Hydropower
COLLEGIATE COMPETITION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

2026 Hydropower Collegiate Competition

Official Rules

NOVEMBER 2025

Preface

The U.S. Department of Energy's Hydropower Collegiate Competition will be governed by 15 U.S.C. §3719 and this official rules document. This is not a procurement under the Federal Acquisitions Regulations and will not result in a grant or cooperative agreement under 2 CFR 200. The prize administrator reserves the right to modify this official rules document if necessary and will publicly post any such notifications as well as notify registered prize participants.

The following table describes changes that may be implemented in this rules document.

Date	Modification
9.11.2025	Revised eligibility language to clarify accreditation requirements and explicitly include Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs).
11.25.25	Moved January milestone requirements to coincide with the February milestone due date. Added final report deadlines and details/dates for the final event.
12.1.25	Clarified the Publicly and Liability provisions.

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Water Power Technologies Office's (WPTO's) Hydropower Collegiate Competition (HCC, also referred to as the "competition" in this rules document) invites interdisciplinary teams of postsecondary, undergraduate, and graduate students from a variety of academic programs to solve complex hydropower challenges. Through the competition, WPTO intends to offer students direct industry experience, valuable exposure to hydropower career pathways, and greater knowledge of hydropower's potential to contribute to a U.S. energy future.

1.2 Prize Overview

The competition will select up to 15 teams, based on the application scoring criteria in Section 2, for an initial cash prize pool of up to $75,000.

The teams selected through the application process that complete the required February submissions will each be eligible for up to $5,000. Teams awarded for the February required submissions are then eligible to compete for the awards for the Optional Build and Test Challenge, Final Event, and Grand Prize.

The teams who compete in the optional Build and Test Challenge will each be eligible for additional cash prizes of up to $3,000 and $2,000, upon completion of the February Build and Test Challenge submission and the prototype and presentation, respectively.

Details on cash prize distributions at each stage can be found in Table 1 below.

Specific requirements for each stage of the competition are included in the following sections.

Table 1. Cash Prize Distributions

All amounts are up to the total noted and are not guaranteed. Funds are distributed to the selected and eligible lead team's institution.

Stage	Cash Prize per Team	Total Cash Prize Pool
Application To Participate	Up to $5,000	Up to $75,000
February Required Submissions	Up to $5,000	Up to $75,000
Optional Build and Test Challenge Submission	Up to $3,000	Up to $45,000
Optional Build and Test Challenge Prototype and Presentation	Up to $2,000	Up to $30,000
Final Event	Up to $5,000	Up to $75,000
Grand Prize*	TBD*	Up to $20,000

Total	$15,000 (plus $5,000 if participating in optional challenge) + Grand Prize awards	$320,000
*Grand Prize cash prizes will only be distributed to first-, second-, and third-place winners. Specific amounts for winner placements will be announced closer to the Final Event.		

As part of HCC, competitors will have the opportunity to engage in networking events with hydropower industry experts during an industry event. This engagement is intended to encourage connections between competitors and industry professionals to inform students about career prospects in the hydropower industry. Logistics will be shared closer to the event and will include information about event registration, lodging, local resources, team booths, shipping and storage of materials, event feedback protocol, and more.

1.3 Background

Hydropower provides reliable, affordable, and secure electricity and storage, as well as jobs in communities across the country. Yet, about a quarter of the current U.S. hydropower workforce[1] is eligible or approaching eligibility for retirement.

Hydropower plays an important role in our power system and has untapped potential and significant opportunity for growth. This growth can be realized with further innovation and a new generation of passionate, motivated innovators and entrepreneurs.

WPTO with NREL and the Hydropower Foundation, established HCC in 2022 to pave the way for next-generation innovators and entrepreneurs to start their careers in renewable energy.

1.3.1 Opportunities With Non-Powered Dams, In-Conduit Systems, and Pumped Storage Hydropower Systems

The 2026 HCC competition has been expanded to include the new theme of developing in-conduit hydropower systems, in addition to the previous themes of developing hydropower for non-powered dams (NPDs) and pumped storage hydropower (PSH). The United States has more than 80,000 NPDs. At these locations, adding electricity generation systems to the existing dam structure can be a cost-efficient way to generate electricity. As for PSH, the U.S. PSH fleet continues to provide most of the utility-scale power storage capacity and energy storage capacity[2]. Finally, in-conduit hydropower offers significant opportunities in the municipal, agricultural, and industrial space from public water supply systems (municipal and industrial), irrigation canal systems (agricultural), thermoelectric cooling systems (industrial), and wastewater systems

[1] Daw et al. 2022. *U.S. Hydropower Workforce: Challenges and Opportunities*. Golden, CO: National Renewable Energy Laboratory. NREL/TP-7A40-83817. https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy23osti/83817.pdf.
[2] Uría-Martínez, Rocío, and Megan M. Johnson. 2023. *U.S. Hydropower Market Report 2023 Edition*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Energy. DOE/EE-2771.

(municipal and industrial). There is 1.41 GW of power potential estimated nationwide from in-conduit hydropower.[3]

1.4 The 2026 Competition

Student teams will first be able to compete for the opportunity to further participate in the prize. Up to 15 teams will win the opportunity to move on.

The 2026 student teams selected to continue to the next stage will have 8 to 10 months to address a series of hydropower challenges relevant to the industry and then present their concepts at an industry event in the Spring of 2026. Teams will also submit written documents demonstrating their progress throughout the competition for the five required challenges, attend monthly all-team calls, collaborate with an assigned industry mentor, and have access to educational webinars and networking opportunities with hydropower experts.

The primary theme of the competition is innovations in hydropower, specifically (1) the conversion of NPDs to hydroelectric dams; (2) the addition of PSH to existing hydropower reservoirs; and/or (3) in-conduit hydropower. Competing teams are allowed to either advance existing technology through this competition or develop new technologies.

1.4.1 Challenges

The main competition will consist of five required challenges: a Siting Challenge, a Design Challenge, a Community Connections Challenge, a Design and Siting Poster, and a Quick Pitch. Teams selected through the application process to compete in the main competition also have the option to compete in the optional Build and Test Challenge. Each challenge includes distinct submissions that selected teams are expected to complete to be awarded cash prizes, as detailed in Section 3.

The following describes the five required challenges and one optional challenge:

1. **Siting Challenge:** Teams will perform a hydropower site selection process for either (1) a potential NPD with a generation capacity between 1 MW and 10 MW, (2) a potential PSH system with a generation capacity of up to 1 GW and storage duration between 8 and 24 hours by adding a new reservoir to an existing manmade reservoir, or (3) a potential in-conduit hydropower system[4] with a generation capacity between 100 KW and 10 MW that follows Code of Federal

[3] Kao, Shih-Chieh, et al. "An Assessment of Hydropower Potential at National Conduits." Oct. 2022. https://doi.org/10.2172/1890335.

[4] For the purpose of this competition "conduit" has the meaning established at 18 CFR § 4.30(b)(2) –

> [A]ny tunnel, canal, pipeline, aqueduct, flume, ditch, or similar manmade water conveyance that is operated for the distribution of water for agricultural, municipal, or industrial consumption and not primarily for the generation of electricity. The term not primarily for the generation of electricity includes but is not limited to a conduit:
>
> (i) Which was built for the distribution of water for agricultural, municipal, or industrial consumption and is operated for such a purpose; and
>
> (ii) To which a hydroelectric facility has been or is proposed to be added

Regulations (CFR) guidance in that it is "within a tunnel, canal, pipeline, aqueduct, flume, ditch, or similar manmade water conveyance that is operated for the distribution of water for agricultural, municipal, or industrial consumption, and not primarily for the generation of electricity."[5] Teams will then develop a feasibility assessment for the selected site (this subset of between 100 KW and 10 MW of potential generation capacity is available through the use of open-source tools that will be made available by the prize administrators upon selection of the teams). **Submissions in this challenge will count for 35% of the total final score.**

2. **Design Challenge:** Teams will choose from two tracks. In Track 1, named Facility Conceptual Design, teams will create a conceptual design of the selected hydropower site from the Siting Challenge. In Track 2, named Hydropower Component Deep Dive, teams will complete a final design package for an individual component or system related to the development of the selected hydropower site from the Siting Challenge. **Submissions in this challenge will count for 40% of the total final score.**
3. **Community Connections Challenge:** Teams will engage with the hydropower industry and their communities to achieve three goals: make connections with professionals to discuss a challenge in the industry that the team is passionate about, create unique solutions to address those challenges, and take action toward one of those solutions. **Submissions in this challenge will count for 25% of the total final score.**
4. **Design and Siting Poster:** Teams will bring a poster to the Final Event to summarize their design and siting activities. **Submissions in this challenge are worth 100 points and do not count toward the final score.**
5. **Quick Pitch**: Teams will prepare a 90-second project pitch to communicate the biggest takeaways from their year-long efforts. Submissions in this challenge are to be assessed through a voting mechanism that the attendees at the final industry event will be invited to participate in during the Final Event. **Voting responses do not count toward the final score.**
6. **Optional Build and Test Challenge:** Teams will build a scaled prototype of their concept or powerhouse and perform a series of tests. **Submissions in this challenge are worth 100 points and do not count toward the final score.**

Results from each challenge will be incorporated into final reports and presentations, described in further detail in the following sections. Teams will present their results at the Final Event. Through participation in the challenges, teams can win up to $20,000 in prizes ($15,000 for the required challenges and an additional $5,000 for the optional Build and Test Challenge).

[5] 1 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Title 18, Chapter 1.B.4.D § 4.30 (b) (2); Kao et al. 2022.

Additionally, teams will be eligible to compete for cash prizes from an additional final Grand Prize cash pool of up to $20,000.

1.4.2 Assigned Mentors

Eligible teams selected to participate will be assigned a mentor for support throughout the competition. These hand-selected industry mentors will play a critical role throughout the competition, providing teams with real-world experience, technical insight, and other important support. Competition organizers will assign mentors to teams and provide a recommended and non-binding mentorship agreement form for each team and mentor to sign after mentor assignments are made.

1.5 Key Dates

Dates are subject to change. Teams should check HeroX for the most up-to-date information.

Table 2: Key Dates

Activity	Deadline
HCC Application Opens	August 25, 2025
HCC Application Closes	September 19, 2025
Application Stage Winners Announced	September 24, 2025
Tentative In-Person Workshops	Dates and Location TBD
February Submission for Siting Challenge, Design Challenge and Community Connections (Required)	February 23, 2026
February Submission for optional Build and Test Challenge (Optional)	February 23, 2026
Submission for Final Report (Required)	2 weeks prior to Final Event, exact date TBA
Submission for Metrics Report (Required)	1 week prior to Final Event, exact date TBA
Presentation (Required)	At Final Event
Submission for Design and Siting Poster and Quick Pitch (Required)	At Final Event
Final Event	April 27-29, 2025

1.6 Prize Goals

The competition's goals are to:

- Bring together students from multiple disciplines and backgrounds
- Encourage teams to explore opportunities for hydropower using real-world concept development experiences
- Inspire future innovators to tackle the challenges and opportunities surrounding hydropower development.

Although hydropower-specific advanced degrees are rare, having related experience within a wide range of energy opportunities can provide a foundation for future opportunities in the sector; careers include researchers, scientists, engineers, educators, project managers, entrepreneurs, and salesforce, among others.

Teams participating in this competition will address the challenge of how hydropower can play a critical role in meeting growing energy demands. The specifics of the challenges will continue to evolve annually to address evolving industry needs and foster innovation, collaboration, and creativity.

1.7 Eligibility and Competitors

Up to 15 teams will be selected to participate in the competition. The competition seeks to bring together interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate student teams and is only open to academic institutions, subject to the following requirements:

- Interested teams must submit an initial application to act as a competitor in the competition and be selected to compete.
- Teams may consist of a combination of undergraduate and graduate students but must be at least 50% students who are pursuing their bachelor's and/or associate's degree at the beginning of the competition. Only 50% of the team may be pursuing an advanced degree (master's, Ph.D., etc.).
- To be eligible for cash prizes, academic institutions must have federally-recognized accreditation.
- Non-U.S. institutions are eligible to participate on their own, without a U.S. university partner; however, these teams will not be eligible to receive cash prizes and must provide their own funding to support travel and competition expenses.
- Multiple institutions are eligible to form a singular team; however, multi-institutional teams must designate the lead institution and partner institution(s). For teams comprising U.S. and non-U.S. institutions, the lead institution must be an eligible U.S. institution to receive cash prizes.
- Each institution may sponsor only one team. Multiple teams applying from an institution will be asked to partner internally. Institutions appearing on multiple teams, acting as either the lead or partner institution, will be required to select only one team to participate in the competition.
- DOE employees, employees of sponsoring organizations, members of their immediate families (e.g., spouses, children, siblings, or parents), and persons living in the same household as such persons, whether or not related, are not eligible to participate in the prize.
- For the family members of lab employees participating in the competition, the lab employee's scope of their employment cannot overlap with any aspect of the prize competition.

- Individuals who worked at DOE (federal employees or support service contractors) within six months prior to the submission deadline of any contest are not eligible to participate in any prize contests in this program.
- Federal entities and federal employees are not eligible to participate in any portion of the prize.
- Students who are employed at labs can participate, including interns; however, they cannot use their federal lab facilities as part of the competition because these facilities are not open to all competitors.
- Entities and individuals publicly banned from doing business with the U.S. government—such as entities and individuals debarred, suspended, or otherwise excluded from or ineligible for participating in federal programs—are not eligible to compete.
- Individuals participating in a foreign government talent recruitment program[6] sponsored by a country of risk[7] and teams that include such individuals are not eligible to compete.
- Entities owned by, controlled by, or subject to the jurisdiction or direction of a government of a country of risk are not eligible to compete.
- To be eligible, an individual authorized to represent the competitor must agree to and sign the following statement upon registration with HeroX:

> I am providing this submission package as part of my participation in this prize. I understand that the information contained in this submission will be relied on by the federal government to determine whether to issue a prize to the named competitor. I certify under penalty of perjury that the named competitor meets the eligibility requirements for this prize competition and complies with all other rules contained in the official rules document. I further represent that the information contained in the submission is true and contains no misrepresentations. I understand false statements or misrepresentations to the federal government may result in civil

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[6] Foreign-Government-Sponsored Talent Recruitment Program is defined as an effort directly or indirectly organized, managed, or funded by a foreign government, or a foreign government instrumentality or entity, to recruit science and technology professionals or students (regardless of citizenship or national origin, or whether having a full-time or part-time position). Some foreign-government-sponsored talent recruitment programs operate with the intent to import or otherwise acquire from abroad, sometimes through illicit means, proprietary technology or software, unpublished data and methods, and intellectual property to further the military modernization goals and/or economic goals of a foreign government. Many, but not all, programs aim to incentivize the targeted individual to relocate physically to the foreign state for the above purpose. Some programs allow for or encourage continued employment at U.S. research facilities or receipt of federal research funds while concurrently working at and/or receiving compensation from a foreign institution, and some direct participants not to disclose their participation to U.S. entities. Compensation could take many forms, including cash, research funding, complimentary foreign travel, honorific titles, career advancement opportunities, promised future compensation, or other types of remuneration or consideration, including in-kind compensation.

[7] DOE has designated the following countries as foreign countries of risk: Iran, North Korea, Russia, and China. This list is subject to change.

and/or criminal penalties under 18 U.S.C. § 1001 and § 287, and 31 U.S.C. §§ 3729-3733 and 3801-3812.

In keeping with the goal of growing a community of innovators, competitors are encouraged to form multidisciplinary teams while developing their concept. The HeroX platform provides a space where parties interested in collaboration can post information about themselves and learn about others who are also interested in competing in this contest.

All cash prizes will be paid directly to the lead academic institutions.

Based on prior experience with collegiate competitions, HCC prize administrators recommend a team size of six to eight participants, but there is no official limit to the number of participants per team. However, for each team, the number of students participating in the scored presentations may be limited based on timing and/or space restrictions. Interdisciplinary teams that include students with backgrounds in the following areas are highly encouraged: engineering, environmental science, business, marketing, communications, policy, social sciences, and other related fields.

Throughout the competition, teams will have the opportunity to gain insights into hydropower and clean energy careers. They will have access to workforce development resources and career opportunities in these sectors. All teams will be invited to attend regular educational webinars and industry presentations that will enhance their learning experience. The HCC has helped students in the past by connecting them with job opportunities and instilling an interest in and understanding of renewable energy careers.

Specific application requirements and evaluation criteria are included in this document. The prize administrator has the right to refuse any submission for incompleteness or unresponsiveness to the prize goals.

2 Application Requirements

To participate, interested teams must submit an application in PDF format on the HeroX platform by **11:59 p.m. MT on September 19, 2025**. Teams will not be eligible to compete if a complete application is not submitted by the deadline. Submissions will be reviewed and scored by national laboratory researchers and DOE staff using the evaluation criteria listed in the following subsections and in the scoring rubric shown in Table 3.

Ultimately, this collegiate competition is designed to foster hydropower educational programs.

What To Submit

Each application for HCC must be a maximum of three pages and include a response for each of the following sections.

Team Contact Information

The team contact information must include:

- Lead institution
- Partner institutions (if applicable)
- Team faculty advisor(s) name and department (faculty member or primary representative)
- Faculty advisor(s) email
- Faculty advisor(s) phone number
- Collegiate team student leader(s) name and declared/intended major (if known)
- Collegiate team student leader(s) email.

Educational Objectives and Integration (35%)

Teams should provide a brief introduction of their team, why they are interested in participating in this competition, and their commitment to engage in HCC educational opportunities. This includes but may not be limited to subject matter expert speakers, tools, overviews, and other educational webinars.

The application provides an achievable and detailed description of:

- How the competition would be integrated into the team's academic experiences (e.g., courses integrating competition elements or other programs that otherwise support competition-related work, scholarships, independent-study projects, or research assistantships designed to support successful student participation in the competition) or, if this is not possible due to a lack of available programs of this type, a plan to cultivate knowledge through other means (e.g., remote learning, industry partnerships, informal independent-study projects, industry mentorships, and clubs).

Organization and Project Planning (30%)

The application provides an achievable and detailed description of:

- How the team will execute elements of the competition, including how unique obstacles, such as academic calendars or virtual collaboration challenges, will be overcome (if applicable, noting previous participation in similar competitions)
- How the team will be supported by faculty and staff—and external partners, where applicable—to ensure that students can be successful in achieving the competition objectives (e.g., list faculty, staff, and other mentors and how they will advise students throughout the competition)
- Which departments across the institution will participate and actively support the team to meet competition requirements, including a description of what this support will look like across each of these departments.

Team Composition (25%)

The application provides a detailed description of:

- Efforts to ensure that the team will comprise students and faculty with a wide range of backgrounds, skill sets, and educational training relevant to hydropower.
- A clear plan to incorporate the varied skillsets and educational backgrounds of the teams into the activities during the competition.

Institutional Support and Fundraising (10%)

Cash prizes will be awarded per team by the prize administrator as outlined in Table 1. Teams should clearly describe how the funds will help them achieve their project goals. Note that these funds may not cover the full expenses of team projects or participation for all students; therefore, applicants should describe how they will seek additional resources (e.g., software, educational materials, and project planning tools) that they anticipate needing as part of the competition.

Table 3. Application Component Scoring Rubric

Application Component and Scoring Criteria	Maximum Possible Points (100)
Team Introduction, Educational Objectives, and Integration	35
• The application provides a complete team overview followed by an achievable and detailed description of how the competition would be integrated into the team's academic experiences and a plan to cultivate student knowledge.	
Organization and Project Planning	30
The application provides an achievable and detailed description of: • How the team will execute elements of the competition, including how unique obstacles, such as academic calendars or virtual collaboration challenges, will be overcome. • How the team will be supported by faculty and staff—and external partners, where applicable—to ensure that students can be successful in achieving the competition objectives (e.g., list faculty, staff, and other mentors and how they will advise students throughout the competition). • Which departments across the institution will participate and actively support the team to meet competition requirements, including a description of what this support will look like across each of these departments.	
Team Composition	25
The application includes: • Efforts to ensure that the team will comprise students and faculty with a wide range of backgrounds, skill sets, and educational training relevant to hydropower. • A clear plan to incorporate the varied skillsets and educational backgrounds of the teams into the activities during the competition.	
Institutional Support and Fundraising	10
• The application includes a detailed and achievable description of how the team will seek additional resources (e.g., software, educational materials, and project planning tools) they anticipate needing as part of the competition.	

3 Competition Submission Requirements

The HCC in its entirety consists of all the activities leading up to and throughout the Final Event. The Final Event is where the teams present their results from the challenges; the competing teams must have also submitted their written reports by the dates specified in this document.

3.1 Submissions and Award Overview

During HCC, participating teams will create and submit or present the items listed in Table 4:

Table 4. Submission Deadlines

Submission	Submission Deadline	Funds Awarded
Application to participate. All selected teams will be invited to compete in the rest of the competition.	September, 19,2025 11:59 p.m. MT	Selected teams will be eligible to receive up to $5,000, distributed to the selected and eligible lead team's institution
Siting Challenge February Submission: Site Selection and Justification document Design Challenge February Submission: Design selection and justification document Optional Build and Test February Submission: Description of testing objectives Community Connections February Submission: Interview summary and outreach strategy, team roster, and team overview.*	February 23, 2026, 11:59 p.m. MT	Each lead team's institution can receive a cash prize of up to $5,000
Team photos and video (optional)	March 23, 2026, 11:59 p.m. MT	
Final siting and technical design report	Sunday April 12, 2025 11:59 pm Mountain Time	
Metrics report	Sunday April 19, 2025 11:59 pm Mountain Time	
During the Final Event	April 27-29, 2025	Each team that meets the submission requirements will be eligible to receive an additional cash prize of up to $5,000 and to compete for a portion of the Grand Prize cash pool (amount subject to change)

Submission	Submission Deadline	Funds Awarded
Quick Pitch: 90-second quick pitch	Prepare for Final Event	
Design and Siting Poster: Poster summarizing Siting Plan, Technical Design, and optional Build and Test, if applicable	Bring to Final Event	
Presentation of (1) Community Connections Challenge (10 minutes), (2) Technical Design (20 minutes), and (3) Optional Build and Test Challenge, if applicable (10 minutes)	Prepare for Final Event	
Optional Build and Test prototype, if applicable	Bring to Final Event	

All of the submissions will be scored as described in Table 5. Details on what to include in these submissions and the scoring criteria used to evaluate them are given in the following sections for each of the challenge

Table 5. Scoring Summary for the Competition Submissions (800 Points Total, With 600 Points Counted Toward Grand Prize)*

Description	Maximum Possible Points
Siting Challenge (35%)	**210**
February Submission: Site Selection and Justification document	20
Siting Challenge portion of written report*	90
Siting Challenge portion of presentation**	100
Design Challenge (40%)	**240**
February Submission: Design Challenge	20
Design Challenge portion of written report*	120
Design Challenge portion of presentation**	100
Community Connections Challenge (25%)	**150**
February Submission: Community Connections Challenge: Team roster, and team overview.*	10
February Submission: Community Connections Challenge: Interview summary and outreach strategy	10
Final report	50
Final presentation	80
	600
Build and Test Challenge (Optional – does not count toward total score)	**100*** **
February Submission: Optional Build and Test Challenge	10
Prototype	40
Presentation	50
Siting and Design Poster (does not count toward total score)	100
Project Quick Pitch (does not count toward total score)	****

*Formatting requirements are in place to ensure an equal amount of space for all teams to tell their stories to the reviewers. Reports not formatted to the requirements and/or that are deemed to be utilizing more than the allotted pages will be penalized at the discretion of the reviewers proportional to the infraction. Furthermore, extra words will be ignored.

**The final presentation must be submitted online to the prize administrators in advance of a team's presentation during the Final Event, and teams should bring a USB with the presentation as a backup.

***Teams can earn up to 100 points for the optional Build and Test Challenge that are not included in the main competition scores but will make teams eligible for an optional challenge trophy and recognition at the final awards ceremony.

Description	Maximum Possible Points
****Attendees of the Final Event will vote for a winner of this contest, and the winner will be the team with the most votes.	

3.2 Siting Challenge (35%)

Teams will need to perform a hydropower site selection process for a potential NPD with a generation capacity between 1 and 10 MW, a potential PSH system with a generation capacity of up to 1 GW and storage duration between 8 and 24 hours by adding a new reservoir to an existing manmade reservoir, or a potential in-conduit hydropower system with a generation capacity between 100 KW and 10 MW. Teams will be expected to develop a feasibility assessment of the selected site for power generation and/or storage. Teams will have the resources to do this using open-source tools[8] that will be made available by the prize administrators. Teams are encouraged to identify at least one new co-development opportunity at their selected site. Co-development opportunities include but are not limited to:

- Hybrid designs (wind, solar, storage, hydrogen, etc., in addition to hydropower)
- Environmental improvements
- Recreation
- Energy resilience
- Species rehabilitation
- Food security
- Energy security
- Tourism
- Irrigation/agricultural benefits
- Workforce development/education.

Teams will need to explain how and why this location was chosen, what risks exist in installing these systems, and how they could theoretically be mitigated. Should a team determine that risks cannot be mitigated for their originally selected site, the team may opt to choose a different site.

Many characteristics should be researched and considered in the selection of an appropriate site, including but not limited to:

- High-level costs
- Resource and generation availability
- Dam safety and geotechnical data

[8] Such as NPDamCat, NPD Hydro, the NPD Resource Assessment, SMH Exploring, the Hydropower Baseline Cost Model, and more found at https://hydrosource.ornl.gov/tool/npd_tools; LCA of Closed-Loop PSH: https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.est.2c09189; and Closed-Loop PSH Resource Assessment for the United States: https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy22osti/81277.pdf.

- Access to transmission/grid integration
- Transportation access
- Environmental factors, e.g., fish passage, sensitive species
- Cultural effects, e.g., historical landmarks
- Social metrics
- Operations and maintenance requirements
- Agricultural effects
- Triple-bottom-line assessment of options (economic, environmental, and social outcomes)
- Opportunities to reduce the cost of adding power to existing civil infrastructure.

Teams will be scored based on the thoroughness of the assessment rather than the feasibility of the site. To score high in this challenge, the team should adequately describe the project liabilities (for instance, they include endangered species or historically protected structures), describe all reasonable assumptions made, and include an error-free quantitative analysis,

3.2.1 Siting Challenge Submissions

Competitors will submit the following for the Siting Challenge:

- Siting Challenge February Submission: Site Selection and Justification document that includes the team's down-select process in determining a site along with risk identification and an approach to minimizing risk. This document should also include information on how outcomes helped inform the design track selected in the Design Challenge.
- Siting portion of the Siting and Design Report that describes the analysis performed in detail.
- Siting Challenge Presentation and Q&A Session: Teams will present their Siting Challenge and Design Challenge results to a review panel. This presentation will be followed by questions and answers with the same panel of reviewers.

Table 6. Possible Points per Submission Element of the Siting Challenge

Points allocated below contribute to the total competition award.

Submission Element	Possible Points
February Submission: Site Selection and Justification document	20
Siting section of Siting and Design Report	90
Siting portion of the Siting and Design Presentation and Q&A Session	100
Maximum Possible Points for the Siting Challenge	210

3.2.2 February Submission: Site Selection and Justification Document

Each team must submit an up to three-page Siting Selection and Justification document on the HeroX website that includes the team's down-select process to a maximum of three possible sites where the team believes a hydropower solution could be developed. The document should also include identification of risks and a proposed approach to risk minimization. **This submission is due February 23, 2026, 11:59 p.m. MT.**

3.3 Design Challenge (40%)

For the Design Challenge, teams will have the option of choosing one of the following two tracks:

- **Track 1: Facility Conceptual Design:** Teams will create a conceptual design of the selected hydropower site from the Siting Challenge. This design will include equipment selection, conceptual drawings, and a more detailed feasibility assessment (e.g., beyond socioeconomic and technical feasibility, this should also include operational models to determine operational feasibility).
- **Track 2: Hydropower Component Deep Dive:** Teams will design a component or system related to the development of the selected site. This effort will include engineering designs, drawings, cost estimates, and relevant models.

3.3.1 Track 1: Facility Conceptual Design

Teams will create a conceptual design of the hydropower assets that will either enable conversion of the NPD to produce power or incorporate in-conduit hydropower or a PSH system, encompassing all required components from the water supply to the powerline (sometimes referred to as "water to wire").

The components of an NPD powerhouse are described in Oak Ridge National Laboratory's report *Non-Powered Dam Retrofit Exemplary Design for Hydropower Applications*.[9] These components typically include but are not limited to the components that can be found in a hydropower plant as shown in Figure 1.

[9] DeNeale, Scott, et al. 2022. *Non-Powered Dam Retrofit Exemplary Design for Hydropower Applications.* Oak Ridge, TN: Oak Ridge National Laboratory. ORNL/TM-2021/2232. https://info.ornl.gov/sites/publications/Files/Pub167488.pdf.

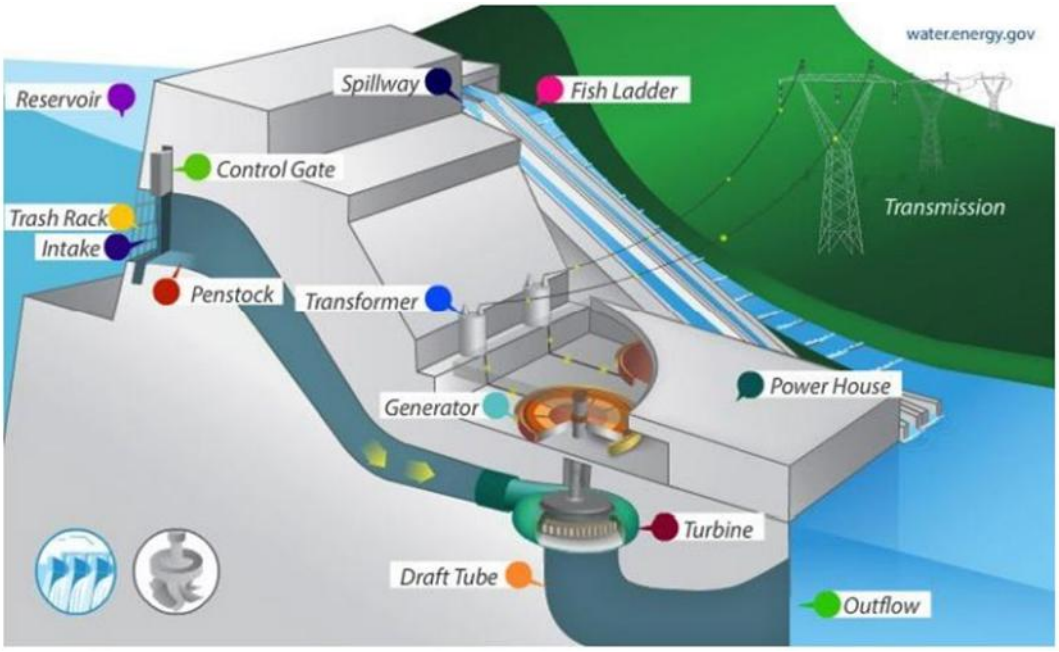
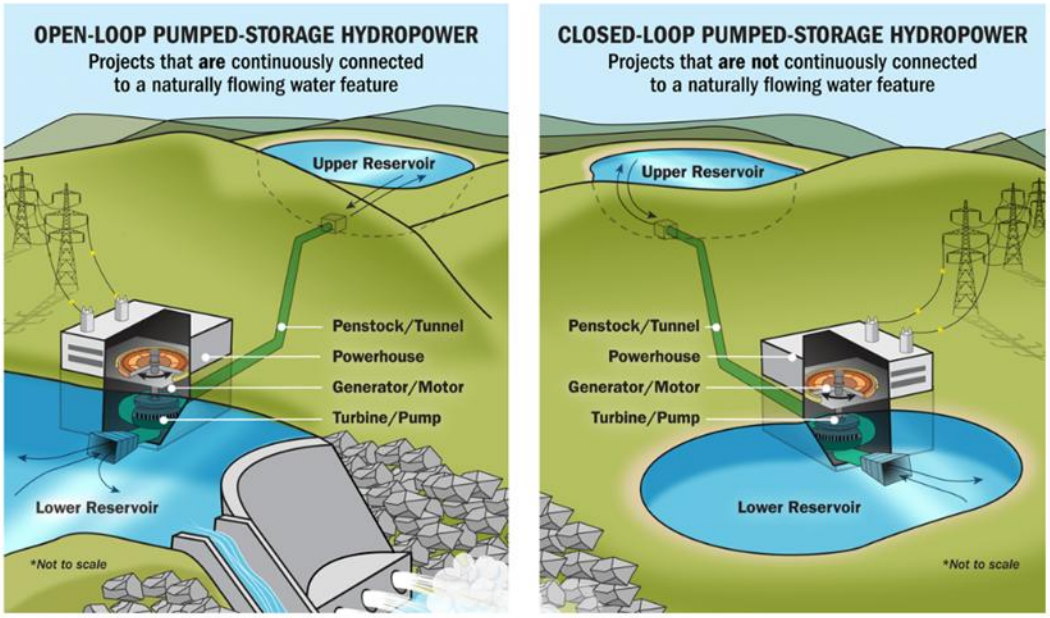


Figure 1. Major components of a hydropower plant

The features of both open-loop and closed-loop PSH are shown in Figure 2. This competition will accept either open-loop or closed-loop designs as long as one reservoir is an existing manmade reservoir.



Open-loop pumped storage hydropower systems connect a reservoir to a naturally flowing water feature via a tunnel, using a turbine/pump and generator/motor to move water and create electricity.

Closed-loop pumped storage hydropower systems connect two reservoirs without flowing water features via a tunnel, using a turbine/pump and generator/motor to move water and create electricity.

Figure 2. Components of open-loop and closed-loop PSH systems

Possible locations and example features of an in-conduit hydropower system are shown in Figures 3 and 4.

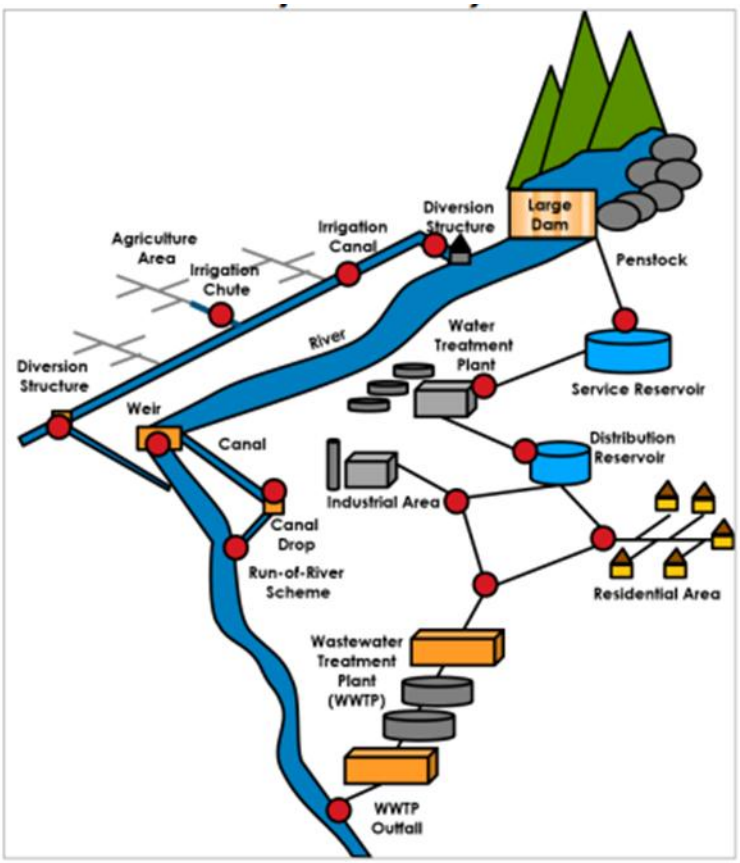


Figure 3. Possible sites for implementation of in-conduit hydropower, shown as red dots

Image from Badruzzaman et al. (2020)[10]

[10] Badruzzaman, M., C. Cherchi, M. Ayu Sari, J. G. Jacangelo, M. Swindle, G. Goodenough, N. Ajami, and A. Sundararaman. 2020. "California's In-Conduit Hydropower Implementation Guidebook: A Compendium of Resources, Best Practices, and Tools. Sacramento, CA: California Energy Commission. https://www.energy.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/CEC-500-2020-030.pdf.

Figure 4. In-conduit hydropower turbine installed in a California water distribution system conduit

Image from WPTO Staff (2023)[11]

Teams will be evaluated on the thoroughness and feasibility of their design. Reviewers will consider the appropriateness of the equipment selected, critical design considerations, the accuracy of the modeling work, and specific evaluation criteria described in the rubric to score team designs.

3.3.2 Track 2: Component Deep Dive

Teams will choose a component of a hydropower system, which could be from the co-development concept, and/or an electromechanical or civil engineering innovation that could reduce the cost of adding that component to an existing structure and develop a detailed design of that component. Teams must complete a technical design report that explains the development process.

Specific component deep-dive areas could include but are not limited to:

- Fish passage or recreation passage: areas of innovation could include modifications related to disruption minimization
- Turbine: areas of innovation could include aspects like environmental improvements, fish passage, dissolved oxygen improvements, and controls

[11] Water Power Technologies Office Staff. 2023. "New Assessment Finds Opportunities for Conduit Hydropower Development Across the United States." *U.S. Department of Energy*. March 1, 2023. https://www.energy.gov/eere/water/articles/new-assessment-finds-opportunities-conduit-hydropower-development-across-united.

- Water intake: areas of innovation could include aspects like reducing greenhouse gas emissions, conveyance efficiencies (and associated controls), and selective withdrawals
- Structures: areas of innovation could include aspects like modular dams, gates, spillway designs, trash racks, and selective withdrawal for environmental reasons related to greenhouse gases.[12]

The selected track (facility conceptual design or component deep dive) must also align with build and test activities if the team elects to participate in the optional Build and Test Challenge.

Teams will be evaluated on the thoroughness and feasibility of their design. Reviewers will consider the appropriateness of the equipment selected, critical design considerations, the accuracy of the modeling work, maximization of the opportunities for innovation, and specific evaluation criteria described in the rubric.

3.3.3 Design Challenge Submissions

Competitors will submit the following for the Design Challenge:

- **February Design Submission:** Design Selection and Justification document that includes the team's selected Design Challenge and details around their planned approach, associated risks, and risk management strategy
- **Design portion of the Siting and Design Report** that meets the requirements outlined in the evaluation criteria
- **Design Presentation and Q&A Session:** Teams will participate in a Siting and Design presentation. This presentation will be followed by questions from a panel of reviewers.

Table 7. Possible Points per Submission Element of the Design Challenge

Submission Element	Possible Points
February Submission: Design Selection and Justification document	20
Design section of Siting and Design Report	120
Design portion of the Siting and Design Presentation and Q&A Session	100
Maximum Possible Points	240

3.3.4 February Submission: Design Selection and Justification Document

The February submission for the Design Challenge should be a maximum of three pages, should describe the preliminary design selection and justification document for the team's choice of either Track 1 or Track 2, and should be submitted on the HeroX

[12] Areas of innovation could also be identified through the use of the Low Impact Hydropower Institute's certification criteria shared here: https://lowimpacthydro.org/criteria-standards/.

website. **This submission is due February 23, 2026, 11:59 p.m. MT.**

The specifics of the preliminary design (Track 1) or component deep dive (Track 2) are not required in this February deliverable; however, reviewers will evaluate the process by which teams will be making design decisions, the identification of risks and the teams' approach to risk minimization, and the remaining components and potential issues to be explored and analyzed. Submissions will be evaluated in accordance with the Design Challenge rubrics.

3.4 Siting and Design Final Report

Each team must complete a final written report describing the process and results of the Siting and Design Challenges. **The final report is due 2 weeks prior to the Final Event (dates shown on Table 4).**

The following format requirements apply to the written report:

- The length must not exceed 20 pages (not including the cover sheet, abstract, and references). Pages should be 8.5 inches by 11 inches, paginated, and with a minimum of 1-inch margins, text should have an 11-point font and be single spaced, and a cover sheet and a brief abstract (under one page) should be included.
- The cover sheet must include a list of all team members who are involved in the project, including mentors, faculty, and others (e.g., sponsors and advisors), and clearly indicate each team member's role in the competition.
- An abstract must include a summary of the Siting and Design Challenge activities and mention what the team accomplished within each challenge.
- Captions for figures and tables must be numbered for easy navigation.
- The final document must be packaged into a single PDF file (see Appendix D).

Each section, as outlined below, should—where relevant—reference other sections. The written report is the primary means for a team to provide detailed information about their project and is expected to include the following sections:

Final Report: Siting Section

For the siting section of the report, teams must include the following:

- The team's approach and methodology to site selection
- Risk identification and their approach to risk minimization
- Details on how their Siting Challenge activities led to the approach they selected for the Design Challenge
- Details on the selected site, including co-development opportunities (if applicable)
- Details on takeaways from the feasibility analysis (e.g., challenges faced, new discoveries not anticipated in the pre-feasibility stage and expected challenges that could be encountered during actual development and suggested solutions).

Final Report: Design Section

For Track 1, the written report must explain the proposed dam, the PSH system, or the in-conduit system (including site modifications, if applicable) through engineering

analysis and design drawings. Teams should provide adequate detail for a thorough review of the operating principles of the proposed system. At a minimum, the report must include:

- Design objective description
- Feasibility assessment
- System optimization
- General compliance with siting limitations and requirements
- Incorporation of expected user need
- Merits/weaknesses of different concepts
- Assumptions and calculations
- Engineering diagrams, mock-ups, or sketches
- Incorporation of environmental and sustainability factors
- Demonstration of student learning
- Risk identification and approach to risk minimization (e.g., cyber risk, geological risk, and/or permitting risk).

For Track 2, the final written report must present an engineering design review package for the selected component to include, at a minimum:

- A description of the design objective and how the design components support this objective
- An analysis of the expected mechanical loading and/or power requirement (where applicable), and associated safety factors within the design (where applicable)
- Details on how the proposed technology is designed to withstand standard operating conditions
- Engineering diagrams of all associated components
- Risk identification and approach to risk minimization.

Each team will submit their report 2 weeks prior to the end of the competition on the HeroX website. Scoring criteria for the written report are provided in the written report sections of the siting and design challenge rubrics (Tables 8 and 9). At the conclusion of the competition, team reports will be posted to the competition website.

Presentation and Q&A Session

Teams will also develop a final PowerPoint presentation to share the information contained in their report and submit it on the HeroX website. See Appendix D for instructions on formatting and submission.

Each team will have 20 minutes in total to share their Siting Challenge and Design Challenge activities and results. This will be followed by 10 minutes of questions from the judges. The full scoring criteria can be found in the presentation sections of Table 8 and Table 9.

Final presentation slides from each of the teams will be published on the competition website.

Scoring Statements for the Siting and Design Challenges

The Siting Challenge submission elements will be scored using the following criteria:

Table 8. Scoring Statements for Siting Challenge Submissions (200 Points Total)*

Description	Maximum Possible Points
February 2026 Submission: Site Selection and Justification document	**20**
Clear description of initial down-select to three sites and justification, how the down-select to a final site will occur, including criteria that will be used for site selection, and how it will help inform the Design Track selected	10
Development of a risk matrix to include description of risks, assessment of probability of occurrence and consequence, and approach for risk minimization	5
Clear documentation	5
Siting Challenge Portion of Written Report**	**90**
Documentation of down-select to three sites and ultimately one with discussion of the iterative process between siting and design (where applicable)	25
Site specification and identification of potential siting challenges and co-development opportunities (where applicable)	25
Articulation of impact mitigation approaches	20
Summary of takeaways that may be useful for those going into the hydropower industry as it relates to project siting and project development	20
Siting Challenge Portion of Presentation***	**100**
Compelling narrative of inspiration and purpose behind the siting decision and related co-development opportunities, if applicable (including information around any discussion with industry to validate assumptions)	25
Demonstrates consideration of deployment issues, challenges, and possible opportunities for mitigation (including information around any discussion with industry to validate assumptions)	25
Illustrates integration with the technical design	20
Practiced and polished presentation style	15
High-quality graphics, media, and props to support presentation	15
Total for Siting Challenge	**210**

*10 points will be deducted for each day the written report is late, up to 3 days, at which point the team is no longer eligible to receive points for this challenge.

**Formatting requirements are in place to ensure an equal amount of space for all teams to tell their stories to the reviewers. Reports not formatted to the requirements and/or that are deemed to be utilizing more than the allotted words will be penalized at the discretion of the reviewers proportional to the infraction. Furthermore, extra words will be ignored.

***The final presentation must be submitted online to the prize administrators in advance of a team's presentation during the Final Event, and teams should bring a USB with the presentation as a backup.

The Design Challenge submission elements will be scored using the following criteria:

Table 9. Scoring Statements for Design Challenge (250 Points Total)*

Description	Maximum Possible Points
February 2026 Submission	**20**
Documentation of Design Track selection process and status of design progress to date	5
Justification of decision as it relates to the Siting Challenge activities	10
Development of a risk matrix that includes description of risks, assessment of probability of occurrence and consequence, and approach for risk minimization	5
Design Challenge Portion of Written Report**	**120**
Clear description of design objective and feasibility assessment	20
Demonstration of system optimization	20
Compliance with siting limitations and requirements and expected user need	15
Comprehensive description of the concept and related analysis	15
Complete and comprehensive calculations and engineering diagrams, mock-ups, or sketches	20
Incorporation of environmental and sustainability factors	15
Demonstration of student learning through discussion of takeaways and lessons learned	15
Design Challenge Portion of Presentation***	**100**
Compelling narrative of inspiration and purpose behind the design decisions and related co-development and innovative opportunities (including information around any discussion with industry to validate assumptions)	25
Demonstrates consideration of deployment issues, challenges, and possible opportunities for mitigation (including information around any discussion with industry to validate assumptions)	25
Illustrates integration with the Siting Challenge	20
Practiced and polished presentation style	15
High-quality graphics, media, and/or props to support presentation	15
Total for Design Challenge	**240**

*10 points will be deducted for each day the written report is late, up to 3 days, at which point the team is no longer eligible to receive points for this challenge.

**Formatting requirements are in place to ensure an equal amount of space for all teams to tell their stories to the reviewers. Reports not formatted to the requirements and/or that are deemed to be utilizing more than the allotted words will be penalized at the discretion of the reviewers proportional to the infraction. Furthermore, extra words will be ignored.

***The final presentation must be submitted online to the prize administrators in advance of a team's presentation during the Final Event, and teams should bring a USB with the presentation as a backup.

3.5 Community Connections Challenge (25%)

Hydropower workforce development requires a multidisciplinary approach, and hydropower is closely tied to communities and places where hydropower exists. In recognition of the multidisciplinary approach and the multiple areas of interest that impact hydropower and communities, this required challenge is designed to forge stronger connections between competition participants, the hydropower industry, and the local community to address the challenges they are facing. This challenge will also provide students with opportunities to engage beyond engineering and site design and allow for teams to take creative, scalable approaches to engaging with emerging workforce, communities, and the hydropower industry.

The purpose of this challenge is to:

- Engage students so that they can get exposure to the hydropower industry
- Enable students to be exposed to the current problems that will need to be solved in the coming years
- Have students focus on technology development and work on challenges extending beyond technology to better understand and appreciate those issues
- Come up with a repeatable framework to expose more students to opportunities in the hydropower space.

As part of this challenge, competitors will submit February submissions, a final report, and a presentation at the Final Event. All submissions will be made on the HeroX website.

In the February submission, teams will provide a team overview and a team roster.

By the February submission, teams will conduct a minimum of four interviews with industry professionals. These interviews should focus on understanding the current state of the industry, including key challenges and opportunities. Based on the information gathered from the interviews, in the February submission, the teams will propose three to five solutions to address challenges identified. From these proposed solutions, teams will select at least one to implement in a meaningful way, engaging with the broader hydropower community to drive awareness, discussion, or action. The team will be required to present and summarize the process and impact of their work. Specific requirements are defined in the following challenge segments.

Table 10. Scoring Criteria and Points for the Community Connections Challenge*

Description	Maximum Possible Points
February2026 Submission	**20**
Team roster is complete and in compliance with the template provided by prize administrators	2
Quality and informativeness of team overview with engaging and creative storytelling	3

Quality, depth, and specificity of the industry interviews, insights gained from interviews, and three to five proposed solutions	5
Quality and creativity of outreach activities as represented in the Outreach Strategy Report	10
Final Report	**50**
After-action report: concise, readable, and descriptive with logical flow; communicates information clearly	30
Relevance and completeness of metrics: the team reported on an appropriate set of metrics relevant to their activities	5
Depth and sophistication of analysis: the team demonstrated critical thinking and contextual understanding of the reported data	5
Demonstrated impact and reflection: the team interpreted their work's effectiveness and broader outcomes	5
Use of metrics to inform future actions: the team used their metrics to make conclusions and suggest improvements.	5
Final Presentation**	**80**
PowerPoint is concise and visually engaging, and presentation to reviewers is professional, is clear, and uses effective storytelling techniques	20
Demonstrated execution and measurements of impact to a wide group of stakeholders	20
Demonstrated development of best practices and lessons learned through insights gained	20
Successful completion and thorough proven alignment with the chosen strategy and associated actions/activities	20
Total for Community Connections Challenge	**150**
*5 points will be deducted for each day a submission is late, up to 3 days, at which point the team is no longer eligible to receive points for this submission. **The final presentation must be submitted online to the prize administrators in advance of a team's presentation during the Final Event, and teams should bring a USB with the presentation as a backup.	

3.5.1 February Submissions: Team Overview and Roster, Interview Summary, and Outreach Strategy

Team Roster and Team Overview

Teams will submit a roster on the HeroX platform in Excel format; a template will be provided on HeroX. The roster should also include contact names and email addresses for students and faculty advisors from partnering institutions. **This submission is due Feb. 23, 2026, 11:59 p.m. MT.**

The team overview will introduce team members and their vision for the competition and the clean energy community in an interesting way. The prize administrator will post excerpts from these reports as the team overview on the HCC website and may edit the

text for consistency between teams and to meet necessary web standards on energy.gov. Teams should plan to promote the components of the team overview through their social media channels and media connections once they are live on the HCC website. Students should include a strategy for how they will continue promotion of their project efforts.

This team overview will be collected via Microsoft Forms (competition organizers will send a link to the form in December 2025) and include:

- Team name, institution name, city, and state.
- A brief team and project overview. Consider describing the team's technology concept, history with the competition, lessons learned from previous years, and vision for a clean energy future, as well as why the team is participating in the HCC and what the team is most excited for in this competition. The length of the overview should be 150–250 words.
- A team photo, including the names of the team members in the order in which they appear. If students are unable to capture a team photo, the team may instead submit a photo of their prototype, team members in the field/working on their project, etc. This photo must be submitted as a separate .jpg or .png file.
- A caption and credit for the photo (credit information is not included in the word limit).

To assist teams, prize administrators will provide an electronic form that can be used for the team overview submission. Teams are not required to use this form and may submit using any format of their choosing (i.e., by emailing the competition organizers a Microsoft Word document). All submissions should address the substantive measures outlined in this rules document.

Interview Summary and Outreach Strategy

An interview summary will detail the progress made to date in engaging hydropower professionals. The outreach strategy is an industry best practice to help keep announcements on track and serve as an activity road map. The report should address the following and describe the team's proposed activities throughout the year:

- An overview of the interviews completed, to include who was interviewed, the sector and state/region they represent, their job title and organization, and a summary
- Key takeaways and insights the team has gained from these interviews
- A statement of the challenges they would like to address and high-level goals the team aims to achieve with their outreach activities
- Three to five proposed solutions to the challenges and how the team has identified these solutions
- An overview of the actions the team plans to take by the end of the competition to address one of the proposed solutions
- Any industry connections or partnerships that the team has, and how the team will leverage these connections to achieve their outreach goals

- The team's social media and communications strategy, highlighting progress and milestones, including team social media accounts with hyperlinks and relationships developed with the team's school newspaper or local media outlets
- A timeline of events presented in chart form, including:
    - Timeline for proposed events
    - Timeline for event development and promotion of events
    - Planned outreach announcements and social media posts.

The interview summary and outreach strategy should be no more than 3 pages and formatted according to the following requirements:

- Pages should be 8.5 inches by 11 inches, paginated, and with 1-inch margins at a minimum.
- Content should be, at a minimum, single-spaced.
- The body of the report must use, at a minimum, an 11-point font.
- Captions for figures and tables must be numbered for easy navigation.

3.5.2 Final Report

Teams will submit a final report detailing the metrics of their Community Connections Challenge activities throughout the year on the HeroX website. **The report is due 1 week prior to the Final Event (dates are shown on Table 4).**

The final metrics report should be no more than five pages and follow these formatting requirements:

- Pages should be 8.5 inches by 11 inches, paginated, and with 1-inch margins at a minimum.
- Content should be, at a minimum, single-spaced.
- The body of the report must use, at a minimum, an 11-point font.
- Captions for figures and tables must be numbered for easy navigation.
- The final document must be packaged into a single PDF file (see Appendix D).

Points will be deducted if formatting guidelines are not met.

Reports from each of the teams will be published on the competition website, will be used for reference for future events, and could be used to develop future competition submissions.

The final metrics report should serve as the primary means for a team to provide detailed information about their activities undertaken during the challenge to the reviewers. The final report should include the following:

- **After-action report**
    - Overview of actions taken to address the challenges identified since February submission
    - Discussion of challenges the team faced, how these challenges were mitigated, and lessons learned

    - Description of how these actions met the team's high-level outreach goals and impact the hydropower community
    - Reflection on Community Connections Challenge as a whole.

- **Industry interview outcomes**, including quantifiable numbers, such as:
    - Number and types of interviews, length of interviews, and number of questions
    - Metrics on team and participant attendance at interviews
    - Contact information for each interviewee, including name, company, origin of relationship (i.e., professional or alumni), sector in hydropower industry, and response regarding if this person would be open to continued participation in future HCC events
    - Key learnings and takeaways from the interviews, including how the information gained was applied
    - Description of how the team selected individuals to interview.

- **Action outcomes for activities or events**, with quantifiable numbers, such as:
    - Number and types of activities or events
    - Number of attendees, if applicable
    - Estimated time of engagement for each attendee
    - Summary of the activities and key takeaways
    - Types of attendees (industry, academia, community members, etc.)
    - Geographic regions represented
    - Metrics on team and participant attendance at events
    - How activities were selected to accommodate target audience.

- **Action outcomes for communications materials including social media**, with quantifiable numbers, such as:
    - Number of page clicks
    - Number of downloads
    - Estimated length of engagement per view
    - Location of viewers
    - Locations where materials were distributed
    - Metrics on social media account growth
    - Reflection on the team's original communications plan versus results attained, lessons learned, and best practices.

- **Outreach strategy outcomes**, including quantifiable numbers, such as:
    - Number of people engaged through outreach
    - Estimated engagement time per person
    - Types of outreach
    - Reflection on outreach strategy, best practices, and lessons learned.

When collecting data or feedback from stakeholders, attendees, or program participants, teams should communicate how their information will be used. Reports from each of the teams will be published on the competition website, will be used for

reference for future events, and could be used to develop future competition submissions.

3.5.3 Final Presentation and Q&A

Teams will develop a final PowerPoint presentation to share their results from the challenge during the Final Event. This presentation must include:

- Details on the team, each team member's current studies, and future professional goals.
- A statement of the challenges the team has addressed, an overview of insights gained from industry interviews, a brief discussion of the three to five solutions identified to address this challenges, planning and execution of the action, and an assessment of action impact.

Teams should emphasize the quality and visual appeal of each slide and the accompanying presentation by the speaker. Slides should include high-resolution photos to represent each challenge element. Teams may use videos, but this is not required. There will be no template for these slides, so teams can choose how to best convey their Community Connections Challenge experience.

Each team will have 10 minutes to present to a panel of reviewers and to the public during the final HCC event. This presentation will be followed by 10 minutes of questions from the reviewers. Teams will be scored on the professional and clear structure of the presentation, the use of effective storytelling techniques and visual elements, and their completion of each of the required submissions.

3.6 Optional Build and Test Challenge

Based on a team's selection in the Design Challenge of Track 1 (Facility Conceptual Design) or Track 2 (Component Deep Dive), teams that elect to participate in the optional Build and Test Challenge will have the option to build and test a prototype relevant to that track.

The team will build a scaled prototype of their proposed concept and develop video footage or take photographs of any tests and/or experiments of the prototype. Given the wide variety of concepts expected in this competition, there are no restrictions on the scale of the model that a team can test, what constitutes an appropriate experimental facility, or the testing parameters.

Teams will instead be measured on the development of a test and/or an experiment plan that allows for data to be collected for incremental improvements to be made and attempts at successful execution of the test plan.

Prize administrators expect that the scale of the model will be determined by two factors: (1) the dimensions of the testing facility chosen (if not in open space) and (2) the available budget. Teams will be expected to share their prototype and present their process and attempts to test their prototype.

Teams that compete in this challenge will be eligible for additional cash prizes of up to $3,000 and $2,000, in the competition for the February optional Build and Test

Challenge Submission and prototype and presentation, respectively. To be awarded these funds, teams must be awarded for the February required submissions. Teams are encouraged to use the first cash prize to fund their testing campaign, enabling them to complete the submission elements defined in the next section for the challenge.

3.6.1 Optional Build and Test Challenge Submissions

- **February Submission:** Build and Test Strategy document that includes the competing team's proposed testing and experimentation strategy, including materials to be purchased, identification of risks, an approach for minimizing risks, including risk of noncompletion, and a preliminary approach to testing (including possibilities for where they will test and how they will test).
- **Prototype:** Teams participating in this challenge are expected to bring an assembled prototype to the Final Event.
- **Presentation and Q&A Session:** Teams will participate in a presentation where they will describe their build and test activities and include video footage or photographs of testing and/or experimentation activities. Testing is required to take place in a laboratory setting. This presentation will be followed by questions from a panel of reviewers.

More details on the requirements and scoring criteria can be found below.

Table 11. Scoring Criteria and Points of the Optional Build and Test Challenge

These points do not contribute to the total competition score but allow for eligibility to receive a prize.

Description	Maximum Possible Points
February 2026 Submission	**10**
Details on proposed approach, including materials to be purchased and preliminary approach to testing (including possibilities for where they will test and how they will test)	6
Development of a risk matrix to include description of risks, assessment of probability of occurrence and consequence, and an approach for risk minimization. Include risk mitigation strategies for ensuring a prototype and communication of testing approach at the Final Event.	4
Prototype	**40**
Prototype build is of professional quality with evidence that it helped inform design activities and clear scaling	30
Prototype is relevant to the Siting Challenge and Design Challenge activities	10
Presentation*	**50**
Clear description of the scaling factors considered in designing and fabricating the model-scale facility (Track 1) and/or component (Track 2)	10
Clear description of the development of an experimental test plan and how the test plan would allow for the collection of data to prove the team's stated objective	15
Demonstration that the test plan was executed successfully and description of how the instrumentation (where applicable) and measurement design were completed, including pictures and/or videos	15
Summary of lessons learned during execution of the Build and Test Challenge and what modifications, new tests, or changes in recorded or simulated measurements the team would consider going forward	10
Total for Optional Build and Test Challenge	**100**
*The final presentation must be submitted online to the prize administrators in advance of a team's presentation during the Final Event, and teams should bring a USB with the presentation as a backup.	

Optional Build and Test February Submission

Teams will submit a Build and Test Strategy document on the HeroX website. **This submission is due February 23, 2026, 11:59 p.m. MT.**

This document may not be more than three pages and must communicate the team's intent to participate in the optional challenge; their proposed approach, including identification of risks, expected risk minimization approach, and approach for minimizing risks; and their preliminary testing/experimentation strategy, including possibilities for where they will test and/or perform experiments of their prototype and the testing/experiments they anticipate carrying out. Testing must take place in a laboratory

setting.

Upon this submission, teams who meet the requirements described will receive an additional prize of up to $3,000 to support the activities around prototype development described below.

Optional Build and Test Prototype Development

The team will build a scaled prototype of their proposed concept. Test plans must be shared with prize administrators prior to testing their prototype. Teams must adhere to all prescribed safety requirements provided by an experimental facility as it relates to building and/or testing the prototype.

Optional Build and Test Presentation and Q&A Session

The competing teams will need to assess performance at scale for their prototype and present their results in a 10-minute presentation to a panel of reviewers at the Final Event of the competition, followed by 10 minutes of Q&A. The presentation should include the following information:

- The development of a physical model of their preliminary design (Track 1) or the prototype fabrication of their Design Challenge component (Track 2)
- The testing/experimentation process, including a list of instrumentation and methods used, and a description of the measurements taken, which may be numerical modeling results (Track 1) or physical measurements (Track 2)
- An analysis of the testing/experimentation data and summary of results
- Photos and/or video footage of tests/experiments with the prototype
- A description of lessons learned from the design, build, and test processes.

The Build and Test Challenge evaluation criteria will focus on the quality of the model design, test plan development, instrumentation, measurement techniques, and postprocessing of the measured data rather than on the size and breadth of the experiment.

3.7 Siting and Design Poster

One poster summarizing the team's efforts in the Siting and Design Challenges is required for each team. The poster should include information from the Siting and Design Challenges, and if applicable, the optional Build and Test Challenge. The poster does not need to include a summary of the Community Connections Challenge. Teams will bring their poster to the Final Event.

Poster dimensions should be 36 inches by 48 inches; a template is available on the HeroX Resources page.

Teams are encouraged to showcase their creativity as they tell the story of their efforts over the year. Reviewers will evaluate the poster and score it by using the following scoring criteria. The team with the most points will win a trophy for "Best Poster."

Table 12. Bonus Poster Scoring Rubric

Description	Maximum Possible Points
Siting and Design Poster	**100**
Poster and model are visually appealing	20
Concept is clearly understood	30
Important elements of the Design Challenge are represented on poster and link to siting activities	25
Important elements of the Siting Challenge are represented on poster and link to design activities	25

3.8 Quick Pitch

Teams will give a quick pitch presentation to the attendees of the Final Event during one of the conference sessions. Teams will have up to 90 seconds and may show one slide during their elevator-pitch-style presentation. The pitch should describe the team's concept and feasibility.

Attendees at the Final Event will vote on the winning quick pitch through an online survey tool. The team with the most votes will win a trophy for "Best Quick Pitch."

4 Final Event

The HCC will culminate with an in-person event (see Appendix E for event contingencies) to be held in April 27 through 29, 2026 in Green Bay, Wisconsin coinciding with NHA's Midwest Regional with the Midwest Hydro Users Group (MHUG).

During the Final Event, teams will present:

- A 20-minute public presentation on the outcomes from the Siting Challenge and Design Challenge, followed by 10 minutes of private Q&A with a panel of reviewers
- A 10-minute public presentation on the outcomes of the Community Connections Challenge, followed by 10 minutes of public Q&A; teams will also present their challenge activities in a multimedia summary using media of their choice
- A 10-minute public presentation on the optional Build and Test Challenge (for teams competing in this challenge), followed by 10 minutes of private Q&A with a panel of reviewers; teams are to bring their prototype to the Final Event
- A poster summarizing the outcomes from the Siting Challenge and Design Challenge
- A project pitch communicating the team's main project takeaways.

4.1 How We Determine Award Winners

The prize administrator will screen all completed submissions and, in consultation with DOE, will assign reviewers to independently score the applicable content of each submission. The reviewers will be composed of federal and nonfederal subject matter experts with expertise in relevant areas.

Reviewers will review submissions in each phase according to the evaluation criteria described. The prize administrator will tally the scores.

During the Final Event, conference attendees will have the opportunity to vote for Best Quick Pitch, while a dedicated judge will score Best Poster at the team booths. For the quick pitch, competition organizers will provide attendees with website information to cast their vote, and the team with the most votes in the category will be declared the winner.

4.2 Final Determination

The director of WPTO is the judge of the competition and will make the final determination. Final determination of winners by the judge will take the reviewers' scores and program policy factors in Appendix A into account.

Table 13. How We Determine Award Winners for the Grand Prize Awards

Award	Criteria*	Prizes**
First Place	The team that earns the highest combined score in the Siting, Design, and Community Connections Challenges	Trophy Split a Grand Prize cash pool of up to $20,000; cash prizes will be paid to each winning team's institution
Second Place	The team that earns the second highest combined score in the Siting, Design, and Community Connections Challenges	
Third Place	The team that earns the third highest combined score in the Siting, Design, and Community Connections Challenges	
Individual Challenge Awards • Siting Challenge • Design Challenge • Community Connections Challenge • Optional Build Test • Poster • Quick Pitch	The team that earns the highest score in the associated challenge (or highest number of votes for the quick pitch)	Trophy
*Specific details on earning points for each award are included in the previous sections. The competition judge makes all final decisions in the allocation of prizes and awards. **All participating teams in the Final Event receive a participation plaque.		

5 Key Terms

Term	Definition
Competition	The competition is all aspects and activities leading up to and during the Final Event. It is the challenges, submissions, and Final Event, collectively referred to for a given year as the U.S. Department of Energy Hydropower Collegiate Competition.
Final Event	The Final Event is when and where the teams compete in the challenges. This could be during the National Hydropower Association's Water Power Week or a similar event.
Submissions	Submissions are what the team builds, writes, submits, and brings to compete in the Final Event. Submissions are measured against scoring statements, which determines whether a team will receive a prize for each challenge.
Team Booth	Each team is provided with an assigned area during the Final Event, known as a team booth, to use as a central location to practice their presentation, regroup, and showcase their hard work throughout the year to the public. There will be electrical outlets available in the team booth area to allow students to access computers and other equipment that the teams deem necessary.

Appendix A. Additional Terms and Conditions

Your submission for the Hydropower Collegiate Competition is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- You must post the final content of your submission or upload the submission form online by the deadlines outlined in this rules document and listed on the HeroX website. Late submissions or any other form of submission may be rejected.
- All submissions that you wish to protect from public disclosure must be marked according to the instructions in Section 10 of Appendix A (Section A.10). Unmarked or improperly marked submissions will be deemed to have been provided with unlimited rights and may be used in any manner and for any purpose whatsoever.
- You must include all the required elements in your submission. The prize administrator may disqualify your submission after an initial screening if you fail to provide all required submission elements. Competitors may be given an opportunity to rectify submission errors due to technical challenges.
- Your submission must be in English and in a format readable by Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF. Scanned hand-written submissions will be disqualified.
- Submissions will be disqualified if they contain any matter that, in the sole discretion of the U.S. Department of Energy or the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), is indecent, obscene, defamatory, libelous, and/or lacking in professionalism, or demonstrates a lack of respect for people or life on this planet.
- If you click "Accept" on the HeroX platform and proceed to register for any of the prizes described in this document, these rules will form a valid and binding agreement between you and DOE and are in addition to the existing HeroX Terms of Use for all purposes relating to these contests. You should print and keep a copy of these rules. These provisions only apply to the prize described here and no other prize on the HeroX platform or anywhere else.
- The prize administrator, when feasible, may give competitors an opportunity to fix nonsubstantive mistakes or errors in their submission packages.
- As part of your submission to this prize, the competitor will be required to sign the following statement:

> I am providing this submission package as part of my participation in this prize. I understand that the information contained in this submission will be relied on by the federal government to determine whether to issue a prize to the named competitor. I certify under penalty of perjury that the named competitor meets the eligibility requirements for this prize competition and complies with all other rules contained in the official rules document. I further represent that the information contained in the submission is true and contains no misrepresentations. I understand false statements or misrepresentations to the federal government may result in civil and/or criminal penalties under 18 U.S.C. § 1001 and § 287, and 31 U.S.C. §§ 3729-3733 and 3801-3812.

A.1 Verification for Payments

The prize administrator will verify the identity and role of all competitors before distributing any prizes. Receiving a prize payment is contingent upon fulfilling all requirements contained herein. The prize administrator will notify winning competitors using provided email contact information for the individual or entity that was responsible for the submission. Each competitor will be required to sign and return to the prize administrator, within 30 days of the date on the notice, a completed NREL Request for ACH Banking Information form and a completed W9 form (https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw9.pdf). In the sole discretion of the prize administrator, a winning competitor will be disqualified from the competition and receive no prize funds if: (i) the person/entity does not respond to notifications; (ii) the person/entity fails to sign and return the required documentation within the required time period; (iii) the notification is returned as undeliverable; (iv) the submission or person/entity is disqualified for any other reason.

In the event of a dispute as to any registration, the authorized account holder of the email address used to register will be deemed to be the competitor. The "authorized account holder" is the natural person or legal entity assigned an email address by an internet access provider, online service provider, or other organization responsible for assigning email addresses for the domain associated with the submitted address. All competitors may be required to show proof of being the authorized account holder.

The prize administrator will award a single U.S. dollar amount to the designated primary submitter, whether consisting of a single or multiple entities. The primary submitter is solely responsible for allocating any prize funds among its member competitors or teammates as they deem appropriate. The prize administrator will not arbitrate, intervene, advise on, or resolve any matters or disputes between team members or competitors.

A.2 Submission Rights

By making a submission and consenting to the rules of the contest, a competitor is granting to DOE, the prize administrator, and any other third parties supporting DOE in the contest, a license to display publicly and use the parts of the submission that are designated as “public” for government purposes. This license includes posting or linking to the public portions of the submission on the prize administrator or HeroX applications, including the contest website, DOE websites, and partner websites, and the inclusion of the submission in any other media worldwide. The submission may be viewed by DOE, prize administrator, and judges and reviewers for purposes of the contests, including but not limited to screening and evaluation purposes. The prize administrator and any third parties acting on their behalf will also have the right to publicize competitors’ names and, as applicable, the names of competitors’ team members and organization, which participated in the submission on the contest website indefinitely.

By entering, the competitor represents and warrants that:

1. The competitor’s entire submission is an original work by the competitor and the competitor has not included third-party content (such as writing, text, graphics, artwork, logos, photographs, likeness of any third party, musical recordings, clips

of videos, television programs or motion pictures) in or in connection with the submission, unless (i) otherwise requested by the prize administrator and/or disclosed by the competitor in the submission, and (ii) competitor has either obtained the rights to use such third-party content or the content of the submission is considered in the public domain without any limitations on use.

2. Unless otherwise disclosed in the submission, the use thereof by prize administrator, or the exercise by prize administrator of any of the rights granted by competitor under these rules, does not and will not infringe or violate any rights of any third party or entity, including, without limitation, patent, copyright, trademark, trade secret, defamation, privacy, publicity, false light, misappropriation, intentional or negligent infliction of emotional distress, confidentiality, or any contractual or other rights.

3. All persons who were engaged by the competitor to work on the submission or who appear in the submission in any manner have:

    A. Given the competitor their express written consent to submit the submission for exhibition and other exploitation in any manner and in any and all media, whether now existing or hereafter discovered, throughout the world;
    B. Provided written permission to include their name, image, or pictures in or with the submission (or, if a minor who is not competitor's child, competitor must have the permission of the minor's parent or legal guardian) and the competitor may be asked by the prize administrator to provide permission in writing; and
    C. Not been and are not currently under any union or guild agreement that results in any ongoing obligations resulting from the use, exhibition, or other exploitation of the submission.

A.3 Copyright

Each competitor represents and warrants that the competitor is the sole author and copyright owner of the submission; that the submission is an original work of the competitor or that the competitor has acquired sufficient rights to use and to authorize others, including DOE, to use the submission, as specified throughout the rules; that the submission does not infringe upon any copyright or any other third-party rights of which the competitor is aware; and that the submission is free of malware.

A.4 Use of Artificial Intelligence in Competition Deliverables

The following are requirements regarding the use of artificial intelligence in competition deliverables:

- Teams must indicate if generative artificial intelligence (AI) was used in any part of their deliverables, including which tool and prompts.
- Teams are not allowed to use verbatim text from a generative AI chatbot as part of their competition deliverables. Chatbots may reuse text from other sources, causing inadvertent plagiarism.
- All human authors of a deliverable are responsible for all of its content. ChatGPT and similar tools cannot be held accountable.

- Citations recommended by any generative AI chatbot must be verified with the original literature because chatbots are known to generate citations that are inaccurate and/or don't exist.
- AI-generated images and/or multimedia used in competition deliverables will not be accepted.
- The organizers may decline to move a deliverable forward in the competition if AI is used inappropriately according to the requirements outlined above.
- Teams should adhere to their school's AI policies.

A.5 Challenge Subject to Applicable Law

All challenges are subject to all applicable federal laws and regulations. Participation constitutes each participant's full and unconditional agreement to these official challenge rules and administrative decisions, which are final and binding in all matters related to the challenge. This notice is not an obligation of funds; the final award is contingent upon the availability of appropriations.

A.6 Resolution of Disputes

The U.S. Department of Energy is solely responsible for administrative decisions, which are final and binding in all matters related to the challenge.

Neither the U.S. Department of Energy nor the prize administrator will arbitrate, intervene, advise on, or resolve any matters between team members or among competitors.

A.7 Publicity

The winners of these prizes (collectively, "winners") will be featured on the DOE and NREL websites.

Except where prohibited, participation in the challenge constitutes each of the winning competitor's (including all persons appearing in the winning submissions) consent to DOE's and its agents' use of each winner's name, likeness, photograph, voice, opinions, and/or hometown and state information for promotional purposes through any form of media worldwide, without further permission, payment, or consideration. Additionally, except where prohibited, participation in the contest constitutes each of the winning competitor's agreement to provide a written publicity release to the Prize Administrator to evidence the winning competitor's consent if requested by the Prize Administrator.

A.8 Liability

Upon registration, all participants agree to assume any and all risks of injury or loss in connection with or in any way arising from participation in this contest. Upon registration, except in the case of willful misconduct, all participants agree to and, thereby, do waive and release any and all claims or causes of action against the federal government and its officers, employees, and agents for any and all injury and damage of any nature whatsoever (whether existing or thereafter arising, whether direct, indirect, or consequential, and whether foreseeable or not), arising from their participation in the contest, whether the claim or cause of action arises under contract or tort.

In accordance with the delegation of authority to run this contest delegated to the judge responsible for this prize, the judge has determined that no liability insurance naming DOE as an insured will be required of competitors to compete in this competition per 15 U.S.C. § 3719(i)(2). It is the responsibility of the competitors to assess the risks associated with their proposed activities and adequately insure themselves against possible losses.

A.9 Records Retention and Freedom of Information Act

All materials submitted to DOE as part of a submission become DOE records and are subject to the Freedom of Information Act. The following applies only to portions of the submission not designated as public information in the instructions for submission. If a submission includes trade secrets or information that is commercial or financial, or information that is confidential or privileged, it is furnished to the Government in confidence with the understanding that the information shall be used or disclosed only for evaluation of the application. Such information will be withheld from public disclosure to the extent permitted by law, including the Freedom of Information Act. Without assuming any liability for inadvertent disclosure, DOE will seek to limit disclosure of such information to its employees and to outside reviewers when necessary for review of the application or as otherwise authorized by law. This restriction does not limit the Government's right to use the information if it is obtained from another source.

Submissions containing confidential, proprietary, or privileged information must be marked as described below. Failure to comply with these marking requirements may result in the disclosure of the unmarked information under the Freedom of Information Act or otherwise. The U.S. Government is not liable for the disclosure or use of unmarked information and may use or disclose such information for any purpose.

The submission must be marked as follows and identify the specific pages containing trade secrets, confidential, proprietary, or privileged information: "Notice of Restriction on Disclosure and Use of Data: Pages [list applicable pages] of this document may contain trade secrets, confidential, proprietary, or privileged information that is exempt from public disclosure. Such information shall be used or disclosed only for evaluation purposes. [End of Notice]"

The header and footer of every page that contains confidential, proprietary, or privileged information must be marked as follows: "Contains Trade Secrets, Confidential, Proprietary, or Privileged Information Exempt from Public Disclosure." In addition, each line or paragraph containing proprietary, privileged, or trade secret information must be clearly marked with double brackets.

Competitors will be notified of any Freedom of Information Act requests for their submissions in accordance with 29 C.F.R. § 70.26. Competitors may then have the opportunity to review materials and work with a Freedom of Information Act representative prior to the release of materials. DOE does intend to keep all submission materials private except for those materials designated as "will be made public."

A.10 Privacy

If you choose to provide HeroX with personal information by registering or completing the submission package through the contest website, you understand that such information will be transmitted to DOE and may be kept in a system of records. Such information will be used only to respond to you in matters regarding your submission and/or the contest unless you choose to receive updates or notifications about other contests or programs from DOE on an opt-in basis. DOE and NREL are not collecting any information for commercial marketing.

A.11 General Conditions

DOE reserves the right to cancel, suspend, and/or modify the contest, or any part of it, at any time for any reason.

If any fraud, technical failure, or any other factor beyond DOE's reasonable control impairs the integrity or proper functioning of the contests, as determined by DOE in its sole discretion, DOE may cancel the contest. Any performance toward contest goals is conducted entirely at the risk of the competitor, and DOE shall not compensate any competitors for any activities performed in furtherance of this prize.

Although DOE may indicate that it will select up to several winners for each contest, DOE reserves the right to only select competitors that are likely to achieve the goals of the program. If, in DOE's determination, no competitors are likely to achieve the goals of the program, DOE will select no competitors to be winners and will award no prize money.

DOE may conduct a risk review, using Government resources, of the competitor and project personnel for potential risks of foreign interference. The outcomes of the risk review may result in the submission being eliminated from the prize competition. This risk review, and potential elimination, can occur at any time during the prize competition. An elimination based on a risk review is not appealable.

A.12 Program Policy Factors

While the scores of the expert reviewers will be carefully considered, it is the role of the prize judge to maximize the impact of challenge funds. Some factors outside the control of competitors and beyond the independent expert reviewer scope of review may need to be considered to accomplish this goal. The following is a list of such factors. In addition to the reviewers' scores, the below program policy factors may be considered in determining winners:

- Geographic variety and potential economic impact of projects.
- Whether the use of additional DOE funds and provided resources are non-duplicative and compatible with the stated goals of this program and the DOE mission generally.
- The degree to which the submission exhibits technological **or programmatic** variety when compared to the existing DOE project portfolio and other competitors.
- The level of industry involvement and demonstrated ability to accelerate commercialization and overcome key market barriers.

- The degree to which the submission is likely to lead to increased employment and manufacturing in the United States or provide other economic benefit to U.S. taxpayers.
- The degree to which the submission will accelerate transformational technological, financial, or workforce advances in areas that industry by itself is not likely to undertake because of technical or financial uncertainty.
- The degree to which the submission supports complementary DOE funded efforts or projects, which, when taken together, will best achieve the goals and objectives of DOE.
- The degree to which the submission expands DOE's funding to new competitors and recipients who have not been supported by DOE in the past.
- The degree to which the submission enables new and expanding market segments.
- Whether the project promotes increased coordination with nongovernmental entities for the demonstration of technologies and research applications to facilitate technology transfer.

A.13 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Compliance

This prize is subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. § 4321, et seq.). NEPA requires federal agencies to integrate environmental values into their decision-making processes by considering the potential environmental impacts of their proposed actions. For additional background on NEPA, please see DOE's NEPA website at http://nepa.energy.gov/.

While NEPA compliance is a federal agency responsibility and the ultimate decisions remain with the federal agency, all participants in the Hydropower Collegiate Competition will be required to assist in the timely and effective completion of the NEPA process in the manner most pertinent to their participation in the prize competition. Participants may be asked to provide DOE with information on fabrication and testing of their device such that DOE can conduct a meaningful evaluation of the potential environmental impacts.

A.14 Definitions

Prize administrator means both the Alliance for Sustainable Energy operating in its capacity under the Management and Operating Contract for NREL and DOE EERE Water Power Technologies Office. When the prize administrator is referenced in this document, it refers to staff from both the Alliance for Sustainable Energy and Water Power Technologies Office staff. Ultimate decision-making authority regarding prize matters rests with the Director of Water Power Technologies Office.

A.15 Return of Funds

As a condition of receiving a prize, competitors agree that if the prize was made based on fraudulent or inaccurate information provided by the competitor to DOE, DOE has the right to demand that any prize funds or the value of other non-cash prizes be returned to the government.

ALL DECISIONS BY DOE ARE FINAL AND BINDING IN ALL MATTERS RELATED

TO THE CHALLENGE.

Appendix B. Roles and Responsibilities

Table B-1 shows the competition roles, the individual(s) responsible for performing in each role, and what each role entails.

Table B-1. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Individual(s) Assigned	Responsibilities
Collegiate Team	Multiple	Team carries out work on the project within the rules and requirements of the competition, based on direction and advice from their fellow team members, student leader(s), and faculty advisor(s).
Collegiate Team Student Leader(s)	Minimum of one and maximum of two per team	The student leader(s) attends informational sessions with the faculty advisor, represents the team when communicating with competition prize administrators and other teams, and disseminates information received from the competition prize administrators over the entire project, including monitoring communications. A minimum of one and maximum of two student leaders per team are allowed, but at least one must be an undergraduate. These names shall be reported to the prize administrators prior to the team kickoff meeting.
Collegiate Team Faculty Advisor(s)	Minimum of one per team	The faculty advisor serves as the lead faculty member and primary representative of a participating institution in the competition. This person also engages with competition prize administrators and provides guidance to the team throughout the project and ensures that the student leader(s) disseminates information received from the competition prize administrators. The faculty advisor advises, provides input to, and coaches the students on the skills necessary to compete in the various aspects of the competition. Some teams may specify multiple faculty advisors who contribute to the team. The name(s) shall be reported to the prize administrators prior to the kickoff meeting.
Collegiate Team Co-Advisors(s) or Supporting Faculty	Multiple	Supports the faculty advisor and student leader(s) in the above duties but typically does not directly engage with DOE/NREL prize administrators.
Prize Administrator	NREL	The prize administrator leads correspondence with

Role	Individual(s) Assigned	Responsibilities
		the collegiate teams regarding contracts, challenge questions, and team expectations. During the competition, the prize administrator is the primary point of contact for questions related to engagement with the reviewers, logistics, and protocol. Tasks include developing team schedules, coordinating/collating scores and team feedback from the challenges in time for the awards ceremony, and supporting the collegiate teams and reviewers.
Challenge Reviewers	To be announced prior to the Final Event	The challenge reviewers conduct and evaluate each challenge.
Competition Judge	Director, WPTO	The director of WPTO is the judge of the competition and will make all final determinations.
Industry Mentor	One mentor will be assigned to each team	These hand-selected industry mentors will play a critical role throughout the competition, providing teams with real-world experience, technical insight, and other important support.

Appendix C. Conduct

The competition is a forum for students with an interest in hydropower to showcase innovative ideas and further develop their knowledge. The event is designed to be safe, fair, and competitive as well as a fun learning experience and professional growth opportunity. Each team is responsible for the safety of its operations. Participants are expected to conduct themselves in the spirit of the competition by being team players both within their own teams and among competitor teams.

As part of the culture of the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, renewable energy and sustainability go hand in hand—a common public perception as well. As a result, though the competition is about renewable energy, we expect that participants will embrace and showcase sustainability where possible during all aspects of the event (e.g., reducing waste in packaging for shipping, reusing packaging materials used in transporting items to the Final Event, and eliminating the use of nonrecyclable materials, such as foam packing peanuts). In addition, we encourage team members to engage in common sustainable activities, such as recycling paper and beverage containers. Team creativity to support this mission is encouraged but not scored.

While teams work on their submissions, faculty advisors, faculty co-advisors, graduate student advisors, and members of industry secured by each team for support can provide feedback about the team's design so the students can identify fatal flaws, prove technical rigor, or demonstrate feasibility of their concept. Teams are highly encouraged to pursue mentorships and sponsorships early in the competition, as it will provide immense benefit to the learning and overall competition experience. However, only student team members may take an active role in any competition event. It is the role of the nonstudent team members to provide a supportive environment and the educational background necessary for the students to achieve success in the competition.

In addition, teams are encouraged to bring to the prize administrator's attention rules that are unclear, misguided, or in need of improvement. The prize administrators will seriously consider suggestions that are feasible, within their constraints, and are intended to improve the competition, its rules, fairness, measurable outcomes, or precision.

Appendix D. Communications and Challenge Details

D.1 External Communications

The HCC website will showcase the various elements of the competition, ongoing collegiate team engagement, and information about how to participate in future competitions. The website will also feature important documents, such as this manual and the HCC application template.

D.2 Internal Communications

It is each team's responsibility to stay abreast of the latest competition communications from the prize administrators. Communication between the teams and the prize administrators occurs via one or more of the following:

- HeroX Forum: Official communications suitable for viewing by all team members and prize administrators will be posted on the competition's HeroX Forum.
- HeroX Resources: All HCC resources, templates, and meeting recordings will be uploaded to the HeroX Resources page.
- Virtual Meetings: Teams are strongly encouraged to participate in scheduled virtual meetings with the prize administrators. Invitations and instructions for participation in these meetings are provided by the competition operations manager(s) via email and on the HeroX Forum.
- Email: The official email address for the competition is Water.Competition@nrel.gov; questions should be sent directly to this email address, and answers that may be of interest to all teams will be posted on the competition's HeroX Forum. For expediency and to protect confidentiality, the prize administrators may choose to communicate with teams via team members' email addresses as listed in the HeroX database; however, official communications occur via the HeroX Forum.
- Website: The HCC website will showcase the various elements of the competition, ongoing collegiate team engagement, and information about how to participate in future competitions. The website will also feature important documents, such as this manual and submission templates.

D.3 Branding

Teams are expected to set up a professional space in their team booths at the Final Event to highlight the team's branding. This can include the concept design, posters, team logo, and school information. The team booths are the teams' chance to showcase all the work they have put into their project over the course of the year and are the best way to communicate their efforts to the industry, especially at a visible industry networking event.

D.4 Reviewing and Scoring

A panel of challenge reviewers is responsible for scoring team performance in each challenge and for each submission. The reviewers will have expertise related to the content they are responsible for evaluating. The panel will include a wide array of backgrounds that allow the reviewers to evaluate performance from a variety of angles.

Prize administrators will ensure that, to the extent possible, reviewers will not:

- Have personal or financial interests in or be an employee, officer, director, or agent of any entity that is a registered participant in the competition
- Have a familial or financial relationship with an individual who is a registered participant
- Provide advice to teams, although they can provide clarification on the reviewing process
- Discuss team performance with other teams or their advisors.

The names of the selected reviewers will be announced prior to the final in-person event. Reviewers for February submissions may be different from those providing reviews at the Final Event. The director of WPTO is the judge of the competition and will make the final determination based on the criteria outlined in this document and the reviewers' scores.

D.5 Team Feedback

In an effort to provide as much feedback as possible, teams will receive their scores following completion of the competition. Teams will also receive a short narrative derived from the challenge reviewers' deliberations after each team's presentation.

D.6 Submissions and Submission Locations

Go to HeroX and follow the instructions for registering and submitting all required materials before the deadlines in Section 1 and as displayed on the HeroX website.

The HeroX platform provides a space where parties interested in collaboration can post information about themselves and learn about others who are also interested in competing. Teams can submit early copies and updated revisions until the deadline. If a team wants to submit after a deadline, you must contact the prize administrator, and points will be deducted according to what is identified in the evaluation criteria.

D.7 Submissions

PDF Requirements

Submitted PDFs must meet the following criteria:

- Have embedded fonts
- Have all images be a minimum resolution of 300 dpi.

In addition, PDFs created from scans or by outputting the content into a raster image format (e.g., .jpg, .tiff, .png, or .gif) are not acceptable.

- That is, an all-raster PDF should be avoided because, despite being large files at 300 dpi, they are of unacceptable quality at lower resolutions and are not scalable without degradation.

Audiovisual Presentation Requirements

Audiovisual presentation format requires that:

- Videos, if used, are in a .MOV or H.264 compressed .MP4 (MPEG-4) file type with a resolution of 720 × 480
- Presentations are in a 16:9 aspect ratio
- No background music that violates U.S. copyright laws is included; all incorporated music must be an original or royalty-free composition, and proof of licensing must be submitted with the final file and transcript.

Electronic File-Naming Instructions

The required file-naming convention for all electronic files is:

[TEAM ABBREVIATION] _[SUBMISSION]_[SUBMISSION DATE (YYYY-MM-DD)].[EXTENSION]

For example, a report submitted by California Maritime Academy on April 24, 2024, would have the following file name: MARITIME_Report_2024-04-23.PDF.

Appendix E. Alternative Competition Structure

In the event of a cancellation of the in-person element of the Final Event, this document will be updated to reflect changes resulting in the cancellation. All the required submissions will remain unchanged, but the event and submission schedule may be updated. Should there be extenuating circumstances for some but not all teams, a hybrid solution between a standard in-person event and virtual will be developed and further communicated to the teams with as much advance notice as feasible.

The primary goal of the competition is to maximize learning, and the prize administrators will work with each team to determine what is possible.

The following of best practices are highly recommended for remote participation in any event.

E.1 Prior to the Final Event

Prior to the Final Event, a team should:

- **Know the competition schedule.** Teams are responsible for keeping track of the Final Event schedule and confirming their meeting point of contact.
- **Test their technology.** Teams should explore the virtual meeting platform and test their audio and video capabilities. The prize administrators have built in transition time, but it is limited.
- **Check their internet connection.** Teams are encouraged to use a hard-wired internet connection (i.e., ethernet cord). Wi-Fi connections can be used but are not ideal because they are prone to more connection issues.

E.2 Day of the Final Event

On the day of the Final Event, a team should:

- **Note their audio settings**. Teams are responsible for muting their audio connection (phone or computer) when they are not intending to speak. The prize administrators will mute participants with excessive background noise. Ensure team members are only using one audio connection, connecting to audio via their phone or computer but not both. Connecting with two audio connections results in electrical feedback that is very uncomfortable for all involved.
- **Verify their video preferences.** Teams are encouraged (but not required) to use their webcam when presenting. Audio narration of slides is also acceptable. Ensure team members have a clean background while streaming their video (e.g., no inappropriate or offensive images in the background or people walking around) and avoid window backdrops because of lighting.
- **Be prepared.** Teams should look professional in their dress and speak professionally during their presentation. Refrain from distracting behavior while sharing their video and/or audio, such as drinking or eating.

Appendix F. Community Connections Challenge Resources

Students should research the current state of these topics in the industry before meeting with industry professionals. Resources include but are not limited to:

- *U.S. Hydropower Workforce: Challenges and Opportunities* (nrel.gov)
- Hydropower STEM Portal
- NREL Hydropower Program News
- DOE WPTO Hydropower Program
- Competition meetings and webinars.