

# 2025 YOUTH INNOVATION CHALLENGE



**Advancing marine conservation**



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## **Applicant Handbook**

Everything You Need to Know to Apply

GEEP is a partnership of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Taiwan Ministry of Environment, and the North American Association for Environmental Education.



**EPA** United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency

**naaee**  
North American Association  
for Environmental Education





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## 2025 Youth Innovation Challenge: Advancing Marine Conservation

Warming sea temperatures. Loss of marine biodiversity. Harmful waste littered across the ocean. These are only a few of the issues our ocean and marine life face today—with significant impacts on marine ecosystems, the environment, and the well-being of our communities. But these are all things we can address together through the power of science, innovation, collaboration, and education.

The 2025 Youth Innovation Challenge (YIC) provides an opportunity for young people around the world to share their innovative solutions to protect marine resources. This year's YIC explores how we can address marine issues, including loss of biodiversity, marine debris, lack of awareness, and other related issues, and support people of all ages to be engaged stewards to support marine environments.

Are you 15–30 years old and do you have an idea to protect marine resources and solve related issues at the local, national, or regional level? We want to hear from you! We're looking for solutions that you could implement on your own or in partnership with other individuals or organizations. Your solution must align with one or more of the following key priority areas, and should also include an environmental education (EE) component (see Selection Criteria for more information about EE):

- **Marine biodiversity and conservation:** Managing, protecting, and/or restoring marine biodiversity for its ecological, cultural, economic, and other values.
- **Marine debris:** Reducing and/or mitigating the effects of marine debris, including the monitoring, clean-up, and recycling of marine debris, and educating communities about how to address these issues.
- **Public-private collaboration:** Collaborating between the private sector, governments, and the public to protect marine environments. This might include ideas for cooperation between government and corporations to fulfill corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals, civic engagement opportunities for the public to engage with government programs, and other initiatives that foster collaboration between public and private sector.

A total of 15 YIC finalists will receive a Youth Innovation Challenge certificate and receive global recognition on GEEP and NAAEE platforms. In addition, 3 of the 15 finalists will be chosen as winners and will receive a \$1,000 USD prize and will be invited to attend the YIC award ceremony in Taipei, Taiwan in October 2025 (all travel expenses covered). Proposals will be accepted [online through Submittable](#) until **June 30, 2025 at 11:59 PM U.S. Eastern Time (convert to your time zone)**. Contact [GEEP@naaee.org](mailto:GEEP@naaee.org) with any questions.

**Attend the YIC Applicant Webinar** to learn more about how to submit a strong Youth Innovation Challenge pitch and proposal! Registration information and a recording of the webinar will be posted to the [program webpage](#).

The Youth Innovation Challenge (YIC) is a program of the [Global Environmental Education Partnership \(GEEP\)](#), a vibrant learning network designed to champion environmental education (EE) around the world, in partnership with the [Taiwan Ocean Conservation Administration \(OCA\)](#). GEEP is a partnership between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Ministry of Environment in Taiwan, and the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), which serves as the secretariat.

### Want to learn more about marine issues?

Check out the following resources to learn more about marine issues and resources:

- [What is marine conservation?](#)
- [National Marine Educators Association \(NMEA\) Ocean Literacy Principles](#)
- [UN Decade of Ocean Science](#)
- [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\) Marine Debris Program \(MDP\)](#)
- [Ocean Conservation Administration \(OCA\) iOcean Platform](#)

## The Challenge

**The Youth Innovation Challenge invites applicants from 15 to 30 years of age to propose a solution to address marine issues, including conservation, biodiversity, and marine debris. Solutions can incorporate a variety of approaches but must include environmental education. Solutions must be innovative, feasible, and informed by research.**

Proposed solutions should use environmental education (EE) as a key strategy. EE provides the skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors that encourage individuals and groups to be thoughtful and engaged changemakers. As a key part of your solution, EE can help ensure that solutions are focused on empowering long-term change within a community.

An innovative solution could include applying an existing tool or approach in a new context, such as adapting an existing approach to a new environmental issue, audience, or scale. Or, a solution could involve something completely new! We encourage you to think creatively about the problem you want to solve, the steps you propose to take, and who you will work with to achieve your goal.

Proposed solutions should also be feasible and address an unmet community need at any scale. Your target community could be geographic, such as your neighborhood, city, or country, or tied to shared interests, such as a school or a professional community. Your solution should consider the needs and characteristics of your community.

Finally, proposed solutions should consider the complex social, economic, and/or environmental dynamics of your targeted marine issue through informed research and evidence from credible sources. This background research should demonstrate how your solution is relevant to the audience you are hoping to reach and will help us understand your knowledge of the issue(s). [Learn more about how to determine if a resource is credible.](#)



## Benefits

All eligible proposals will be evaluated by a panel of experts working at the intersection of environmental education, community engagement, and marine conservation. A total of 15 YIC finalists will be selected and will receive the following benefits:

- An official YIC finalist certificate
- Recognition through GEEP, NAAEE, and other global partners' websites and social media pages

We will select 3 winners from the 15 YIC finalists. Each winner will receive a \$1,000 USD prize, in addition to all the benefits listed above, and will be invited to attend the YIC award ceremony in Taipei, Taiwan in October 2025 (all travel expenses covered).

## Eligibility

The Youth Innovation Challenge is intended for young leaders and innovators aged 15–30. Your innovative solutions must provide a solution to one of the following key areas, using environmental education as a key component:

- **Marine biodiversity and conservation:** Managing, protecting, and/or restoring marine biodiversity for its ecological, cultural, economic, and other values.
- **Marine debris:** Reducing and/or mitigating the effects of marine debris, including the monitoring, clean-up, and recycling of marine debris, and educating communities about how to address these issues.
- **Public-private collaboration:** Collaborating between the private sector, governments, and the public to protect marine environments. This might include ideas for cooperation between government and corporations to fulfill corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals, civic engagement opportunities for the public to engage with government programs, and other initiatives that foster collaboration between public and private sectors.

Solutions must be **submitted online through Submittable** (only one proposal per person or team will be accepted). See important guidance in *Selection Criteria* below.

*Proposals will only be accepted in English at this time. Your video pitch and written responses will not be scored based on your English proficiency, but rather the strength of your solution and your ability to communicate your ideas and vision to the judges.*

## Proposal Process

Applications should include a short (3 minutes or less) video pitch about your innovative solution as well as detailed responses to the questions below. Successful proposals will describe how their solution addresses marine conservation, biodiversity, debris issues, or uses public-private collaborations to protect marine environments, and will explain how their solution is innovative, feasible, and grounded in effective environmental education (see *Selection Criteria* below).

Applications must be **submitted online through Submittable** by June 30 **2025 at 11:59 PM U.S. Eastern Time**. Winners will be notified by **September 2025**.

We highly encourage you to use your own words and not to use AI-generated content, including written responses from Chat GPT or other AI platforms or AI-generated photos or videos.

## Timeline

- **May 2025:**  
Applicant webinar to learn tips and tricks for submitting a strong Youth Innovation Challenge video pitch and proposal. Registration information and a recording of the webinar will be posted to the [program webpage](#).
- **June 30, 2025:**  
All applications due through [Submittable](#) by 11:59 PM U.S. Eastern Time ([convert to your time zone](#)).
- **July—August 2025:**  
Applications reviewed by YIC expert panel.
- **September 2025:**  
Finalists and winners notified. All applicants are welcome to request feedback about their submissions.
- **October 2025:**  
Winners attend award ceremony in Taiwan.

## Timeline

- **May 2025:** Applicant webinar to learn tips and tricks for submitting a strong Youth Innovation Challenge video pitch and proposal. Registration information and a recording of the webinar will be posted to the [program webpage](#).
- **June 30, 2025:** All applications due through [Submittable](#) by 11:59 PM U.S. Eastern Time ([convert to your time zone](#)).
- **July—August 2025:** Applications reviewed by YIC expert panel.
- **September 2025:** Finalists and winners notified. All applicants are welcome to request feedback about their submissions.
- **October 2025:** Winners attend award ceremony in Taiwan.

## Selection Criteria

The selection panel will use the below criteria to score your solutions and select the 15 YIC finalists and 3 YIC winners:

### Aligns with at least one key focus area:

Your proposed solution falls within the scope of at least one of the key areas:

- **Marine biodiversity and conservation:** Managing, protecting, and/or restoring marine biodiversity for its ecological, cultural, economic, and other values.
- **Marine debris:** Reducing and/or mitigating the effects of marine debris, including the monitoring, clean-up, and recycling of marine debris, and educating communities about how to address these issues.
- **Public-private collaboration:** Collaborating between the private sector, governments, and the public to protect marine environments. This might include ideas for cooperation between government and corporations to fulfill corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals, civic engagement opportunities for the public to engage with government programs, and other initiatives that foster collaboration between public and private sectors.

### Includes environmental education (EE) as one of the key components of your solution:

Solutions proposed in any of the above key areas should demonstrate how environmental education can help address complex environmental issues and create long-lasting change for a sustainable future. We encourage you to review [“About EE and Why It Matters”](#) and our [Guidelines for Excellence: Community Engagement](#) as you consider how to incorporate EE in your proposal. Your solution may integrate a number of approaches, including education, science, communication, policy, and more. In reviewing the education component, the selection panel will look for the following characteristics of effective EE practice in your proposed solution:

- **Building capacity for informed choices**—EE aims to provide people and communities with the knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills to help them make informed decisions about addressing environmental and social issues.
- **Community-centered**—Integrating environmental goals within the context of community interests, issues, and capacities puts the community at the heart of EE. A community is a group of people with something in common, and communities can be at any geographic scale or in a virtual space. Your solution is based on your target community's unique needs, and your approach is tailored to their interests and capacities.
- **Collaborative and inclusive**—EE supports collaborative and inclusive relationships, partnerships, and coalitions. You demonstrate how partnerships will contribute to your solution's success, and how you ensure your solution considers community members from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives.
- **Focused on action**—A central aim of EE is informed, committed action by individuals, groups, or communities that improves the quality of the environment. While strategies like advocacy and social marketing are valuable, they on their own are not considered to be EE because they attempt to move participants to take a specific, predetermined action. EE is not focused on promoting a predetermined action, but instead empowers individuals and communities with skills and motivation to encourage positive action.

**Informed:** You have designed your solution based on an understanding of the complex social, economic, and environmental dynamics of marine debris, and provide relevant research or evidence to demonstrate this. Whether your background research comes from books, scientific journals, or websites, we encourage you to make sure your sources are credible. [Learn more about how to determine if a resource is credible here.](#)

**Innovative:** Your solution meets a need in your community, country, or region, using a new or better idea, practice, product, process, or strategy to address marine debris. This could be an entirely new solution or applying an existing tool or approach in a new context, and can include creative ways to engage new audiences through environmental education.

**Feasible:** You, your partners, and your community collectively have the necessary skills and experiences to make your proposed solution a success. Feasibility also considers how you will address potential challenges or risks, and how you will ensure long-term viability of your solution, recognizing that effective solutions will require long-term changes in behaviors, processes, policies, and institutions. You don't need to have every detail figured out, but we want to see that you have thoughtfully considered possible challenges.

## Intellectual Property and Submission Use

Applicants will retain the intellectual property rights to their solutions after submission, but applicants grant GEEP, NAAEE, and OCA unlimited rights to share the solutions through, but not limited to, social media, their websites, or other communications and publications.

## About Us



### About GEEP

The Global Environmental Education Partnership (GEEP) is a vibrant learning network designed to build capacity in countries around the world to strengthen environmental education and lead to a healthy and sustainable future.

[Learn more about the GEEP.](#)



### About NAAEE

The North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) works to advance environmental literacy and civic engagement to create a healthy and sustainable future using the power of education. In partnership with our affiliate network, we have more than 20,000 members around the world. NAAEE works as a force multiplier for environmental education by strengthening and increasing the visibility and efficacy of the profession, sharing effective practice, and supporting educators at all levels.

[Learn more about NAAEE.](#)



### About OCA

The Taiwan Ocean Conservation Administration (OCA) examines changes in Taiwan's marine life and environment and uses technology to encourage public participation to raise awareness about marine conservation.

[Learn more about OCA.](#)

## A Commitment to Education for All

GEEP, NAAEE, and OCA are committed to creating a welcoming environment for all. We believe that the many characteristics that make us different are also what will lead us to more innovative and creative solutions.

If you are an individual with a disability, you may request a reasonable accommodation if you are unable or limited in your ability to apply for this challenge on this site as a result of your disability. You can request reasonable accommodations by contacting us at [GEEP@naaee.org](mailto:GEEP@naaee.org).







Advancing marine conservation



## The Application

1. Title of your solution (maximum 30 words)

2. Which of the key areas does your solution address? (select all that apply)

- Marine biodiversity and conservation / Marine debris / Public-private collaboration

3. Video pitch

In three minutes or less, tell us about your proposed solution. Your pitch does not need to cover all the details of your solution, but it should be memorable, highlight what makes your solution unique, and address the selection criteria outlined above. Beyond that, you can be creative with the content of your video! See our tips on creating a compelling video pitch.

### Video pitch parameters:

- Ensure that your video pitch is 3 minutes long or less. We will not review any content beyond the 3-minute mark.
- Your video pitch should be in English. If your pitch includes words that are not translatable to English, please write out the full spelling of the word in the subtitle or transcript.
- The file size limit is 800MB. See below for accepted file types.
- Any music or photos used in your video pitch must be free of copyright. Please provide links or other proof that any third-party content used in your video is copyright-free.
- Finalist and winner videos will be shared publicly. Please make sure you have made this clear to anyone included in your video and that you can prove they gave you permission to include them. If in doubt, please use footage that does not include faces (e.g., shows groups of people from a distance).
- *Your pitch will not be scored based on your English proficiency, but rather your ability to inspire and gain support for your idea and vision.*
- *We highly encourage you not to use AI-generated content, such as AI-generated photos or videos.*

Please contact us at [GEEP@naaee.org](mailto:GEEP@naaee.org) if you have any issues uploading or have any questions about the type of pitch you submit.

4. What is your solution? Be sure to specify: (max 500 words)

**WHAT** | Your goal: how your solution is innovative and addresses at least one of the key focus areas. How is environmental education key to the success of your solution? If you are successful in launching your idea, what would the impacts be?

**HOW** | Your activities or approaches: how your solution will achieve that goal, including how you will use environmental education (EE). Remember to consider all of the selection criteria in your design.

**WHO** | Who will be engaged in your project? Describe the audience (e.g. community members, educators, young people, decision makers, corporations) your project intends to reach and how you will tailor your approach to this audience. Include any ways that you have considered to engage people from a variety of identities and perspectives.

5. Describe why you think your idea is feasible. In this section, you can consider the points below, but you only have to discuss the things most pertinent to your solution. (max 300 words)
- Your relevant experiences/skills (if you are working with a team, you can also include your team members' experiences and skills)
  - Key partnerships that will complement your expertise
  - How you might address potential risks or challenges
  - How you might ensure the long-term viability of your solution
6. What is the relevant research or evidence that informs your solution? Share a brief summary of your background research and include your sources. *This could include research from books, scientific journals, websites, or other sources. Review the selection criteria for tips on finding credible sources.* (max 300 words)
7. In addition to funding, what additional partnerships, skills, or other resources would help you successfully implement this solution? *This will help the selection panel see that you understand what is needed to successfully implement your solution. Please be honest here—unmet needs will not negatively impact your score!* (max 150 words)

