



2021 FAQ

Competition

WHAT IS THE COLLEGIATE INVENTORS COMPETITION?

The Collegiate Inventors Competition® (CIC), a program of the National Inventors Hall of Fame®, is a national competition that recognizes and rewards innovations, discoveries and research by college and university students and their faculty advisers. The competition encourages students who actively pursue invention. Students frequently come from science, engineering, mathematics and technology studies, but creative invention can emerge from any course of study. The program was introduced in 1990.

WHAT TYPES OF INVENTIONS ARE SUBMITTED?

The Collegiate Inventors Competition receives inventions of all types from all fields. Each invention must be the original idea and work product of the student/adviser team and must not have been (1) made available to the public as a commercial product or process, or (2) patented or published more than one year prior to June 7, 2021.

The invention, a reduced-to-practice idea or working model, must be the work of a student or team of students, either as a class project or an independent project. Additionally, the invention must be capable of being reproduced.

WHERE AND WHEN DOES THE FINAL JUDGING ROUND AND AWARDS TAKE PLACE?

The final round of judging and the awards take place at the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, in October.

Awards

IS THIS A GRANT TO HELP ME PAY FOR COLLEGE?

No. The Collegiate Inventors Competition is not a traditional scholarship program and does not provide direct tuition assistance. The competition recognizes innovations, discoveries and research by college and university students by awarding unrestricted cash prizes.



WHAT ARE THE AWARDS?

All Finalists of the Collegiate Inventors Competition will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C. Winners will be awarded cash prizes.

Requirements

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR ENTERING THE COMPETITION?

The application consists of: General student information, an essay including a brief description or abstract of the invention, information on the faculty adviser (if applicable), a letter of recommendation from the faculty adviser or a professional reference, a literature/patent search and summary, and any relevant supporting or supplemental materials you wish to submit (examples: charts, graphs, videos, articles, samples, etc.). In addition, entrants must fulfill the student status requirements. The entry must be written in English.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE STUDENTS SELECTED AS FINALISTS?

Students chosen as Finalists must attend the final judging session and awards presentation in Washington, D.C., in October to be eligible for awards (airfare and hotel will be paid for by the competition). Additionally, Finalists may be asked to officially confirm their status as students.

Eligibility

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO ENTER?

Any full-time student enrolled in a U.S. college or university is eligible to enter. A full-time student is anyone who has been enrolled full time between June 2020 and June 2021.

In the case of a team, at least one member of the team must be enrolled as a full-time student. The remaining team members must be enrolled as full-time or part-time students. A part-time student is anyone who has been enrolled part time between June 2020 and June 2021.

Students who are currently enrolled full time and will graduate in May or June 2021 are eligible.

Non-U.S. citizens are eligible as long as they are enrolled in a U.S. college or university and can meet student eligibility status.

CAN A POST-DOCTORATE FELLOW OR RESEARCHER SUBMIT?

No, unless he or she can meet the stated full-time student eligibility requirement.



Adviser or Professional Reference

WHY DO I NEED AN ADVISER/PROFESSIONAL REFERENCE?

Similar to a letter of recommendation, an adviser and/or professional reference letter adds credibility to your invention, as well as confirms the work is your own.

I DON'T HAVE AN ADVISER WHO WORKED ON THIS PROJECT DIRECTLY WITH ME. AM I STILL ELIGIBLE TO ENTER?

Yes; however, you must designate an individual to provide a professional reference for purposes of the competition, and that person must submit a letter on your behalf. Your adviser or professional reference may be a counselor, mentor or faculty member who knows you and with whom you feel comfortable describing your invention/research.

Team Requirements

HOW MANY STUDENTS CAN ENTER AS A TEAM?

A maximum of four persons may comprise each team.

IF MY TEAM CONSISTS OF UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS, IN WHICH CATEGORY WILL WE BE PLACED?

Teams must select whether to be considered in the "Undergraduate" or "Graduate" category. Designations may be reassigned at the discretion of the judges.

Public Disclosure

I HAVE TOLD A FEW PEOPLE ABOUT MY INVENTION. CAN I STILL ENTER THE COMPETITION?

It will depend upon the circumstances and the manner in which you shared the information about your invention. You cannot enter the competition if your invention (1) has already been patented or disclosed by another party/inventor, or (2) you have been issued a patent for the invention more than one year prior to the date of submission to the competition.

DO I FORFEIT MY INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS BY SUBMITTING AN ENTRY TO THE COLLEGIATE INVENTORS COMPETITION?

No. The goal of the Collegiate Inventors Competition is to recognize, award and encourage student innovation. We do not seek any ownership interests in your invention. We strongly encourage all students to begin the appropriate intellectual property protection process as soon as possible.



IS THE COMPETITION VIEWED AS A “PUBLIC DISCLOSURE”?

Entering the Collegiate Inventors Competition does not require you to make any “enabling” disclosures; that is, we do not ask you to give us information that would allow a person of ordinary skill to duplicate your invention. As such, we do not view your entry as a public disclosure. In addition, all individuals reviewing your entries are bound by nondisclosure agreements. The National Inventors Hall of Fame only uses the approved titles and very short descriptions of the inventions for publicity purposes.

DO I NEED A PATENT TO PARTICIPATE?

No; however, keep in mind that to obtain patent protection in the United States, the inventor must file a patent application within one year of the date of public disclosure or commercial use of the invention. For information on how to file a patent application, visit uspto.gov.

I HAVE FILED A PROVISIONAL APPLICATION FOR A PATENT, OR MY PATENT APPLICATION IS PENDING BEFORE THE USPTO. CAN I STILL ENTER THE COMPETITION?

Yes. If you have not filed a provisional patent application and are in need of information on how to do so, visit uspto.gov/web/offices/pac/provapp.htm.

Prior Art/Patent Search

DO I HAVE TO DO A PATENT SEARCH AND WHY?

Yes, a literature and/or patent search is an essential component for determining originality of the idea presented in your application. In addition, your search will be used by the judges, along with their own research, to help distinguish your invention from other inventions and concepts. We are expecting you to make a good faith effort to identify inventions, discoveries and articles (prior art) that are similar or related to your work and to distinguish your invention from that prior art.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A THOROUGH SEARCH?

A thorough search considers all prior art. That is, it considers all known information relevant to your invention, including earlier U.S. patents, foreign patents and nonpatent literature (e.g., newspapers, journal articles, published papers, etc.). To obtain more information on conducting a patent search, visit the USPTO at uspto.gov or consult your school’s technology transfer office.

WHERE DO I GO TO DO A PATENT SEARCH?

The USPTO has a freely searchable online database that allows the user to search U.S. patents issued from 1790 to the present. Information on how to use the database can be found at uspto.gov. In addition, every state has at least one [Patent and Trademark Resource Center \(PTRC\)](#). You can find the PTRC closest to your location by visiting uspto.gov/go/ptdl/.



Judging

WHAT IS THE JUDGING PROCESS?

First-round judges review each entry submitted to the Collegiate Inventors Competition. To ensure blind scoring, the judges do not meet or collaborate with each other in scoring the entries. Their collective scores and rankings along with data collected by independent researchers are used to determine Finalists.

All Finalist or Finalist Teams meet individually with the final panel of judges for a formal presentation of their inventions. The Undergraduate and Graduate Divisions may have different judging panels. Finalists also entertain questions from the panel. After all the Finalists have made their presentations, the panel deliberates and selects the winners in each division.

WHO ARE THE JUDGES?

The first-round judges are scientists, researchers and other experts in the fields of mathematics, engineering, biology, chemistry, physics, materials science, computer science, medicine, pharmacology, nanotechnology and other disciplines related to invention and technology development. The judges, all volunteers, represent government agencies, research institutions, professional associations and private industry. Entries are assigned to judges based on the particular field or category of the invention.

The final round of judges consists of Inductees of the National Inventors Hall of Fame and special guest judges, which in the past have included experts from the United States Patent and Trademark Office, the National Institutes of Health, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, Abbott Laboratories, AbbVie and the Kauffman Foundation, among others.

WILL I RECEIVE PERSONAL FEEDBACK ON MY INVENTION IF I DO NOT WIN?

Due to the large number of entries we receive each year, individual feedback cannot be given to all participants; however, Finalists may receive feedback on their presentations from the final-round judges.

Confidentiality

HOW DOES THE COMPETITION PRESERVE CONFIDENTIALITY?

All judges are required to sign confidentiality and nondisclosure agreements that state they will not discuss, use or convey any information they read in the entries with any other person(s) outside of the judging process. Applications are screened for any potential conflict of interest before they are assigned to judges. In addition, if a judge is working on a similar project or area of research, he or she is required to recuse himself or herself from reviewing or judging an entry.



WHAT HAPPENS TO THE ENTRIES AFTER THE COMPETITION?

All entries are destroyed, and all submitted files are deleted at the conclusion of the competition, unless you request that your entry be returned.

Notifications

WHEN ARE THE FINALISTS NOTIFIED?

Finalists are notified by telephone approximately two months prior to the final judging round. Other entrants will be notified by email later that month. Finalists will be featured on the Collegiate Inventors Competition website.

WHEN ARE THE WINNERS ANNOUNCED?

The winners are announced at the competition after the final judging round concludes. The top prize winners will be featured on the Collegiate Inventors Competition website.

Additional Questions

Send an email to collegiate@invent.org or call 800-968-4332, option 5.

