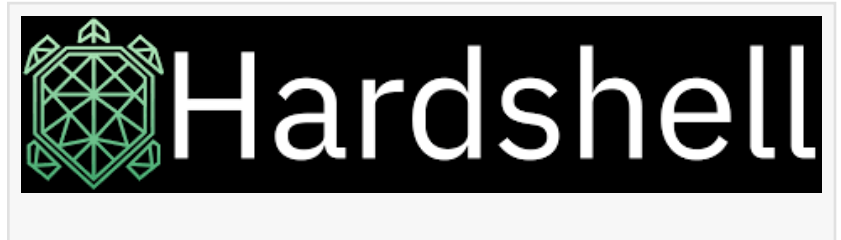


Enterprise Data-Layer Assurance AI Startup Hardshell Wins 10th Annual Veteran Startup Showcase

AI startup Hardshell wins 10th Annual Veteran Startup Showcase, a \$100K grant for its data-layer assurance engine to be awarded at the Seed the South Summit.



CHARLOTTE, NC, UNITED STATES, April 23, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ --

[Hardshell](#), a data-layer assurance engine for enterprise AI platforms, enables organizations to trust the AI systems they build, buy, and deploy by ensuring data integrity and compliance at the foundation of every AI workflow. Hardshell secured a \$100,000 cash grant by winning the pitch competition at the 10th Annual [Service First Foundation](#) Veteran Startup Showcase, which will be

awarded at the Seed the South Capital Summit in Charlotte, NC, on May 19, 2026. A runner-up prize of \$7,500 was also awarded to [TellUs \(MotherCode\)](#), bringing the total to \$107,500. in non-dilutive funding distributed at this year's event.

“

Hardshell stood out by tackling one of AI's most critical challenges with real technical depth and clear market relevance—the exact kind of company the Showcase was built to elevate.”

Charlotte Creech, Chief Program Officer - Hire Heroes USA

“We're grateful to TFX Capital and the Service First Foundation for the recognition, and to our entire team at Hardshell for the work that made it possible. TFX is doing incredible work for veteran-led companies building in national security, and we're proud to be part of it.”
— Andrew Schoka, Co-Founder & CEO, Hardshell

Why It Matters

The Service First Foundation plays an important role in advancing early-stage companies that drive innovation and economic growth. The quality of founders at this year's Showcase was exceptional—disciplined, mission-driven leaders tackling real, complex problems. Hardshell distinguished itself with a compelling approach to one of the most critical challenges in AI today, demonstrating both technical depth and clear market relevance. It's exactly the kind of company the Showcase was designed to elevate.”

— Charlotte Creech, Chief Program Officer - Hire Heroes USA

2026 Veterans Showcase Finalists

Atlas Data Science — <https://atlasdatascience.com/>

TellUs (MotherCode) — <https://mothercode.io/>

Hardshell ☐ WINNER — <https://hardshell.ai/>

Flight Frame — <https://www.flightframe.us/>

Capfora — <https://capfora.ai/>

Competition Judges

Charlotte Creech — <https://www.linkedin.com/in/charlottecreech/>

Ernie Bio — <https://www.linkedin.com/in/erniebio/>

Andrew Chang — <https://www.linkedin.com/in/changandrew/>

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About the Service First Foundation

The Service First Veteran Startup Showcase is an annual competition featuring pre-vetted, early-stage startups founded by servant-driven Veteran & Intelligence Community leaders. Now in its 10th annual year, the Showcase has featured over 50 early-stage startups and distributed more than \$650,000 in no dilutive cash grants. All finalists receive 1:1 mentorship, coaching, and introductions to potential investors and customers.

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