

2026 COMPETITION RULES

Note: This document is subject to change. Last updated: November 8, 2026.

Please send all questions to Harrison Bench at hbench@s4ca.org.

1. **Eligibility and Teams**
    a. Teams must consist of 3-5 students currently enrolled in grades 9-12 at a high school in Nassau or Suffolk County, New York.
    b. Each team must have a teacher advisor from their school who registers the team and serves as its contact with S4CA.
    c. Team membership may not change after registration closes without S4CA approval.
    d. Teams must be available on December 10, 2026 for the competition.
2. **Registration and Required Forms**
    a. Advisors register teams through the form on S4CA's webpage between November 9 and November 20, including each team's top three preferred time slots for the competition on December 10. S4CA may extend the registration window at its discretion.
    b. S4CA will confirm time slots on November 23. Slots are assigned on a best-effort basis and may not match preferences.
    c. Each team member must send S4CA a media release form signed by a parent or legal guardian by November 30. Students without a release on file may not be allowed to participate.
    d. Teams that need to withdraw must notify S4CA as soon as possible.
    e. All teams will be required to submit a post-competition feedback form, with student testimonials included. These testimonials may be shared with press or local officials.
3. **The Challenge**
    a. The challenge will be sent to all teams on November 30.
    b. Questions about the challenge should be emailed to S4CA or raised at the optional orientation session on December 3. Answers will be shared with all teams.
    c. Teams may not contact judges before the competition.
4. **Presentations & Slides**

a. Each presentation is limited to 15 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of Q&A from the judges.
b. Presentations must be live and use slides. Pre-recorded presentations are not allowed. Embedded media (such as short video clips) are allowed but count towards the 15-minute limit.
c. All team members should take part in the presentation or Q&A.
d. Teams must include a list of references/sources at the end of their slides.
e. Slides must be emailed to S4CA by 5:00 PM on December 8.
f. S4CA will give time warnings to teams.

5. **Originality, Advisors & AI Use**
    a. All ideas, analysis, and presentation must be the team's own. Advisors may give feedback but may not write or deliver the work.
    b. S4CA will provide teams with background information on climate change, renewable energy, battery storage, and development on Long Island.
    c. Teams are encouraged to perform additional background research but may not copy another individual's work without attribution.
    d. Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools may be used for brainstorming and research but may not be used for final work products. Teams must verify every claim, cite sources, and be able to explain anything within their presentation during the Q&A. If AI is used, please add it to the list of references.
6. **Technology & Backup Plan**
    a. Teams must join the official competition Zoom link with their advisor 10-15 minutes before their time slot. Advisors should test Zoom on the school's network beforehand.
    b. Presenters need a working microphone, camera, and screen-share function. If any of these malfunction, teams may present by phone while S4CA shares their slides with judges. Technical issues do not affect prize eligibility.
7. **Judging & Scoring**
    a. Three judges score each team. Judges will be announced on November 30 but may be changed any time before the competition.
    b. Judges will score teams 1-5 on four criteria (Evidence & Understanding; Community Engagement; Practicality, Safety & Tradeoffs; Presentation & Teamwork) for a total of 20 points. There are four additional bonus points that may be awarded at judges' discretion with written justification.
    c. Scores will be averaged across judges. Scores are final.
    d. In the event of a tie, the team with the higher base score (no bonuses) will be selected as the winner.
    e. Teams will receive written feedback after the competition has ended.
8. **Prizes**
    a. Winners will be announced at the Closing Ceremony on December 10.
    b. The 1st place winner will receive $1,000. The 2nd place winner will receive $500. The 3rd place winner will receive $250.

c. Prize checks will be mailed after the competition to the school or advisor of the winning teams. S4CA will request payee information to facilitate this. Schools and advisors have discretion over division and disbursement of funds.

9. Conduct

a. Teams, advisors, and judges are expected to be respectful. Teams may take any position, but facts may not be knowingly misrepresented.
b. Profanity will not be tolerated.
c. Advisors are responsible for supervising their students and following school policies.
d. S4CA may disqualify a team for violating these rules.

10. Recording, Media & Privacy

a. Sessions will be recorded for judging, promotion, and evaluation. Photos and recordings may be shared on S4CA's website, social media, with the press, and with local officials.
b. Teams retain ownership of their work but grant S4CA and NYLCV permission to share it for educational and promotional purposes.
c. S4CA retains personal information for competition purposes only.