



2026 RULES AND CONDITIONS

By entering Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum's National High School Design Competition, you agree to be bound to the following rules and conditions:

Eligibility:

The National High School Design Competition ("Design Competition") is a competition open to any current high school student (grades 9–12) or homeschooled student who has completed coursework through grade 8 and is working toward a high school degree. At the time of entry, the student must reside in the 50 United States or the District of Columbia. Previous winners of the Design Competition are not eligible to enter.

You may not enter if you are a member of the immediate family or household of a:

- Regent, officer, or director of the Smithsonian Institution ("Smithsonian");
- Smithsonian employee, fellow, intern, research associate, or volunteer directly involved in the planning of the Design Competition;
- Mentor; or
- Judge or an employee of a judge.

Entries:

Make your entry by following the directions provided on the website at ["2026 DESIGN CHALLENGE"](#) and ["HOW TO ENTER."](#)

You may enter as an individual or as a team of up to three students. You may only enter once. If you enter as a team, you may not also submit an entry as an individual. Only submit a design that is your own original creation, or if entering as a team, the original creation of your team. Each participant is solely responsible for their individual entry or their team's entry and the consequences of making that entry. The Smithsonian reserves the right to disqualify any entry if it determines that it contains design marks, logos, or writing identifying the participant(s), or if the participant(s) sought to communicate with any member of Cooper Hewitt, or Smithsonian except as is provided on the website at "2026 DESIGN CHALLENGE" and "FAQS & TIMELINE." Participants are solely responsible for all costs associated with the preparation of an entry.

You must provide a consent form signed by your parent or legal guardian. If submitting a team entry, each participant must provide a consent form signed by a parent or legal Guardian.

Entries received after 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on Monday, February 2, 2026 will be considered late entries, and late entries will be disqualified from the Design Competition.

Selection:

A jury, composed of a panel of staff from across Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, will evaluate all eligible entries in accordance with the Design Competition [selection criteria](#):

- Innovation: How creative and original is the design?
- Impact: Large or small, what is the impact of the design?
- Relevance: How does the design address a specific need for your community's future?
- Communication: How clear is the design idea from the sketch and question responses?



The Smithsonian will select the highest-rated entries from across the United States to be featured on the Cooper Hewitt's interactive map.

The Smithsonian will also select five regional winners representing the highest-rated entry from the following regions:

1. Northeast (representing entries from: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont)
2. Southeast (representing entries from: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C.)
3. Midwest (representing entries from: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin)
4. Northwest (representing entries from: Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming)
5. Southwest (representing entries from: Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas)

Should the Smithsonian or the competition's jury determine that no eligible designs meet the requirements or satisfy the criteria, the Design Competition will be cancelled.

Regional Winners Notification and Announcement:

Cooper Hewitt will notify all regional winners via the email address or telephone number provided at the time of entry. Regional winners shall refrain from publicly discussing their selection until after Cooper Hewitt has made the official public announcement on its website (anticipated to be announced in April 2026). Those not selected as regional winners will not be notified. If the regional winners do not respond to the notification within two business days, another regional winner may be chosen. Failure to respond within two business days means the regional winner forfeits their position. Regional winners and featured submissions will be listed on the Cooper Hewitt Design Competition website (anticipated to be announced in April 2026).

Regional Winners:

Regional winners are required to participate in the following activities and events:

- Virtual Regional Winners Day on Saturday, May 16, 2026, to learn more about the design process and careers in design.
- Cooperation with the Smithsonian's reasonable requests in connection with the Design Competition.

Be reminded that activities are for participants only, unless otherwise noted.

Failure to attend, participate, or cooperate, as determined by the Smithsonian in its sole discretion, may result in disqualification at any time.

Regional Winner Announcements:

The five (5) regional winners of the Design Competition will be announced on the Cooper Hewitt Design Competition website, anticipated to be on April 7, 2026.

Ownership and Permissions:

Participants retain the rights to their entry or, in the case of a team entry, their contributions to their team's entry.

All Participants hereby grant the Smithsonian and those authorized by the Smithsonian, permission to copy, publish, distribute, publicly display, and otherwise use the entries in whole or in part for any educational, promotional, or other standard museum purpose, in any media now known or later developed, without compensation to the participant. This includes but is not limited to archives, educational programs, exhibitions, fundraising, promotions (including on social media), research, and publications. This permission is irrevocable and perpetual.

This permission does not include commercial uses of any entries. Commercial use requires additional permissions.

The Smithsonian may photograph, video and otherwise document participation in any of the Design Competition-related programs and activities, and to use any such documentation (which may include your likeness, statements, name, or actions) for any educational, promotional, or standard museum purpose, in any media now known or later developed, without compensation to you.

Retention of Entries or Designs:

The Design Competition is an educational program and the Smithsonian will not be accessioning any entries into its collections. Moreover, the Smithsonian is under no obligation to use or retain any entries and likely will not retain digital or physical copies of entries after the competition concludes (nonetheless an entry might be depicted on a website or in some other format consistent with the permissions granted by each participant). Should the Smithsonian decide to retain your entry, it will do so in accordance with its applicable document retention policies.

IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL PARTICIPATION RULES AND CONDITIONS

Smithsonian decisions are final and binding.

Participants represent and warrant that their entry, including any images submitted of an existing design, shall: comply with these rules, contain only the participant's (or in the case of team entries, the participant's team's) own original material (including an original photograph or drawing of an existing design), be lawful, true, and accurate, not violate the rights of any third party, and contain no harmful code (e.g. viruses) or otherwise damaging materials.

Participants agree and acknowledge that participants must disclose the use of any generative artificial intelligence tools ("GenAI tools") in the creation of their (or their team's) entry. This includes, without limitation, the use of artificial intelligence-based text generators, image creators, and any other artificial intelligence assisted technologies.

Participants must provide a detailed description of their (or their team's) use of GenAI tools, including:

- the name of the GenAI tools used,
- the specific tasks or elements of the entry that was created or modified by GenAI tools, and
- any other modifications made to the entry with GenAI tools.

The manner and extent of the use of GenAI tools in creating the entries will be considered in the overall evaluation of the entry in accordance with the selection criteria. Participants may be required to provide additional documentation or evidence upon the Smithsonian's request to verify the accuracy of a participant or their team's disclosure of the use of GenAI tools. Failure to disclose the use of GenAI tools or providing false information regarding the usage of GenAI tools may result in disqualification.

Do not submit anything that is off-topic, partisan-political, or advertising, or contains personal attacks or expletives.



The Smithsonian reserves the right in its sole discretion to disqualify any participant whose entry or conduct appears in any way to: inhibit the enjoyment of others; tamper with the Design Competition; violate these rules; infringe on the rights of third parties; or act in an unsportsmanlike or disruptive manner.

Disclaimers:

The Smithsonian is not responsible for incomplete or misdirected entries, technical or network malfunctions or failures, or causes beyond its control.

Nothing in this agreement or the Design Competition commits the Smithsonian to enter into a contract or award with any participant or for any services related to this Design Competition.

The Smithsonian reserves the right to cancel the Design Competition or modify these rules at any time for any reason at its discretion. As an example, in the event of a dispute regarding the regional winners, the Smithsonian reserves the right to award or not award the prizes in its sole discretion.

Release:

All participants hold the Smithsonian, its regents, officers, agents, employees, fellows, interns, research associates, volunteers, mentors, judges, and guest speakers and their affiliated organizations, harmless from and against all claims of any nature arising in connection with a participant's participation in the Design Competition, or participant's acceptance or use of awards and prizes. The Smithsonian and its regents, officers, agents, employees, fellows, interns, research associates, volunteers, mentors, judges, and guest speakers, its subsidiaries and affiliated companies, are not liable for any costs, damages, injuries, or other claims incurred as a result of anyone's participation in the Design Competition or regional winner's acceptance and usage of the awards and prizes.

Privacy:

All participants waive any privacy expectations they may have with regard to their entries. Participants must not submit any content or information that they do not want made public (online or on premises). Be aware that if your entry is selected:

- As a featured entry or regional winner, your first name, school, and city and state where you live may be displayed on the Cooper Hewitt Design Competition website and promotional materials, but street addresses, emails, and phone numbers will not be posted.
- If your content is selected by the Smithsonian for posting, website visitors may share your content via social media websites such as Facebook, YouTube, X, Instagram, LinkedIn and applications such as "Po.st" and "Add This." These sites operate independently of the Smithsonian and have their own privacy policies. In addition, comments with which you disagree may become associated with the content you submit.