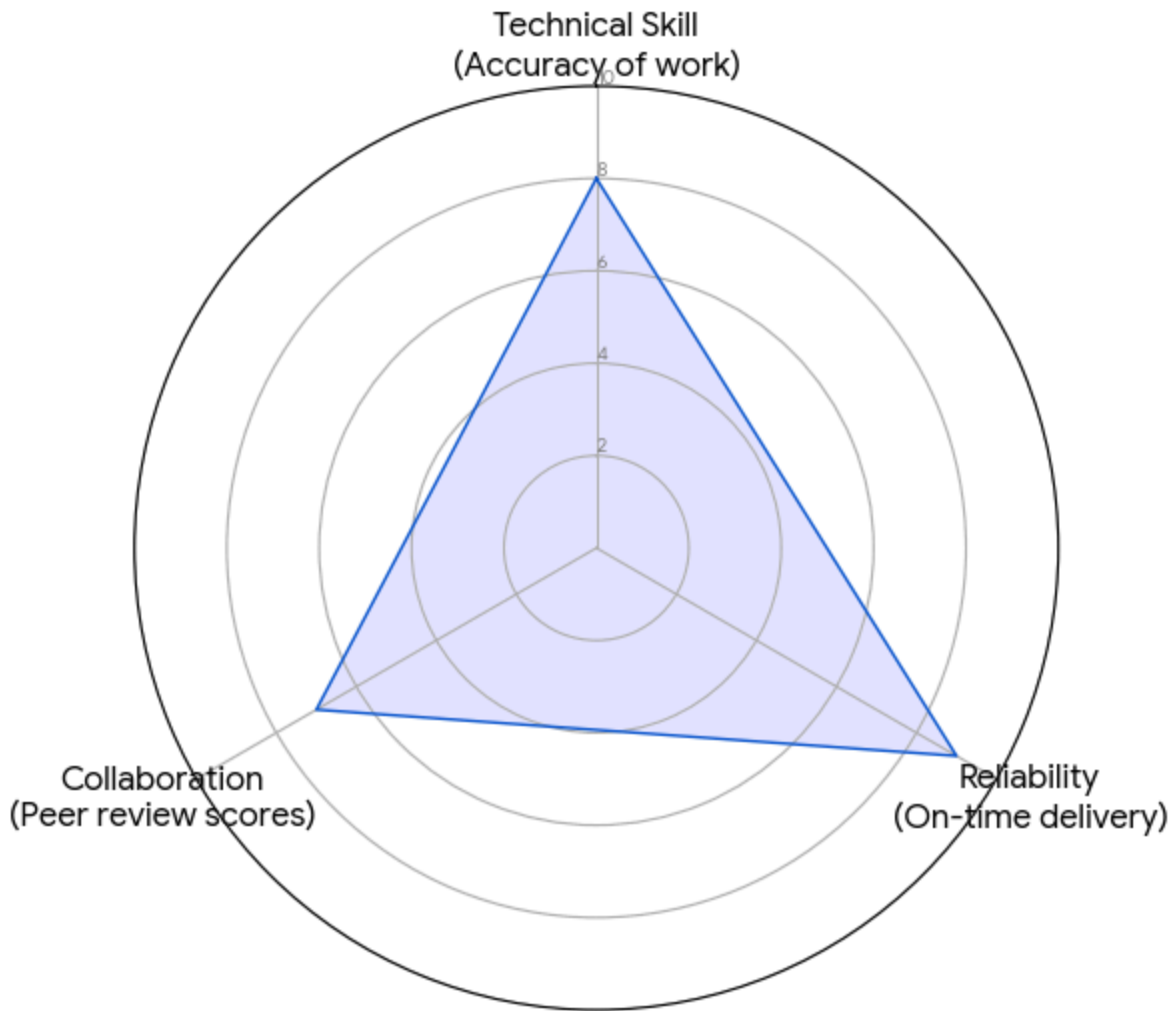
The Vouch Score is visualized as a "Radar Chart" (Spider Graph) with three axes: Technical Skill (Accuracy of work), Reliability (On-time delivery), and Collaboration (Peer review scores).

4.0 Market Analysis Summary

Vouch is classified both as **EdTech** and **HRTech** markets. Our analysis focuses on the School-to-Work transition pipeline, which currently suffers from consistent friction and very low transparency

4.1 Market Segmentation

We have identified three distinct segments crucial to our ecosystem:

1. **Primary Users: Students**

- ○ **Demographics:** University Juniors and Seniors (ages 20–24) and recent graduates.
- ○ **Psychographics:** High anxiety regarding employment, skeptical of traditional "theory-based" education, digital natives comfortable with remote tools.
- ○ **Volume:** ~20 million college students in the U.S. alone.

2. **Primary Customers: Career Centers**
   - ○ **Profile:** University Career Services departments under pressure to justify tuition costs via high "Graduate Employability" rates.
   - ○ **Pain Point:** Lack of data on *why* their students aren't getting hired.

3. **Secondary Customers: Corporations**
   - ○ **Profile:** Talent Acquisition teams at Mid-to-Large Tech and Business Services firms.
   - ○ **Pain Point:** Spending 15+ hours per hire sifting through unverified resumes.

4.2 Target Market Segment Strategy

Vouch uses a **B2B2C (Business-to-Business-to-Consumer)** strategy. Instead of marketing to millions of individual students (which is expensive), we target **University Career Centers**. By selling Vouch as an "Employability Infrastructure" tool to the university, we gain bulk access to thousands of students at once.

- ● **The Hook for Universities:** Vouch increases your 'Placement Rate' rankings by giving your students verifiable proof of skills.
- ● **The Hook for Corporations:** Vouch reduces your 'Time-to-Hire' by 40% by giving you pre-vetted candidates who have already done the job in simulation.

4.3 Industry Analysis

The job market is undergoing a structural transformation. This shift is driven by a widening disconnect between higher education and employer needs, the removal of degree barriers by major corporations, and the rapid displacement of entry-level roles by Generative AI. **Vouch** is positioned to capitalize on these three converging trends by serving as the validation layer for the new labor market.

Despite high confidence among university graduates, employers report a significant deficit in workplace readiness. According to the **NACE Job Outlook 2025**, while nearly **80% of students** rate themselves as "highly proficient" in critical thinking and professionalism, only **55.8% of employers** agree with that assessment.[1] This misalignment in assessment has created a market need for "proof-of-work" platforms that validate actual competency rather than just theoretical knowledge.

To widen their talent pools, many major enterprises are removing bachelor's degree requirements, a phenomenon coined as the "Degree Reset." Research from **Harvard Business**

[**School**](#) reveals that **46% of middle-skill** and **31% of high-skill occupations** have experienced a material reduction in degree requirements since 2017.² Industry leaders such as IBM, Accenture, and Google are pioneering this shift, signaling that verifiable skills are becoming more valuable currency than traditional credentials.

As degrees lose their monopoly on signaling value, skills-based hiring is accelerating. Data from the [**LinkedIn Economic Graph**](#) indicates that job postings emphasizing specific technical and soft skills rather than degrees and qualifications, have increased by **21% year-over-year** in key sectors.³ This shift allows companies to access a talent pool that is **6.1x larger** than when restricting searches to degree holders, validating the demand for a platform like Vouch that highlights "what you can do" over "where you went to school."

Perhaps the most urgent driver for Vouch is the automation of junior roles. A 2025 study by the [**Stanford Digital Economy Lab**](#) found that early-career workers (ages 22–25) in AI-exposed occupations have already experienced a **13% relative decline in employment** compared to senior roles.⁴ As AI automates routine "junior analyst" tasks, students can no longer rely on on-the-job training; they must enter the workforce with intermediate-level practical skills already proven, exactly the service Vouch provides.

4.3.1 Competition and Buying Patterns

Buying Patterns (Universities): Universities typically operate on annual budget cycles (buying in June/July). They favor "Enterprise Licenses" (per-student pricing) and require high data security compliance (FERPA). Decision-makers are risk-averse and look for peer validation (e.g., "Other colleges are using this").
Buying Patterns (Corporations): Corporate recruiting budgets are more fluid. They buy based on **ROI** (Return on Investment). They are willing to pay "Per Successful Hire" or a subscription for "Access to Top Talent" if it saves them interviewing time.

5.0 Strategy and Implementation Summary

5.1 Competitive Edge

Vouch holds a distinct advantage in the ed-tech market by positioning itself as a **Validation Layer**, not just a Content Layer. While competitors focus on *delivering* knowledge, Vouch focuses on *proving* competency.

Vouch's Competitors:

- **vs. LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is a **self-reported** resume platform; anyone can claim they know Python. Vouch is a **verified** portfolio; a student only gets a "Python Badge" if they have successfully debugged code in our sandboxed environment.

- **vs. Coursera / LinkedIn Learning:** These platforms are **passive** (video-watching). Vouch is **active** (problem-solving). We solve the "tutorial hell" problem where students watch hours of content but cannot perform the task in a real setting.
- **vs. Traditional Internships:** Internships are **scarce** and often geographically limited. Vouch is **scalable** and remote-first, allowing a student in a rural university to complete a "Micro-Internship" for a Silicon Valley firm without leaving their dorm.

Barrier to Entry: Our primary defensive moat is our **Data Network Effect**. As more students complete bounties, our AI grading model becomes more accurate, and our "Vouch Score" becomes a more statistically significant predictor of hiring success, making it harder for new entrants to displace us as the hiring standard.

5.2 Marketing Strategy

Our marketing strategy is designed to create a "Flywheel Effect": More students lead to more corporate bounties, which in turn attracts more students.

1. The "Campus Ambassador" Program (Grassroots) We will recruit influential students (Presidents of Business Clubs, Computer Science Societies) to be "Vouch Ambassadors." They will host "Resume Roast" events where they show peers that a Vouch Portfolio is 10x more effective than a PDF resume.

2. The Content Strategy (LinkedIn) We will leverage the viral nature of LinkedIn. When a student completes a Vouch Bounty, the platform automatically prompts them to post their "Vouch Badge" to LinkedIn with a generated case study summary.

- *Result:* Every completed bounty becomes a free advertisement for Vouch in the feeds of recruiters and other students.

3. "Bounty Sponsorships" (Corporate Partnerships) We will offer companies free "Branded Bounties." For example, *"The Spotify Data Analytics Challenge."*

- *Why it works:* Spotify gets free labor/ideas and brand exposure to top students. Vouch gets high-quality content that attracts students who dream of working at Spotify.

5.3 Sales Strategy

Our sales strategy accounts for the different buying cycles of our two distinct customer bases:

1. **For Universities (Enterprise Sales):** We will use a "Land and Expand" strategy. Instead of trying to sell a university-wide license immediately (which takes 12+ months), we will target specific **Department Heads** (e.g., The Dean of the Business School) with a

smaller, lower-cost pilot program ($5,000/year). Once successful, we leverage that data to upsell the central Career Center.
2. **For Corporations (PLG - Product Led Growth):** We will use a "Freemium" model. Companies can post up to 3 "Work Bounties" for free. To unlock the "Hiring Dashboard" (which shows the contact info of the top-performing students), they pay a subscription fee or a per-hire success fee.

5.3.1 Sales Forecast

Year 1: Focus is on pilot data, not profit. We project 5 University Pilots and 20 Corporate Partners.
Year 2: Conversion of pilots to full annual contracts.
Year 3: Rapid expansion to 50+ universities.

Metric	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
University License	5	15	50
Active Student Users	2,500	15,000	75,000
Total Revenue	$45,000	$350,000	$1,800,000

5.4 Milestones

Month 1-3: Build MVP (Web Platform & AI Grading integration).
Month 4: "Alpha Launch" at [Your University] with 100 student testers.
Month 6: Secure first 3 Corporate Partners to provide "Bounties."
Month 9: Reach 1,000 Active Monthly Users.
Month 12: Close Seed Round of funding ($100k) to scale operations.

5.5 Risk Mitigation

- **Risk:** *Cheating/AI Fraud.* Students might use ChatGPT to solve the bounties.
  - **Mitigation:** We implement "Live Coding Environments" where copy-paste is disabled and keystroke dynamics are monitored.
- **Risk:** *Chicken-and-Egg Problem.* Companies won't join without students; students won't join without companies.
  - **Mitigation:** We start with "Single-Player Mode"—Vouch will seed the platform with open-source datasets (e.g., from Kaggle) so students can build portfolios even before corporations officially join.

6.0 Web Plan Summary

The Vouch platform is a web-based application (SaaS) accessible via desktop and mobile. The design philosophy is **"Clean Professionalism"** it should feel less like a classroom tool (Canvas/Blackboard) and more like a workplace tool (Slack/Notion).

6.1 Website Marketing Strategy

SEO: We will target "long-tail" keywords that students search for, such as *"How to get marketing experience without a job"* or *"Data analyst portfolio examples."*
Viral Loops: When a student receives a high Vouch Score, the platform generates a "Shareable Asset" (a branded image of their achievement) optimized for LinkedIn. This turns our users into our primary marketing channel.

6.2 Development Requirements

Front-End: React.js (for a responsive, fast user interface).
Back-End: Node.js / Python (Django) for handling the "Evaluation Engine."
Database: PostgreSQL (for structured student data).
AI Integration: Google API (Gemini 2.5 Pro) for grading textual analysis and code review.

7.0 Management Summary

The Vouch management team combines entrepreneurial grit with technical agility.

- **Charles Vargas, CEO:** Strategic direction and University Sales.
- **CTO (To be Hired):** Leads technical architecture and AI implementation.
- **Advisory Board:** We will recruit 1 Faculty Advisor (for pedagogical credibility) and 1 HR Executive (for industry validation) to guide our product roadmap.

7.1 Personnel Plan

Our initial team consists of four key roles required to launch the MVP (Minimum Viable Product).

1. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) - Charles Vargas

- **Responsibilities:** Overall strategy, investor relations, and university partnerships. The CEO is the "face" of Vouch, responsible for selling the vision to University Deans and Corporate Heads of Talent.
- **Key Skill:** Sales & Business Strategy.

2. Chief Technology Officer (CTO)

- **Responsibilities:** Lead developer of the Vouch platform. Manages the integration of the AI Evaluation Engine (using Google Gemini APIs) and ensures data security (FERPA compliance) for student records.
- **Key Skill:** Full-Stack Development (React/Python) & AI Prompt Engineering.

3. Head of Product & Pedagogy

- **Responsibilities:** Ensures the "Work Bounties" are educationally valid. This role bridges the gap between a "classroom assignment" and a "corporate deliverable," ensuring students actually learn while they work.
- **Key Skill:** Instructional Design or Educational Psychology.

4. Head of Growth (Marketing)

- **Responsibilities:** Managing the "Campus Ambassador" program and driving student sign-ups. They run the social media channels and manage the LinkedIn content strategy to create viral loops.
- **Key Skill:** Digital Marketing & Community Management.

Personnel Table (Year 1 Monthly Costs)

- *Note: Founders will take minimal/no salary in Year 1 to preserve cash flow.*
- **CEO:** $2,000/mo (Stipend)
- **CTO:** $2,000/mo (Stipend)
- **Contract Developers:** $3,000/mo
- **Total Monthly Payroll:** ~$7,000

8.0 Financial Plan

Our financial plan is built on a "Lean Startup" model. We prioritize low burn rate and high automation (using AI for grading) to keep operating costs minimal.

8.1 Important Assumptions

Sales Cycle: University deals take 6 months to close; Corporate sign-ups take <1 month.
Churn Rate: We assume a 15% churn rate for corporations (project-based needs) but <5% for universities (sticky annual contracts).
Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC): $50 per Corporate Partner (via LinkedIn Ads) and $500 per University Lead (via Conferences/Travel).

8.2 Break-even Analysis

We anticipate breaking even in **Month 18**.

- **Fixed Costs:** ~$7,500/month (Payroll, Hosting, Software).
- **Revenue to Break Even:** We need ~3 University Licenses and 15 Corporate Subscriptions to cover monthly burn.

8.3 Projected Profit and Loss

Total Revenue: $45,000
Direct Cost of Sales (Hosting/API): $5,000
Gross Margin: $40,000
Operating Expenses: $90,000 *(Includes $84k Payroll + $6k Marketing/Legal)*
Net Profit: ($50,000) *(Note: We project a strategic loss in Year 1 as we invest the pre-seed capital into product development).*

8.4 Projected Cash Flow

We will maintain positive cash flow through the initial **$100,000** capital injection.

- **Cash In:** $100,000 (Investment) + $45,000 (Revenue) = $145,000.
- **Cash Out:** $95,000 (Total Expenses + COGS).
- **Ending Cash Balance:** $50,000 *(This provides a healthy 6-month runway entering Year 2).*

8.5 Projected Balance Sheet

- **Assets:** $50,000 (Cash on hand, IP value, Laptop/Hardware).
- **Liabilities:** $0 (We are avoiding debt financing in the early stage).
- **Equity:** $50,000 (Founder's Equity).

8.6 Business Ratios

Gross Margin %: 88% (High, typical for SaaS products).
Burn Rate: ~$7,500/month (Gross Burn).
LTV:CAC Ratio: Projected 4:1 (Customer Lifetime Value is 4x the cost to acquire them).

9.0 References

NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers). "Job Outlook 2025." November 2024.
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