

Judging & Awards Guide

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NAVIGATING THE HACKATHON: JUDGING & AWARDS

ELIGIBILITY FOR GLOBAL JUDGING

To be eligible to advance to Global Judging from either a Local Event or the Universal Event, your team and project must meet certain requirements. See the [Project Submission Guide](#) for step-by-step details on how to submit your project.

Minimum requirements:

- Respond to one of the official NASA Space Apps challenges. Projects submitted to “Create Your Own Challenge” will not be eligible for Global Judging.
- Ensure that all team members are registered for the NASA Space Apps Challenge, have chosen a Local Event (and are not waitlisted), and appear on the Members tab of your Team’s page. Teams will not be able to add new members after project submission has closed. The maximum number of team members allowed is six, and the minimum is one. **Note:** All teammates, including the Team Owner, must be registered for the same Local Event. Teams that do not meet this requirement are not eligible for Global Judging.
- Complete all of the required fields on the Project Submission page.
- Provide a short demonstration ("Demo") of your project, either in the form of a slide presentation (7-slide limit) or a video presentation (30-second limit).
- Use English language on the project submission page and in any linked materials. **Exception: If your team creates a video for your project demo, you can speak in another language. However, it MUST include English language subtitles.**
- Submit your project by navigating to the project tab on your team page, click edit, and then "submit" before 11:59 p.m. local time in accordance with your team’s Local Event. **Exception: If your team is registered for the Universal Event, your project must be submitted in accordance with the local time of the Team Owner who created your team.** Contact your Local Lead if you have questions about the deadline for your Local Event.
- Agree to and check the box on the project submission page that says: *"I have read and understand the project submission requirements as contained in the NASA Space Apps Project Submission Guide, and I agree to the Participant Terms and Conditions and Privacy Policy."*
- Agree to and check the box on the project submission page that says: *"I confirm that the submitted project represents my team’s original work and that all external resources, including code, text, and images used in the project, are listed in the NASA Data and the Space Agency Partner & Other Data fields of the project submission form. In creating your project, you confirm that your team did not use any copyrighted materials (i.e., music, images, text, etc.) that you don’t have permission to use."*

- In accordance with NASA's China funding restriction policy, teams will undergo review for prohibited bilateral activity with China, or a Chinese-owned entity, in order to be determined eligible to participate in the Global Judging round of NASA Space Apps. "China or Chinese-owned entity" means any department, agency, or instrumentality of the government of the People's Republic of China and any governmental subdivision thereof, including Hong Kong and Macau, any company owned by the People's Republic of China, or any company, university, or similar institution incorporated under the laws of the People's Republic of China or governmental subdivision thereof, including Hong Kong and Macau. Any determination of eligibility shall be made by NASA, in its sole discretion, and will be based on information provided by the applicant. Please refer to the [NASA Space Apps Terms and Conditions](#) for Chinese affiliation's impact on eligibility to be recognized as a NASA Space Apps Global Winner.

While awards are an exciting and compelling reason to participate in the NASA Space Apps Challenge, we like to start by reminding everyone that NASA Space Apps is, at its core, collaborative — not competitive. We hope that participants have the opportunity to learn, grow, and share. We celebrate all of your ideas and efforts, whether you receive an award or not. **All participants who submit a project on the website by the deadline will receive a certificate of participation.**

JUDGING CRITERIA

At every level of judging, your project will be evaluated on a scale from 1-to-5, in each of the following criteria:

Impact

This project makes an impact by addressing either a minor or major problem, which influences the quality and quantity of its overall effect. The extent to which it inspires or helps others varies, ranging from a broad audience to a select few.

Score of 5 (Outstanding Impact): This project demonstrates exceptional impact, addressing a significant problem with innovative methods. Its reach is extensive, inspiring and benefiting a large audience or changing the world. The quality and effectiveness of the project far exceed expectations, setting a high standard for others.

Creativity

This project demonstrates originality and innovation. It introduces a novel concept that has not been attempted before or presents an improvement upon existing ideas in a meaningful way. This project is distinguished by its level of creativity, showcasing a fresh perspective or inventive execution.

Score of 5 (Highly Creative and Innovative): This project showcases remarkable creativity, introducing a groundbreaking approach that has never been attempted before. It challenges conventional methods, presenting an original and inventive method that stands out in its field. The uniqueness of the idea makes it a true innovation.

Validity

This project presents a proposed solution that is grounded in scientific principles and demonstrates technical, functional, or logical feasibility. It is designed to effectively achieve its intended purpose and has the potential to function in real-world applications. The completeness of the project varies—it may be fully developed or still require significant refinement. Additionally, the usability and user-friendliness of the project influence its practicality and accessibility.

Score of 5 (Highly Valid and Feasible): This project is scientifically sound and technically feasible, demonstrating strong alignment with established principles. It is fully developed and ready for real-world implementation, effectively achieving its intended purpose. The project is highly usable and user-friendly, making it accessible and practical for widespread application.

Relevance

This project fully and directly addresses the challenge for which it was submitted, demonstrating a strong alignment with the intended objectives. It meaningfully integrates NASA data, utilizing it as a core component of the proposed solution rather than a superficial addition. The depth of engagement with the data enhances the project's credibility and effectiveness.

Score of 5 (Highly Relevant and Strong NASA Data Integration): This project thoroughly engages with the challenge, delivering a method that is deeply connected to the intended goals. NASA data is integral to the project's success, providing meaningful insights that drive the innovation forward. The use of the data is well-executed, enhancing both the credibility and impact.

Presentation

The team effectively communicated their project, clearly conveying the challenge, their proposed solution, and its significance. The storytelling was engaging and well-structured, ensuring the audience understood the project's purpose and impact. The clarity, organization, and delivery of their presentation played a key role in making their ideas compelling and clear. Judges evaluate the demo and full project to compute this score.

Score of 5 (Exceptional Communication and Storytelling): The team delivered a well-structured and compelling presentation, clearly articulating the challenge, methods, and importance of the project. Their storytelling was engaging, making the audience fully grasp the significance and potential impact of the work. The delivery was polished, confident, and highly effective in communicating their ideas.

While many NASA Space Apps Challenge teams consider the first four judging criteria carefully and excel at developing projects with great potential, remember to pay equal attention to the final criterion: Presentation. We recommend devoting time and resources to developing your pitch and building a great story around your project. Be sure to recruit team members with a variety of skills, including expertise in storytelling, design, and other skills to help document your project and share the value of your proposed solution with the world. For tips on how to craft an effective project demo, read the [Project Submission Guide](#).

PHASE 1: LOCAL EVENT JUDGING & GLOBAL NOMINEES

Following the hackathon, Local Event and Universal Event judges will determine the projects that will advance to Global Judging. These selected teams are known as Global Nominees. Global Nominees from both Local Events and the Universal Event will be announced on November 5, 2025.

Local Event Judging & Awards Process

Following the hackathon, all project submissions from each Local Event will be evaluated by a panel of Local Judges, who are recruited, trained, and organized by the designated Local Lead. Using the NASA Space Apps judging criteria, the panel will select projects to advance to Global Judging.

Local Leads and Local Judges have the option to provide local awards. These local awards are separate from the Global Judging process and Global Winners that will be announced after all phases of judging are complete. **Regardless of Local Judging results, only officially submitted Global Nominees will be considered for Global Judging.**

Universal Event Judging Process

Following the hackathon, all projects submitted to the Universal Event will be evaluated by a team of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). Using the NASA Space Apps judging criteria, the Universal Event Judges will select projects to advance to Global Judging. These teams will be known as Global Nominees. The number of Universal Event teams that will advance to Global Judging will be proportional to the number of projects that advance to Global Judging from Local Events.

PHASE 2: GLOBAL FINALISTS & HONORABLE MENTIONS

During Global Judging, all Global Nominees will be reviewed by a team of expert judges. Each project will be evaluated according to the judging criteria in this guide. These votes will determine the top teams, who will be known as the “Global Finalists.” Global Finalists will be announced on November 26, 2025. We also recognize Honorable Mentions at this time. While they do not advance to Executive Judging nor are they eligible for awards, Honorable Mentions are ranked highly by our Global Judges for their ingenuity and creativity.

PHASE 3: GLOBAL WINNERS

The Global Finalists will be reviewed by an executive committee from NASA and the 2025 Space Agency Partners. These judges are agency leaders and executives with a variety of subject matter expertise. Each Global Finalist project will be evaluated by each executive judge. This committee will nominate teams for one of ten Global Awards:

- **Best Use of Science:** The project that makes the best and most valid use of the scientific method.
- **Best Use of Data:** The project that best makes space data accessible, or leverages it to a unique application.
- **Best Use of Technology:** The project that exemplifies the most innovative use of technology.
- **Galactic Impact:** The project with the most potential to improve life on Earth or in the universe.
- **Best Mission Concept:** The project with the most plausible concept and design.
- **Most Inspirational:** The project that captures our hearts.
- **Best Storytelling Award:** The project that most creatively communicates the potential of open data through the art of storytelling.
- **Global Connection Award:** The project that best connects people around the world through technology.
- **Art & Technology Award:** The project that most effectively combines technical and creative skills.
- **Local Impact Award:** The project that demonstrates the greatest potential for making a difference in their local community.

The team or individual that created the winning submission for each of the categories above will be known as Global Winners and will be announced on December 18, 2025. Winning teams *may* get the chance to have a one-on-one virtual conversation and celebrate their projects with a NASA scientist in early 2026. A member of the NASA Space Apps GO Team will reach out to coordinate these special virtual sessions with each winning team.