



# CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ROUND TABLE

2026

## 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY NATIONAL DESIGN + CONSTRUCTION COMPETITION



in partnership with

**ACE MENTOR  
PROGRAM**  
ARCHITECTURE • CONSTRUCTION • ENGINEERING

[www.cirt.org/competition](http://www.cirt.org/competition)

# ABOUT

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## AN AWARDS PROGRAM

The CIRT National Design + Construction Competition is maintained, coordinated, and judged by Construction Industry Round Table is intended for ACE Mentor Affiliate team entries. Winning teams, on behalf of their Affiliates, will receive a monetary award that can be used for any purpose to support the operations, programs, grants, and/or needs of the Affiliate.

## PROGRAM SPECIFICS

**FOUNDED** – Mark A. Casso founded the Competition as a Construction Industry Round Table 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Legacy Program (2007).

**COLLABORATION + ELIGIBILITY** - The program is coordinated with the ACE Mentor Program of America (ACE) and only teams officially registered with ACE Mentor are eligible to compete.

**THEME FOR THE PROGRAM** - Celebrating the innovations and contributions the design/construction community makes to the quality of American life, while understanding the issues and challenges the industry faces to deliver on this legacy.

**AWARD APPROACH** – Teams from any ACE Mentor Affiliate/Chapter can volunteer to participate in the CIRT National Design & Construction Competition, which uses project challenges adapted and/or modified to accommodate the competition's parameters. The true goal is to judge the ability of the students to make a reasoned, coherent, well thought out, clear presentations on their team's design and construction approaches that are *realistic and responsive* to the project's objectives within time, budget, constructability constraints, etc.

**PROGRAM AWARDS** - CIRT will present prizes for the top three national finalists (\$5/3/2K) plus prizes for runner-up entries. In addition, CIRT will provide a logistical/travel expense stipend (approximately \$1,000 per team) to apply to costs associated with attending the final round as the Affiliate/Chapter best determines.

**DEFINITION OF A TEAM** - Entries to the competition must be from ACE teams comprised of at least three or more students. The intent is to encourage group dynamics requiring assignments, compromise, and/or consensus building.

**MULTIPLE TEAMS FROM ONE AFFILIATE** - CIRT ardently requests and recommends that Affiliates with more than one team contemplate submitting entries in the different challenges rather than multiple ones in the SAME category. This will greatly increase the value of the competition and improves the odds of having one of the teams among the recognized entries when spread amongst the various challenges. [Conversely, we strongly discourage one team submitting multiple entries].

**PROGRAM SCHEDULE** - The annual event is announced in the early fall and officially begins in January concluding with the final round in late April or early May at which the winner(s) will be selected and announced. [Interim milestone and final submittal dates are included in this competition package].

# TIMELINE + LOGISTICS

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## TIMELINE

There are two rounds of judging in the CIRT Competition. The Preliminary Round involves an online review of all submissions. The Final Round will be held in conjunction with the CIRT Spring National Conference in Washington, DC. Teams from ACE Affiliates/Chapters that wish to participate in the national competition must comply with the following time schedule:

**January 2026 | REGISTRATION OPENS**

**March 13, 2026 | SUBMISSION DEADLINE**

All registrations and final entries must be officially submitted and complete by **midnight in your time zone** on Friday, March 13 (11:59:59 pm).

**March 23, 2026 | PRELIMINARY RESULTS ANNOUNCED**

A preliminary jury round will determine the top three (3) Finalists in each challenge. For this 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, all nine (9) finalists are notified will bring a representative(s) from each team to present in Washington, DC.

**April 3, 2026 | FINALIST HOTEL RESERVATION DUE**

Finalist teams will need to have made their hotel reservations in DC. Finalists will be provided precise hotel/logistical information from ACE National. The stipend will be available for each team to be used to help cover cost to attend the final round based on need, etc. from the requests of the teams.

**April 27, 2026 | FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

Preliminary Finalists present, then those top three National Finalists present to CIRT panels of judges to determine the National Winners , which are announced live (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> place). Additional details will be shared.

## PROGRAM LOGISTICS

All competition information is available at [www.cirt.org/competition](http://www.cirt.org/competition). The National Competition will use a dedicated digital platform, Slideroom, to conduct the process. **All forms and materials must be submitted via cirt.Slideroom.com with an official entry in order to be judged.** The is available on CIRT's website and will be shared by ACE Mentor via email to ACE affiliates.

The preliminary rounds will be determined by what is submitted to the platform as summarized on a **maximum of two** "virtual boards." Each of the options or challenges will have their top three entries identified as part of selecting the "National Finalists." For this special 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, all nine (9) teams identified in the Preliminary Round will move onto final "presentation rounds" in Washington D.C. to determine the National Champion. [There is no requirement that *each* challenge has a representative among the three finalists].



# REGISTRATION + SUBMISSION

## ONLINE ENTRY

To officially enter and compete in the Competition, all teams are **required** to complete and submit the following:

1. **Create an account** on Slideroom using the primary mentor's email (not a student email)
  - a. Note: If you have multiple teams per affiliate, multiple accounts will need to be made (one submission per account).
2. **Completed required "Registration Form"** online at any time before the deadline. The registration form is critical for the competition to maintain contact with the teams and to establish identification of the various entries with their authors. You may log in/out, save progress, and return to the form as needed.
3. **Upload your final Competition Entry in the form of a 1-2 page PDF.** Additional details below.
4. **Hit SUBMIT to complete your entry.** Once submitted you cannot go back to change your entry.

- **PLEASE NOTE:** The name of your Affiliate/Chapter is the ACE recognized entity for your area – NOT the name of your sponsors, mentors, firms, student group or school. If you do not see your name on the list contact ACE National to ensure you are an officially registered affiliate.

## WHAT TO SUBMIT

In addition to submitting information in the required forms, the **MATERIALS submitted for the competition are 1-2 'virtual boards' (pdfs) summarizing your proposed design solution** to one of the challenges.

The Boards are extremely important as **THE basis to make the initial cut to the three finalists**. The entry therefore must be clear, concise, complete, and well thought out with sufficient and compelling information to stand independently from any written narrative or report.

**"Virtual Boards"** (limited to two) can include: a brief written explanation describing the context and thinking behind the scheme; as well as photographs (of the site, 3D model, etc.). No specific drawings or scales are prescribed, but the presentation must convey the ideas underlying the design (whether a building or not), its overall forms and spaces, its character and atmosphere. Narratives addressing the **design process** (as described below) should be on or presented as part of the boards to the degree it helps clarify and enhance the entry.

**The judges are looking for clarity, understandability, constructability, completeness, flow of ideas and how the proposed solution realistically and fully meets the precise elements of the challenge.**

### TECHNICAL NOTES:

- **File Type:** PDF; Maximum of 2 pages as your "virtual boards"
- **Size:** Boards should be created as "print-ready" for a standard 24"x36" poster (vertical or horizontal).
- **Quality:** The jury will review boards digitally; Please ensure all content is clear, in focus, and an appropriate size. Files may need to be flattened to upload and load properly for jury review; Please compress file sizes as much as possible. If they cannot see/read details they cannot consider it in the overall scoring.
- Additional materials or links will not be reviewed by the jury. Digital files will be retained by CIRT.

## DESIGN PROCESS

The following questions are representative of the type of information that would be expected along with the design concepts, renderings, etc. (**Please note:** Jurors will consider the summaries of your replies to these questions when presented as part of your “virtual board” entry.)

**Question A:** Define and/or describe the problems/challenges you faced when deciding on the project you chose to do for the competition.

**Question B:** Thoroughly describe your process, in writing and through visuals (e.g., sketches, renderings, stepped process, before and after, budgets, timelines, workflow, etc.) that specifically and realistically meets the PRECISE or exact nature of the challenge and/or the client goals/needs.

**Question C:** Explain how your approach is an appropriate, innovative solution that *realistically* responds to the precise project challenges (including use of materials/construction methods, etc.). Explain how your entry is different from other approaches or processes, if such is the case; and/or meets budgetary constraints, timeline issues, or other construction challenges.

**Question D:** Describe any social/ecological or otherwise beneficial qualities of your solution. (For example, is it universally applicable? Is it environmentally friendly? Does it use cost-effective or recyclable materials? Etc.?)

**Question E:** Describe what you learned from this competition.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA:

### DESIGN ASPECTS/CONSTRUCTION ELEMENTS

The following design/construction aspects will be evaluation criteria, and should be explained where appropriate:

- site selection and its context (built and/or natural) – before and after
- constructability (structural challenges, materials, schedules, textures, colors, etc.)
- strategy for sustainability (resulting from design and construction decisions)
- surrounding landscape/external spaces, etc.
- life and activities, in and around the building, including the qualities of enclosed spaces showing furniture, fittings and finishes (where needed or appropriate to the design competition selected).

## JUDGING

The panel of judges will be mainly comprised of CIRT member CEOs of the leading design and construction firms and groups in the United States. As such, the overall theme or evaluation criteria for the competition is one founded on the practical aspects of the profession, particularly with respect to constructability, use of materials, meeting deadlines, workflow, and establishing realistic/reasonable expenses or budgets.

***More important than the actual design solution, is the methods and processes used to arrive at a solution. Fundamentally, the spirit of this competition is one of design AND construction.***

During the final round, great weight will be given to the ability of the presenting ACE student (each team selects ONE representative) to articulate a clear, comprehensive, coherent, and cogent presentation that persuades the judges that his/her team has the winning entry most responsive and complete with respect to the challenge goals. (Preparing the student representative is part of the overall process that the other team members will receive benefit from as well).

## FINALIST LOGISTICS

If your team becomes a Finalist:

- **Physical** Boards WILL BE CREATED by CIRT from your original digital submission and mounted on two A1 lightweight boards for your presentation (maximum of two boards, approximately 841mm x 594mm). Please ensure file sizes are appropriate.
- The Finalists may be asked to provide a hi-resolution digital ‘feature image’ of their design for use in CIRT competition announcements.
- Finalists will receive information about travel to DC from CIRT and/or ACE Mentor and will be required to make travel decisions as a team and with their families within a specific timeline.
- Finalists will choose one representative to give a 20-minute presentation and Q+A with the jury in-person in Washington, D.C. Additional details will be shared.

# RESOURCES + INFORMATION

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## WEBSITES

Competition Information: [www.cirt.org/competition](http://www.cirt.org/competition)

Registration + Submission: [cirt.slideroom.com](http://cirt.slideroom.com) [opens January]

## KEY CONTACTS

**Jenni Mushynski**

**Competition Program Manager**

202.466.6777 x103

[jenni@cirt.org](mailto:jenni@cirt.org)

*Contact for: technical/Slideroom support, competition details, clarification, etc.*

**Monica Worheide**

**Director of National Programs**

ACE Mentor Program of America

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*Contact for: Travel information, team/student /affiliate needs*

## PRINTING YOUR BOARDS

CIRT will print the Finalist boards and have them delivered to the Final Presentation location on your behalf. Boards will be available to view and practice with on the day of presentations. More information and timing will be discussed with finalists via email and via meeting on Presentation day.

## MULTIPLE TEAMS FROM ONE ACE AFFILIATE/CHAPTER

CIRT STRONGLY requests and recommends that Affiliates with more than one team consider submitting entries in the different challenges rather than multiple ones in the SAME category, so as not to compete against your own team. It would greatly increase the value of the competition and improve the odds of having one of the teams among the recognized entries. Similarly, *one* team can only submit to *one* challenge; challenges and/or teams may not be combined to enter in multiple challenges.

## PLEASE NOTE

*The project options for the CIRT Design Competition may have been derived from actual competitions that are underway or have been recently completed. The information furnished has been edited and/or modified so as to meet the needs and form the basis of the CIRT competition.*

*If for any reason you believe a key piece of information is missing or you are unclear as to a specific reference in the information provided – please make an educated guess or assumption that would further your proposal (and simply indicate what that assumption was and why you made it). Please do not let a geographical reference or other individual piece of information prevent you from completing the CIRT design competition submission!*

# 2026 CIRT COMPETITION CHALLENGES

*“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”*

– Lao Tzu, Ancient Chinese Philosopher



Image: AI rendering / reddit.com r/alberta

## NET ZERO DATA CENTER

As artificial intelligence (AI) technology expands, the need for data centers is growing rapidly. While this growth fuels innovation, it also raises serious environmental and community concerns. Most AI data centers use massive amounts of electricity and water, often straining local resources. Thus many providers have committed to being “Net Zero” by 2035. **Design a Net Zero data center that significantly reduces its environmental impact / carbon footprint, and respects the surrounding community.**

Successful proposals will demonstrate creative solutions to conserve energy and water, reuse or recycle resources, and/or integrate renewable energy sources, and at the same time, consider carefully how the building will affect local communities in terms of resource usage and pollution, minimizing noise and vibration, to aesthetically fit into the local environment in a thoughtful way, and/or other potential issues. You may choose to create an entirely new structure or reimagine an existing one, but your solution should balance the needs of technology, sustainability, and community.

The team entries *must* demonstrate: (1) the precise aspects and rationale of your site selection, (2) how use of materials and construction solutions address the challenge, (3) balance of functionality and design to achieve the project goals, and (4) provide a cost estimate (per foot) to accomplish the needs in a realistic and doable way consistent with the resources/financial support likely available in the locale. [The proposal **MUST** also include the precise CONSTRUCTION timeline, steps, stages, and remedies for this challenge, with any demolition or other pre-retrofit work described and detailed].



Image: Sanya Cultural District | newatlas.com

## CULTURAL DESTINATION

**Design an iconic structure/space/building that elevates an existing destination—enhancing its appeal to visitors while preserving the authenticity and cultural identity that make it valuable to the local community.** Proposals may be a new build and/or a thoughtful redesign of an existing site/structure, and should demonstrate highly intentional site selections with a distinct character and/or opportunity. The key is to create thoughtful enhancements that simultaneously boost local business, deepen community integration, and increase tourism without compromising the site's original charm/reputation/function(s). Proposals should emphasize/prioritize sustainable design, improved circulation across all applicable transportation modes to accommodate a growing audience, and modernized infrastructure. Proposals must address site selection rationale, visitor and community engagement, integration with existing infrastructure, and the feasibility of construction—materials, systems, and environmental impact included.

The team entries must demonstrate: (1) the precise aspects and rationale of the site selection, (2) how use of materials and construction solutions address the challenge, (3) balance of functionality and design to achieve the project goals, and (4) provide a cost estimate (per foot) to accomplish the needs in a realistic and doable way consistent with the resources/financial support likely available in the locale. [The proposal **MUST** also include the precise CONSTRUCTION timeline, steps, stages, and remedies for this challenge, with any demolition or other pre-retrofit work described and detailed].



Photo: Architizer.com

## CARBON CAPTURE

The demand for faster, higher-quality, and more sustainable construction is growing, advancing innovative methods like modular building, 3D printing, hybrid/pre-fabrication, and/or other tech-enabled design methods to transform how structures are created. These technologies help reduce waste, shorten construction schedules, improve safety, and boost overall quality. The challenge is to **design a structure that incorporates at least one cutting-edge tech-enabled modular construction technique** while clearly demonstrating why and how your solution could be a preferred, sustainable method over standard building practices. Be sure to address the specific technical constraints of the chosen method(s) (e.g. modular shipping sizes; 3D printer span limits; etc). You may build/rebuild/amend any type of building/structure (residential/commercial/emergency shelter/community or public building/etc). Successful proposals should address real-world needs while demonstrating how modular/tech-enabled building improves efficiency and sustainability, and how its constraints shape the user/occupant experience and can adapt in the future. Solutions must meet and demonstrate location-specific safety requirements for structural integrity (e.g. resistance to wind, load-bearing capacity, seismic activity).

The team entries must demonstrate: (1) the precise aspects and rationale of the site selection, (2) how use of materials and construction solutions address the challenge, (3) balance of functionality and design to achieve the project goals, and (4) provide a cost estimate (per foot) to accomplish the needs in a realistic and doable way consistent with the resources/financial support likely available in the locale. [The proposal **MUST** also include the precise CONSTRUCTION timeline, steps, stages, and remedies for this challenge, with any demolition or other pre-retrofit work described and detailed].