



FAQ

Competition

WHAT IS THE COLLEGIATE INVENTORS COMPETITION?

The Collegiate Inventors Competition®, 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 in any field. The program was introduced in 1990.

WHAT TYPES OF INVENTIONS ARE SUBMITTED?

The Collegiate Inventors Competition receives inventions of all types from all fields. Science, engineering, mathematics and technology are frequently represented, but creative invention can emerge from any course of study.

Each invention must be the original idea and work product of the student/adviser team and must not have been (1) patented or disclosed by another party/inventor, or (2) issued a patent for the invention more than one year before the date of your submission to the competition.

The invention, a reduced-to-practice idea or working model/prototype, 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 ROUND JUDGING TAKE PLACE?

The final round of judging and the awards will be held at the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, on October 15-16.

Awards

IS THIS A GRANT OR SCHOLARSHIP 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?

Finalists of the Collegiate Inventors Competition will compete for first and second place in their Undergraduate or Graduate category. Finalists will receive an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, D.C. Winners will be awarded cash prizes and a patent acceleration certificate.

Requirements

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE COMPETITION?

The application requires: General student information, an abstract, a description of the invention, a letter of recommendation from the faculty adviser or a professional reference and a literature/patent search and summary. Any relevant supporting or supplemental materials (examples: charts, graphs, videos, articles, etc.) are optional. In addition, entrants must fulfill the student status requirements.

If Applicant is awarded competition winnings of \$2,000 or more, a 1099 will be issued to Applicant at the conclusion of the tax year. Applicant must be legally eligible to provide a completed and signed W-9 prior to payout. Please see the following link for details and instructions: <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-w-9>

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?

Individual Eligibility

If you are a part-time or full-time student enrolled in a U.S. college or university, you are eligible to enter. You must have been enrolled at least part-time between June 2025 and June 2026.

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, and are legally eligible to provide a completed and signed W-9 prior to payout. Please see the following link for details and instructions: <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-w-9>. All awards of \$2,000 or more will be issued the required 1099-MISC form at the conclusion of the tax year.

Team Eligibility

If you are part of a team of inventors, all your team members must be enrolled as either part-time or full-time students. Each team member must have been enrolled at least part time between June 2025 and June 2026.

Patents

Your entry will be ineligible if (1) your invention 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 your submission to the competition.

CAN A POST-DOCTORATE FELLOW OR RESEARCHER SUBMIT?

No. Only applicants who can meet the stated student eligibility requirement can submit.

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 as 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 the 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 discussing your invention/research.

Team Requirements

HOW MANY STUDENTS CAN ENTER AS A TEAM?

A maximum of four persons may comprise each team.

For inventions developed by teams made up of more than four students, we require that up to four students be chosen as representatives to formally participate in the Collegiate Inventors Competition. All team members must meet the student eligibility requirements.

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 has been (1) patented or disclosed by another party/inventor, or (2) issued a patent for the invention more than one year before the date of your submission to the competition.

MY INVENTION WAS PUBLISHED. DOES THIS COUNT AS A PUBLIC DISCLOSURE?

If your invention was published this does not necessarily mean your invention was publicly disclosed. If you need clarification, please contact collegiate@invent.org with the details and we will advise.

DO I FORFEIT MY INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS BY SUBMITTING AN ENTRY TO THE 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 "PUBLIC DISCLOSURE"?

Entering the Collegiate Inventors Competition does not require you to make an "enabling" disclosure; 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 including judges who are reviewing your entries are bound by nondisclosure agreements to ensure

confidentiality. 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. Patents or provisional patents are not required to participate in the competition.

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 interested in doing so, visit <https://www.uspto.gov/patents/basics/types-patent-applications/provisional-application-patent>.

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 the 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](https://www.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](https://www.uspto.gov). In addition, many states have at least one Patent and Trademark Resource Center (PTRC). You can find the PTRC closest to your location by visiting <https://www.uspto.gov/learning-and-resources/>.

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 Finalists 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, including experts from the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

WILL I RECEIVE PERSONAL FEEDBACK ON MY INVENTION IF I AM NOT A FINALIST?

Due to the large number of entries we receive each year, individual feedback cannot be given to all participants.

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 themselves from reviewing or judging an entry.

Notifications

WHEN ARE THE FINALISTS NOTIFIED?

Finalists are notified by telephone and email 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 during the competition after the final judging round concludes. The top prize winners will be featured on the College Inventors Competition website.

Additional Questions

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