



COMMISSION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
COOPERATION

COMISIÓN PARA
LA COOPERACIÓN
AMBIENTAL

COMMISSION
DE COOPÉRATION
ENVIRONNEMENTALE

2023 CEC Youth Innovation Challenge Participation Guidelines

Since 2017, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation has hosted the annual Youth Innovation Challenge, a contest that invites youth from Canada, Mexico and the United States to submit their innovative ideas and solutions for improving both the environment and the economy in North America.

The 2023 Youth Innovation Challenge, hosted by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, invites North American youth, aged 18 to 30, to propose innovative solutions that will address “an increase in the frequency of droughts, deforestation, forest fires and floods; changes in climate; the release of toxic chemicals to surface waters; the depletion of groundwater; the litter and leakage of plastics, nutrients, and emerging pollutants into the water supply”¹ and other critical issues related to water. The 2023 challenge will also support ongoing efforts related to the United Nations' International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development"² with a special focus on the intersection of water and climate change.³

This 7th annual challenge focuses on the theme of "*Water Solutions for Sustainable Development*".

North American youth will compete for up to C\$15,000 per country in seed funding, a chance to present their solutions to North America's top environmental officials, and networking and mentorship opportunities.

¹ 2021 CEC Strategic Plan, p. 12: http://www.cec.org/files/documents/strategic_plans/cec-strategic-plan-2021-2025.pdf

² United Nations, *International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028* <https://www.un.org/en/events/waterdecade/#:~:text=In%20order%20to%20accelerate%20efforts,%E2%80%9CWater%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%E2%80%9D>

³ United Nations, *Water and Climate Change*: <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/water-and-climate-change>

About the CEC

The Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) was established in 1994 by the governments of Canada, the United Mexican States (Mexico), and the United States of America (United States) through the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation, a side agreement concluded in connection with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). As of 2020, the CEC operates in accordance with the Agreement for Environmental Cooperation, which entered into force at the same time as the new trade agreement, known as CUSMA, T-MEC and USMCA in each of these three countries, respectively. The CEC brings together a wide range of stakeholders, including the general public, Indigenous people, youth, nongovernmental organizations, academia, and the business sector, to seek solutions to protect North America's shared environment while supporting sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations.

The CEC is governed and funded equally by the Government of Canada through Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Government of Mexico through the *Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales*, and the Government of the United States through the Environmental Protection Agency. Find out more at: www.cec.org.

Please read these guidelines carefully. By participating in the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) Youth Innovation Challenge you attest that you understand the challenge guidelines and agree to abide by its rules and requirements:

CEC Youth Innovation Challenge Steps

Solution Submission: Participants must create user accounts on the Submittable platform and share their solutions by filling out the appropriate online form by 3 April 2023, 23:59 local time.

Submission Evaluation: The external evaluation panel of experts judges the submissions against 4 weighted criteria (see below). The 15 (5 per country) submissions that best meet Challenge requirements will be approved and sent to government officials from Environment and Climate Change Canada, the United States Environmental Protection Agency and Mexico's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat).

Winners Announced: A panel of judges, composed of government officials from the three North American countries, will select up to 2 winners per country, based on established criteria (see below).

Solution Presentation: The submitter or team lead for each of the winning submissions will be invited to the annual CEC Council Session (date to be announced) to present their solution to the environment ministers of Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Innovation Launch: A total amount of up to C\$15, 000 per country will be allocated for winning solutions. Up to 2 winning submissions per country will be selected. In addition, winners will receive advice from experts associated with the Commission for Environmental Cooperation to help advance their solution.

Rules and Requirements

Eligibility

- Participants in the CEC Youth Innovation Challenge must be 18 to 30 years old on the date they upload their solution to the Submittable platform. The solution may be uploaded by an individual or a team of submitters.
- Participants must be residents of Canada, Mexico or the United States.
- Participants must demonstrate that their innovative solution can suitably address or respond to critical issues related to water. These solutions can reflect environmental challenges relating to “an increase in the frequency of droughts, deforestation, forest fires and floods; changes in climate; the release of toxic chemicals to surface waters; the depletion of groundwater; the litter and leakage of plastics, nutrients, and emerging pollutants into the water supply”⁴; etc.
- By submitting a solution, participants confirm that they are the sole author or have obtained written permission from all team members who contributed to developing the solution before uploading it to the Submittable platform.
- The Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) staff, Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) and Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group (TEKEG) members, including their immediate family members, and Youth Innovation Challenge judges or their immediate family members (siblings, children, grandchildren) are not eligible to apply.
- The Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) staff, Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) members, CEC, JPAC and TEKEG immediate family members, and Youth Innovation Challenge judges or immediate family members of judges (siblings, children, grandchildren) are not eligible to enter.
- Since the Youth Innovation Challenge winner will present their project at a CEC event in North America, we strongly recommend that the participants have a valid passport at the time of their submission and be prepared to apply for required travel documents if they win.

⁴ 2021 CEC Strategic Plan, p. 12: http://www.cec.org/files/documents/strategic_plans/cec-strategic-plan-2021-2025.pdf

How to Participate

Participants must create a user account in order to submit their solution on the Submittable platform.

All user accounts MUST include:

- First Name, Last Name
- Email address
- Country

All submissions must be completed by filling every section of the online form.

The external evaluation panel will select the 15 solutions that best meet Challenge requirements for consideration by the panel of judges.

Deadlines

- **Submission Deadline:** All fully completed submissions must be posted to the Submittable platform by 23:59 local time on 3 April 2023. Submissions that are incomplete or posted after this time will not be considered eligible.
- **Finalists Selection:** The external evaluation panel of experts will select 15 submissions (5 per country) that qualify for the final selection of winners.
- **Winners Selection:** It is expected that the panel of judges will select up to 2 submissions per country in May 2023.

Winning submissions and Prizes

- Up to 2 submissions per country will be selected by a panel of judges from the federal governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States.
- The top submissions will be selected based on the criteria described below.
- The top submissions will be determined in May 2023. The individual or team lead for each top submission will be notified by either email or telephone.
- The individual or team lead for the top submissions will be invited to present their submission to North America's top environmental officials at the **CEC Council Session** (date and location to be announced).
- If attendance in person at the Council Session is possible, transportation and lodging, airport transfer expenses, and a daily stipend for food will be provided. The traveler is responsible for obtaining the necessary travel documents, such as a valid passport and travel visa.
- The invitation will be extended to the individual or team lead (one person) for each of the top submissions. The team lead may only transfer the invitation to another person within the team of submitters. The submitter or submission team members are the only people eligible to travel to the **CEC Council Session** (date and location to be announced). Any online activities will be open to all team members.

- The individual or team lead for each top submission (or their proxy from the submission team) must acknowledge their agreement to participate in the **CEC Council Session** no later than one week following notification of the selection of their submission, in order to remain eligible to receive transportation and lodging, airport transfer expenses, and a daily stipend for food.
- The top submissions will receive broad recognition and exposure through wide multi-platform distribution, including on the CEC website and other social media sites.
- Winners will be eligible for a one-on-one mentorship session to further develop their solution and receive direct guidance from an expert on differing elements of their project and how to pitch their solution to the ministers and other audiences.

The individual or team lead (on behalf of their team) for the top submissions will receive up to C\$15,000 in seed funding per country (if two submissions per country are selected, each winner will receive C\$7,500 to get their initiative off the ground). This funding may be used to develop a prototype, travel to pitch meetings, cover the cost of design and layout for fundraising or other promotional materials, or other expenses approved in advance by the CEC. This money may not be used to purchase equipment. A signing authority will need to be identified for each winning individual or team submission and a contract must be signed in order for the seed funding to be disbursed. The seed funding will be disbursed in one payment, with a midterm reporting requirement 90 calendar days after disbursement and a concluding report requirement 180 calendar days after disbursement. Reports will be sent to a representative at the CEC Secretariat.

Judging

- Solutions must address water challenges and have a direct impact on North American communities and their environment.
- Solutions must demonstrate that they actively address “an increase in the frequency of droughts, deforestation, forest fires and floods; changes in climate; the release of toxic chemicals to surface waters; the depletion of groundwater; the litter and leakage of plastics, nutrients, and emerging pollutants into the water supply”⁵; and other critical issues related to water.
- Solutions must demonstrate a strong impact on communities while representing a technological or social innovation with a strong case that facilitates its long-term sustainability.
- Solutions will be judged using the following criteria: impact (40%), innovation (30%), feasibility and replicability (20%) and economic value (10%).
- Solutions must have been developed by youth aged 18-30 in Canada, Mexico or the United States.

⁵ 2021 CEC Strategic Plan, p. 12: http://www.cec.org/files/documents/strategic_plans/cec-strategic-plan-2021-2025.pdf

- Any submissions containing vulgarity, nudity, discrimination, violence, defamatory language or any other subject matter deemed by the CEC to be inappropriate will be disqualified and given no further consideration.

Participants agree that the decisions of the panel of judges are final.

Evaluation Criteria

Submitted solutions will be judged using the following criteria: impact (40%), innovation (30%), feasibility and replicability (20%) and economic value (10%).

- **Impact (40%)**

How does your solution benefit, address, and/or respond to critical water issues in North America? How does your solution demonstrate direct impacts that support communities addressing water challenges?

Sub question: How does your solution integrate traditional ecological knowledge or practices from local communities?

- **Innovation (30%)**

How is your solution innovative? How does it differ from current solutions?

- **Feasibility & Replicability (20%)**

How will you implement your solution considering technological feasibility and the availability of resources? Is your solution replicable and scalable?

- **Economic Value (10%)**

Is there a market for your solution or does it fill a specific niche? Does your solution have potential for sustainable economic growth and the creation of green jobs?

Additional Considerations

- Possible innovations could consider the use of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), nature-based solutions, and support for sustainable innovation and emerging clean technologies, among others, and/or consider local knowledge and transform that knowledge into an innovative action or solution.
- Priority will be given to those solutions from young entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs (an entrepreneur within an existing organization) that demonstrate a direct impact on promoting equal access to a healthy environment, particularly from social and economic perspectives.
- The winning solutions will receive a one-year long mentorship including a session that provides further information on the Council session and supports their preparation.

Submission Use and Copyright

- The submitter(s) will retain the intellectual property rights to their solutions after submission, but submission grants the CEC unlimited rights to share the solutions through, but not limited to, social media, its website, or other communications and publications.
- The CEC reserves the right to discuss and promote all submitted solutions, and the names of the team members that submit the top submissions in any CEC-related promotional or advertising venture without notification or compensation to the participant.
- The submitters agree to the possibility of broad multi-platform distribution of their work, including via Internet, video, and print.
- The submitters will receive credit where possible.

Official Languages

- The official languages of the **Youth Innovation Challenge** are English, French and Spanish. Participants may submit their solutions in any of the three languages.

Liability

- By entering the **Youth Innovation Challenge**, each participant acknowledges and agrees that the CEC, its staff, and the panel of judges: (i) shall have no liability of any kind whatsoever with respect to this Challenge and/or the prizes including travel to the CEC Council Session and seed funding, (ii) makes no warranty, guarantee or representation of any kind concerning the prizes, (iii) disclaims any implied warranty, and (iv) is not liable for injury, loss or damage of any kind resulting from the participant's acceptance of these guidelines and legal requirements, or use of the prizes or otherwise from such participation in this Challenge. The CEC, its staff, and the panel of judges are not responsible for typographical or other errors in the offer or administration of this Challenge, including, but not limited to, errors in advertising, the official Challenge rules, the selection and announcement of winners, or the distribution of the prizes. The CEC, its staff, and the panel of judges are not responsible for any problems or technical malfunctions of any telephone network or lines, computer online systems or servers, computer software problems or traffic congestion on the Internet or at any website, and assume no liability for damage to participant's or any person's computer resulting from participation in the Challenge. Participants agree to release and hold harmless the CEC, its staff, and the panel of judges, from and against any claim or cause of action, including, but not limited to, personal injury, death, or damage to or loss of property arising from participation in the Challenge or receipt or use or misuse of any prize.

Negotiation

- Disputes resulting from the participation in this Challenge, or in the interpretation, validity, or enforceability of rules pertaining to this Challenge, shall be resolved by good-faith negotiation between the participant and the CEC.

Other

- Any solution submitted by a participant does not reflect the views of the CEC or the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States, nor do these Parties endorse any representations made in the solutions. Further, participants agree not to use the name or logos of any of the aforementioned Parties.
- Participants must follow all instructions or risk their solutions not being accepted.
- The CEC is not responsible for the cost of developing the solutions.
- The CEC is not responsible for lost, late, or misrouted solutions.
- Participants must inform the CEC if their contact information changes at any time between submitting their solutions and the announcement of the Challenge winners.
- The CEC retains the right to cancel the Challenge for any reason whatsoever, and without advance notice to the participants.
- The CEC retains the right to change the rules of this Challenge or any or all of the elements of the Challenge prizes for any reason whatsoever, by simple notification of such change on the Submittable platform, at < <http://cec.submittable.com> >