

2026-2027 RULES & GUIDELINES

THIS YEAR'S CHALLENGE Design a resilient future city that can prevent urban wildfires, protect communities from their impacts, and recover quickly afterwards.

What is Future City?

Future City is a project-based learning program in which students in grades 6, 7, and 8 imagine, research, design, and build cities that could exist at least 100 years in the future. Teams apply the engineering design process and project management while developing four competition deliverables.

Deliverable	Points	Timing
City Essay	54	Before competition
City Model	65	At competition
City Presentation and Q&A	72	At competition
Project Plan	10	Before competition
TOTAL	201	

Who May Participate?

- Eligible students must be in grades 6, 7, or 8 and from the same school, home school environment, or eligible youth-focused organization, unless otherwise approved by Future City staff.
- A team has at least three students and is guided by one registered educator and one registered STEM mentor.
- The official competition team consists of three student presenters, one registered educator, and one registered mentor.
- Students cannot compete on multiple teams. An organization may register in only one region unless an approved transfer is granted.

LOCAL DATE & DEADLINES

City Essay	December 4, 2026
Project Plan Part 1: Set goals	November 6, 2026
Project Plan Part 2: Create a schedule	December 4, 2026
Project Plan Part 3: Conduct check-ins	January 23, 2027
Project Plan Part 4: Reflect on project	January 23, 2027
City model	January 23, 2027
City presentation and Q&A	January 23, 2027
Competition Expense Report	January 23, 2027

TEAM ROLES & PROJECT PLAN

10 POINTS

Educator

- Leads and supports the team throughout the season and works with the mentor to advise students.
- Registers the team and submits required deliverables and forms through the Educator Dashboard.
- Must be present whenever students meet virtually or in person with the team mentor.

STEM Mentor

- Registers in the Future City Dashboard, completes the required background check, and is assigned to a team by December 10, 2026.
- Coaches, guides, and teaches by connecting classroom learning to real engineering, science, technology, surveying, architecture, and city planning work.
- May advise and give feedback, but students must complete the research, writing, design, construction, and presentation work.

Official Student Presenters

- The same three students deliver the 7-minute presentation and participate in the 8-minute Q&A.
- The presenters should share time equally and demonstrate comparable knowledge of the city and project.
- Only the three official student presenters may present or answer judges' questions.

Deliverable 4: Project Plan | 10 points

Students use a four-part project plan throughout the season. Each part is submitted as a separate PDF by the educator through the Educator Dashboard. Please note that the individual project plan deadlines are suggested milestones. As long as all required components are completed and submitted by Competition Day, teams will receive full credit.

1. Set Goals	Define resources, constraints, assumptions, and team goals.
2. Create a Schedule	Identify milestones and tasks, estimate time, assign responsibilities, and maintain a visual schedule.
3. Conduct Check-Ins	Document at least one meaningful check-in, including progress, issues, lessons, and schedule adjustments.
4. Reflect	Assess goals, design changes, teamwork, and the most valuable experience from the competition.
PROJECT PLAN SCORING Fully completed, on-time submissions receive 10 points. Incomplete or late submissions may receive 5 points. No submission receives 0 points. Please note that the individual project plan deadlines are suggested milestones. As long as all required components are completed and submitted by Competition Day, teams will receive full credit.	

DELIVERABLE 1: CITY ESSAY

54 POINTS

PURPOSE Describe the city's unique attributes and present the team's Fire Resilient Future solution.

Essay Requirements

- City is set at least 100 years in the future.
- Maximum length is 1,500 words. Include the exact word count at the end.
- The title and reference list are excluded from the word count. Captions and words in graphics, illustrations, and tables are included.
- No more than four graphics or illustrations may be included.
- Cite at least three acceptable sources. MLA format is preferred. Wikipedia is not accepted as a cited source.
- AI may assist with concepts, outlines, and minimal syntax. Students must complete the research, writing, and structure, consistent with the Honor Statement.
- Submit the essay as a Word document through the Educator Dashboard, not as a PDF.

What the Essay Must Address

- Introduce the city, including location, population, daily life, infrastructure, services, and futuristic innovations.
- Define the city's urban wildfire or wildland-urban interface (WUI) problem before solutions were implemented.
- Explain the city's overall approach to wildfire resilience and environmental impacts.
- Provide one innovative example for each strategy: prevention, protection, and recovery.
- Discuss design and planning decisions, risks, benefits, trade-offs, compromises, and relevant engineering disciplines.

Scoring Category	Points
Introduce City & Define the Problem	24
Fire Resilient Future Solution	24
Writing Skills	6
TOTAL	54

DELIVERABLE 2: CITY MODEL

65 POINTS

PURPOSE Build one physical, scaled model that represents the future city and visibly demonstrates solutions to prevent, protect, and recover from urban wildfires/WUI fires.

Core Requirements

- One single model; basic state no larger than 25 in. wide x 50 in. long x 20 in. high.
- Extended parts are allowed if self-supported or, when removable, held by a presenter.
- Use no more than two distinct scales. Each scale must be clear, consistent, and listed on the Model ID card.
- Include at least one repeatable moving part related to the city's design or function.
- Use recycled and repurposed materials creatively. The combined value of model, presentation, Q&A, and special-award materials may not exceed \$100.
- The flat, empty baseboard material is exempt from the budget and expense form.
- All other materials, including donated and borrowed items, must be listed at fair market value on the Competition Expense Form.

Model ID Card | 4 in. x 6 in.

- City name, which is also the team name
- School or organization name
- Names of the three student presenters, educator, and mentor
- Model scale or scales

Prohibited or Restricted Items

- No live animals, perishables or food, drones or other flying objects, hazardous items, dry ice, or fire.
- Water used in the model must be self-contained or drainable.
- Power must be self-contained. Wall and floor outlets are not allowed.
- White 3D printing is valued at \$2 per cubic inch; color 3D printing at \$5 per cubic inch.
- Programmable circuit boards are permitted when full cost is listed, with a minimum listed value of \$35.

Scoring Category	Points
City Design	30
Build It: Quality, Scale & Materials	20
Judge Assessment of Model	15
TOTAL	65

DELIVERABLE 3: PRESENTATION & Q&A

72 POINTS

FORMAT Up to 7 minutes for the presentation, followed immediately by an 8-minute judge Q&A.

Presentation Requirements

- The same three official student presenters participate in both the presentation and Q&A.
- The model should be the primary visual aid. Presenters should use it to explain city design, function, and innovation.
- The presentation should introduce the city and explain infrastructure, services, engineering, the design process, project management, risks and trade-offs, and the Fire Resilient Future solution.
- The annual challenge content should include one example each for prevention, protection, and recovery.
- Audiovisual equipment and mobile devices are not allowed.

Visual Aids and Demonstration Aids

- Poster boards: maximum 24 in. x 36 in.; flip charts: maximum 25 in. x 30 in.; tri-fold boards: maximum 36 in. x 48 in.
- Up to two poster boards or flip charts may be displayed at one time, or one tri-fold board.
- One handout or brochure is allowed, limited to one 8.5 in. x 11 in. sheet.
- Except for the handout and costumes, demonstration aids must collectively fit within a 6 in. x 6 in. x 12 in. volume.
- Guns or replicas that could realistically be mistaken for a gun are prohibited.
- All visual aids, handouts, costumes, and demonstration aids count toward the \$100 combined budget.

Scoring Category	Points
Content & Delivery	48
Engineering & Technology	24
TOTAL	72

COMPETITION RULES & FINAL CHECKLIST

Important Competition Rules

- Teams must commit to a region by October 31, 2026. A region must have at least 20 registered schools or organizations by that date for its winner to advance to Finals.
- All team members must sign and submit the Honor Statement before the regional deadline.
- The educator must submit required competition forms through the Educator Dashboard, including the Expense Form and receipts, Honor Statement, and Media Waivers.
- Judges evaluate deliverables using the official rubrics. Scores assigned by judges are final.
- Flags, banners, posters, and similar signage at Regionals and Finals must relate only to Future City. Prohibited displays include political, legislative, candidate, sports-team, public-controversy, or societal-debate messaging.
- Future City may amend the official rules. If this summary conflicts with the national handbook or dashboard instructions, the official national requirements govern.

Common Scoring Deductions

Penalty	Examples
5-10 points	Missed deliverable or form deadline; incomplete or late Project Plan; presentation exceeds time limit; unauthorized person answers judges; failure to follow timekeeper or moderator instructions.
20 points	Exceeds the \$100 expense limit or misrepresents material values.
2-10 points	Essay exceeds the 1,500-word limit.
2 points	Missing Model ID card.
5-15 points	Model reuses a past model without original reconfiguration; exceeds size limits; or uses a prohibited item.
0 points	Plagiarized City Essay.
Disqualification	Certain serious rule violations, including destructive or unsportsmanlike conduct.

Before You Submit or Compete

- ☐ City Essay is a Word document, within 1,500 words, includes the exact count, at least three sources, and no more than four graphics.
- ☐ All four Project Plan parts are complete and uploaded separately as PDFs.
- ☐ Model meets size, scale, moving-part, theme, safety, and budget requirements.
- ☐ Model ID card and Competition Expense Form are complete; receipts are available.
- ☐ Presentation is 7 minutes or less; Q&A team is the same three presenters; aids meet size and budget limits.
- ☐ Honor Statement and Media Waivers are electronically signed and submitted.
- ☐ Team has verified Albany-specific dates and instructions in the Educator Dashboard.

2027 FINALS Regional winners advance to the Future City Finals in Washington, D.C., February 13-17, 2027. The official team consists of three student presenters, one educator, and the team's official mentor.

Regional information: www.FutureCity.org/new-york-albany
Educator resources and due dates: Dashboard.FutureCity.org