



SECOND ANNUAL COMMUNITY IN NATURE PRIZE CHALLENGE FOR 2026 STEM NEXT'S OFFICIAL CHALLENGE RULES AND LEGAL DISCLAIMER

STEM Next Opportunity Fund ("STEM Next") invites all out-of-school time (hereinafter "OST") programs in the United States inviting out-of-school-time programs to design and complete activities that connect nature, community impact, and future careers. Youth teams will identify a local or global nature-related issue or opportunity that matters to them, explore the careers behind it, and connect with the world of work as a part of the second annual Community in Nature Prize Challenge for 2026 ("Challenge").

By entering into any STEM Next's Challenge, participant agrees to abide by these official Challenge rules and legal disclaimer and the decisions of STEM Next, such decisions which are final and binding in all respects.

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN. DONATIONS TO STEM NEXT'S PROGRAMS OR SERVICES DO NOT ENHANCE CHANCES OF WINNING.

Challenge Submission Period

The Challenge submission period begins on October 13, 2026, and closes on December 10, 2026, at 11:59 PM EST. No submission will be accepted after the close of the Challenge submission period. Participants who are selected as potential winners will be announced on or around December 21, 2026. STEM Next shall have sole discretion to change or modify the announcement date.

Eligibility

The Community in Nature Prize Challenge 2026 is open to structured out-of-school-time programs in the United States that serve youth in grades K–12. Eligible programs include afterschool programs, STEM clubs, robotics teams, makerspaces, summer programs, and other structured learning experiences offered or supervised by a school, library, museum, community organization, faith-based organization, or similar institution.

Each entry must engage at least 10 youths. Each submission must include at least one career, complete one world-of-work connection and feasible work-inspired task, and create a Share What You Learned artifact that answers every required question. All entries must be submitted by an adult educator, program leader, or staff member on behalf of the participating program.

Employees, officers, directors, or agents of STEM Next or any of STEM Next's partners, related companies, agencies, or agents, as well as the immediate family (defined as spouse, parents, siblings, children, and grandparents) and same household members of any such employee, officer, director, or agent, are not eligible to participate. All applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations apply. Void where prohibited or restricted by law.

How to Enter

To enter, participants must complete the Challenge sign-up form and the following four steps:

1. **Spot a Nature Opportunity:** Choose one local or global nature-related issue or opportunity and explain what is happening, why it matters, and who or what is affected.
2. **Discover the Careers Behind It:** Explore at least one related career, including what the professional does, the skills and tools used, and how the career contributes to nature or communities and addresses the issue or opportunity.
3. **Connect With the World of Work:** Learn from a professional, organization, or reputable professional resource and complete a feasible, work-inspired task.
4. **Create and Share What You Learned:** Create a Share What You Learned artifact that answers every required question in the Challenge Toolkit, covering the team and challenge overview, nature opportunity, careers explored, world-of-work connection and task, what youth created, and what youth learned, including a youth voice quote.

The artifact may be a slide presentation, written report, video, social post, infographic, or another format. There is no required format or length, and judges will not score production quality.

A live professional interaction is not required. Reputable recorded interviews, career videos, employee profiles, and virtual workplace resources are acceptable. An unanswered outreach attempt counts toward the world-of-work connection if the artifact explains what youth asked; the work-inspired task is still required. The connection must relate to the nature issue but need not involve the same career explored in Step 2.

All submissions must demonstrate alignment with STEM Next's Career-Connected Learning Framework, including durable skills, career-connected STEM, and career exploration. Additional guidance is provided in The Community in Nature Prize Challenge 2026 Toolkit ("Challenge Toolkit").

Final entries must be submitted by an adult educator, program leader, or staff member on behalf of the participating program through the online final submission form. The form and instructions will be emailed to programs after sign-up. Each submission must include the Share What You Learned artifact, the required educator close-out survey, the OST program's name and location, and the point of contact's name, email address, and phone number.

Files or links must be labeled with the program name and team identifier. Submitted links must be viewable without a login, password, or permission request and remain active through the end of judging in December 2026. If the artifact includes identifiable photos or video of youth, the program must have the necessary media releases and permissions on file.

Each submission must be submitted via the challenge portal at https://stemnext.tfaforms.net/f/2026_Your-Community-In-Nature-Challenge in advance of the submission deadline. Each submission must include the OST's name, email address, phone number, point

of contact's name, and the location of the OST program. Information collected in connection with the Challenge will be handled in accordance with [STEM Next's Privacy Policy](#). STEM Next will not consider incorrect, fraudulent, incomplete, late, or otherwise non-conforming entries or entries that are intended to annoy, abuse, threaten, or harass any person or entity in any way. Eligibility is at the exclusive discretion of STEM Next, and STEM Next shall be entitled to reject

any participant's submission for any reason or no reason at all without having to provide an explanation. STEM Next reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to cancel, suspend, or terminate the Challenge for any reason and without prior notice to any participant. In such an instance, STEM Next may, if and as appropriate, select a winner using reasonable means that are materially consistent with the Challenge in question.

Judging Criteria

Entries will be determined by a panel of judges, comprising individuals with an OST background, with a focus on nature, environment, and youth development. When reviewing entries, the panel of judges will consider judging criteria such as:

1. Nature and Community Understanding
2. Career-Connected Learning
3. World-of-Work Connection and Task
4. Share What You Learned

Prize: Selecting and Notifying a Potential Winner

STEM Next will award ten (12) participants with prize money based on the prize table below:

Prize Tier	Number of Winners	Prize Per Winner
First Place	Three	\$5,000
Second Place	Three	\$3,000
Third Place	Six	\$1,000

All potential winners will be selected pursuant to the judging criteria provided above. STEM Next will contact all potential winners by email to confirm that they have won and are entitled to a prize. STEM Next is not responsible for digital communications that are undeliverable as a result of any filtering of any kind, insufficient space in a participant's account, or any other failure beyond its reasonable control. Each potential winner must show picture identification to claim their prize. Any potential winner will forfeit its prize if: (1) fails to respond within five days from the date STEM Next first tries to notify potential winner; (2) cannot be reached at the information provided by participant; (3) rejects the prize (or it is returned undeliverable through no fault of STEM Next); or (4) is disqualified from the Challenge for any reason.

In the event of any forfeiture hereunder, an alternate potential winner will be selected. Potential prize winners are solely responsible for all applicable: (1) federal, state, and local taxes and withholdings; and (2) out-of-pocket expenses associated with prize acceptance and use. STEM Next will not substitute prizes for cash or other merchandise at the request of any potential prize winner. STEM Next, however, reserves the right to substitute alternate prizes of comparable or equal value in its sole discretion.

Intellectual Property

By entering into this Challenge, participant represents and warrants: (1) that it wholly owns or has properly licensed whatever materials or information it submits hereunder in connection with Challenge and can make such submissions without violating any applicable law, agreement with any third-party right of any kind (including without limitation any intellectual property, data protection, privacy, or publicity right) and (2) that any and all materials or information provided by it hereunder shall be true and correct in all respects.

Furthermore, without limitation on anything set forth herein to the contrary, participant agrees STEM Next shall have a non-exclusive, perpetual, irrevocable, royalty-free, fully paid up license to the entry submitted (including all rights embodied therein) and that STEM Next, and its respective designees may utilize, edit, modify, post, create derivative work of and distribute the entry and all elements of such entry, including, without limitation, the names and likeness of any persons or locations embodied therein, in any and all media now known or hereafter devised, including for advertising and marketing their products or services, worldwide, without compensation or notification to, or permission from, participant or any third party. Participant waives any right to inspect or approve any modified, edited, or derivative works created under STEM Next's rights in this paragraph.

General Release; Indemnification

In consideration of participating in the Challenge, each participant, their heirs, legal representatives, subsidiaries, agents, officers, directors, assigns, affiliates, or other related parties ("Releasing Parties") agrees: (a) to abide by these official rules and decisions of STEM Next and judges, which shall be final and binding in all respects relating to this Challenge; (b) to release and discharge STEM Next and their respective officers, directors, employees, volunteers, agents, and representatives of the foregoing (collectively "Released Parties") from any and all injuries, liability, losses and damages of any kind, in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, from participant's participation in Challenge, submission of an entry, any Challenge-related activity or the acceptance, possession, use or misuse of any awarded prize; (c) the use of participant's, as well as any third party's likeness which is reference and/or used in the participant's submission, name, voice, performance, photo, image, expressions, personal experience, and biographical material and/or likeness for programming, advertising, publicity and promotional purposes in any and all media, now or hereafter known, worldwide and on the internet, and in perpetuity by STEM Next and its designees, without compensation (unless prohibited by law) or additional consents from participant or any third party and without prior notice, approval or inspection, and to execute specific consent to such use if asked to do so; and (d) assume all risks, known or unknown associated with participant's entry into Challenge. By participating, participant also agrees not to release any publicity or other materials on their own or through someone else regarding their participation in the Challenge without the prior consent of STEM Next, which it may withhold in its sole discretion. All federal, state, and local laws apply.

Further, Releasing Party agrees to indemnify and hold harmless Released Parties from and against any and all claims, damages, obligations, losses, liabilities, costs or debts, and expenses (including but not limited to attorney's fees) arising from (a) violations of these official rules; (b) violation of any third party right, including without limitation any copyright, trademark, intellectual property, privacy, publicity, or other proprietary right; or (c) any claim that an entry into Challenge caused any harm, including financial, to any third party. These indemnifications and hold harmless obligations will survive beyond the conclusion of the Challenge.

Released Parties are not responsible for lost, late, incomplete, damaged, inaccurate, stolen, delayed, misdirected, undelivered or garbled entries or votes; or for lost, interrupted or unavailable network, server, Internet Service Provider (ISP), website, or other connections, availability or accessibility or miscommunications or failed computer, satellite, telephone or cable transmissions, lines, or technical failure or jumbled, scrambled, delayed, or misdirected transmissions or computer hardware or software malfunctions, failures or difficulties, or other errors or difficulties of any kind whether human, mechanical, electronic, computer, network, typographical, printing or otherwise relating to or in connection with Challenge, including, without limitation, errors or difficulties which may occur in connection with the administration of

Challenge, the processing of entries, the tabulation of votes, the announcement of the potential winners, the incorrect uploading of the entries or in any Challenge-related materials.

Released Parties are also not responsible for any incorrect or inaccurate information, whether caused by STEM Next, participant, other site users, tampering, hacking, or by any equipment or programming associated with or utilized in the Challenge. Released Parties are not responsible for injury or damage to any person, including participants, computer, or related to or resulting from participating in this Challenge or downloading materials from or use of STEM Next's website. Participants or other persons who tamper with or abuse any aspect of the Challenge or related website, who act in an inappropriate or disruptive manner, or who are in violation of these official rules, as solely determined by STEM Next, will be disqualified and all associated entries will be void. Should any portion of the Challenge be, in STEM Next's sole opinion, compromised by virus, worms, bugs, non-authorized human intervention or other causes which, in the sole opinion of STEM NEXT, corrupt or impair the administration, security, fairness or proper play, or submission of entries, STEM Next reserves the right at its sole discretion to suspend, modify or terminate the Challenge and, if terminated, at its discretion, select the potential winners from all eligible, non-suspect entries received prior to action taken using the winner determination procedure outlined above.

ANY ATTEMPT TO DELIBERATELY DAMAGE STEM NEXT'S WEBSITE OR UNDERMINE THE LEGITIMATE OPERATION OF THE CHALLENGE MAY BE IN VIOLATION OF CRIMINAL AND CIVIL LAWS AND SHOULD SUCH AN ATTEMPT BE MADE, STEM NEXT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO SEEK DAMAGES AND OTHER REMEDIES (INCLUDING ATTORNEYS' FEES) FROM ANY SUCH INDIVIDUAL TO THE FULLEST EXTENT OF THE LAW, INCLUDING CRIMINAL PROSECUTION.

Choice of Law; Arbitration

This challenge is subject to all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations. Issues concerning the construction, validity, interpretation, and enforceability of these official rules shall be governed by the laws of the State of California without regard to any principles of conflict of laws. For any controversy or claim arising out of or related to the Challenge, these official rules or any element thereof, participant and STEM Next irrevocably submit and consent to binding arbitration conducted by a one-person neutral arbitrator selected by mutual agreement of the parties. Such arbitration shall be held in the County of San Diego, California. The prevailing party shall be entitled to attorney's fees. Judgment on the award rendered by the arbitrator may be entered in any court having jurisdiction therefor. Under no circumstances will the participant be permitted to obtain awards for, and the participant hereby waives all rights to claim punitive, incidental, and/or consequential damages, other than the participant's actual out-of-pocket expenses.

Modifications

STEM Next may amend these official rules in its sole discretion. The illegality, invalidity, or unenforceability of any specific provision or part of a provision of these official rules shall in no way affect the remainder of these official rules. STEM Next does not endorse any participant or entry, and expressly disclaims any and all liability in connection with the entries.