



2026 ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Call for Entries and Instructions to Submit

The American Council of Engineering Companies of Tennessee (ACEC Tennessee) annual Engineering Excellence Awards (EEA) competition recognizes engineering firms for projects that demonstrate an exceptional degree of innovation, complexity, achievement, and value.

INTRODUCTION

ACEC Tennessee's 2026 Engineering Excellence Awards showcases the year's best engineering achievements to a statewide audience of clients, industry leaders, and decision-makers. **All award winners are recognized, and the top winning projects will be highlighted at the ACEC Tennessee EEA Gala on December 10, 2026 at the Four Seasons Hotel in Nashville, TN.**

EEA entries are accepted into one of 16 project categories:

- ▶ Planning, Studies, and Program Management*
- ▶ Buildings and Facilities*
- ▶ Technology Systems*
- ▶ Structural Systems
- ▶ Surveying, Geospatial, and Digital Engineering*
- ▶ Environmental
- ▶ Waste and Storm Water
- ▶ Water Resources
- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Special Projects and Innovation
- ▶ Energy and Utilities
- ▶ Industrial and Manufacturing Processes and Facilities
- ▶ Community and Municipal Infrastructure*
- ▶ Development and Site Infrastructure*
- ▶ Geotechnical/Subterranean*
- ▶ Aviation*

**New or updated category for 2026!*

A diverse panel of judges possessing a vast array of built environment and technical expertise convene to evaluate and rank submissions based on the criteria provided below. The panel then selects top award winners in each category, including two Grand Awards (one large project, one small project) and Honor Awards. One Grand Conceptor Award will be selected from the Grand Award winners. The Grand Conceptor will be announced at the ACEC Tennessee EEA Gala as the top state winner selected by the judges. Awards will be presented to the clients/owners and entering firms.

All entries are eligible for the People's Choice Award. Project panels will be displayed during the Gala reception for attendees to place their votes. The winner will be announced during the Gala.

Projects from all across the world are rated on the basis of uniqueness and/or innovative application of new or existing techniques; future value to and enhancing public awareness/enthusiasm for the engineering profession; social, economic, and sustainable development considerations; complexity; and successful fulfillment of client/owner's needs, including schedule and budget.

General Criteria

- 01.** Engineering or surveying projects that have won awards in other state or national organizations' programs are welcome in the ACEC Tennessee EEA competition.
- 02.** Any engineering or surveying firm in Tennessee is eligible. The firm does not have to be a member of ACEC Tennessee.
- 03.** Projects entered in the competition may have been executed anywhere in the world and managed by a Tennessee office. Projects submitted in the categories of (A) Planning, Studies, and Program Management or (E) Surveying, Geospatial, and Digital Engineering must have been publicly disclosed by the client between November 1, 2024 and October 31, 2026. Construction of projects (all other categories plus applicable projects in (E) Surveying, Geospatial, and Digital Engineering) must have been ready for use between November 1, 2024 and October 31, 2026. (See award categories section for the full listing of all eligible categories.)
- 04.** Entries in the state competition may be placed in any one of the 16 categories. The entering firm must select the one category that is most appropriate. A project may be entered only once in any category. However, after a project entered in (A) Planning, Studies, and Program Management has been constructed, it may be entered in a different category in the year when eligible.

05. Each entry must consist of two parts:**Part 1:**

- Completed project entry form
- Signed consent form
- Entry fees (payable through ACEC Tennessee website)

Part 2:

- Submission materials uploaded to custom link emailed to entry contact
- Photographic display panel delivered to ACEC Tennessee office

NOTE: Non-compliance with the rules may disqualify an entry. Please read the requirements thoroughly (see Preparing Your Entry).

06. ACEC Tennessee will not be responsible for any damages to or loss of an entrant's official electronic entry or photographic display panel.**07.** The ACEC Tennessee EEA Committee reserves the right to determine, and change if necessary, the eligibility and category classification of any entry.

Publicity

The public relations and marketing value of participation in the state EEA program is substantial. All state winners will be highlighted in ACEC Tennessee's public relations program, which benefits all Tennessee engineering firms. Working with participating firms, ACEC Tennessee representatives will contact local media to announce winners and their awards. Through state efforts, display panels may be exhibited in such public venues as city and state administrative buildings, universities, shopping centers, and office buildings. These activities enhance direct business development benefits for state award winners and all entering firms.

Further benefits can be gained through feature stories presented in firm brochures, newsletters, and other publications.

JUDGING

Entries will be judged on the basis of:

- ▶ Overall engineering excellence
- ▶ The work performed by the entering firm only
- ▶ The rating guidelines listed below

Judging Criteria and Definitions

Each entry will be evaluated based on the following five categories, which are key elements of the project description text required in the electronic submittal described below.

01. Uniqueness and/or innovative applications of new or existing techniques

- Does the entrant's contribution to the project demonstrate the use of a new science or a breakthrough in the general knowledge of engineering?
- Does the entrant's contribution to the project represent a unique application of new or existing technology, techniques, materials, or equipment?

02. Future value to the engineering profession and enhanced public awareness/enthusiasm of the role of engineering

- Will the entrant's contribution to the project redefine current engineering thinking?
- Does the entrant's project increase public awareness/enthusiasm about the role of engineering in their everyday lives?

03. Social, economic, and sustainable development considerations

- Do the solutions identified produce secondary benefits of value to the community environment?
- Does the entrant's approach provide society with social, economic, or sustainable development benefits?
- Does the entrant's contribution to the project improve the health, safety, or welfare of the public or affected environment?

04. Complexity

- Did the entrant's efforts successfully address highly complex criteria or unique problems?
- Were extraordinary problems of site, location, hazardous conditions, project requirements, or similar elements present?
- Did the entrant's solutions require the use of out-of-the-ordinary technology or ingenuity for achievement of the project's goals?

05. Successful fulfillment of client/owner needs

- Did the entrant successfully engage the client/owner in the overall project development process?
- Was it an economical and cost-effective solution?
- How did the final cost compare to the original budget estimate?
- How closely does the entrant's solution meet the total goals of the client/owner?
- Did the entrant meet the client's time schedule?

PREPARING YOUR ENTRY

This section describes all required submission materials for entering the 2026 ACEC Tennessee EEA competition. All materials must be submitted exactly as designated in the Submission requirements. Digital files must be PC compatible and appropriate to the information being submitted (i.e., Adobe PDF; Microsoft Word; high resolution JPEGs; Microsoft PowerPoint; etc.).

If the submission does not meet the requirements listed, it may be disqualified. Additionally, if any part of an entry does not meet the requirements listed, that portion of the entry may not be presented for judging. Please follow the guidelines.

No reference to other awards is permitted in your submitted materials.

Categories

Each category shown on the following page has two subcategories: Large Project and Small Project. Small projects are defined as having a total project construction budget that does not exceed \$2.5 million. Awards will be given in both the large and small project subcategories.

NOTE: Having a small and large category is different from the national competition guidelines but is aligned with the national small category total budget cap for projects that may be moved forward for ACEC National's EEA competition.

NEW IN 2026

Please note the following categories have been updated or added this year:

- ▶ **Planning, Studies, and Program Management**
- ▶ **Buildings and Facilities**
- ▶ **Technology Systems**
- ▶ **Surveying, Geospatial, and Digital Engineering**
- ▶ **Community and Municipal Infrastructure** — new for 2026
- ▶ **Development and Site Infrastructure** — new for 2026
- ▶ **Geotechnical/Subterranean** — new for 2026
- ▶ **Aviation** — new for 2026

Categories

Category A: Planning, Studies, and Program Management

- New products, materials, and technologies
- Expert testimony
- Basic research and studies
- Technical papers
- Public outreach/involvement
- Water conservation
- Security plans
- Project feasibility studies/economic/risk
- Value engineering

Category B: Buildings and Facilities

- Mechanical/electrical/plumbing
- Sustainability or carbon neutrality
- Efficiency certification standards (e.g., LEED; energy efficiency - new and retrofit)
- Secure facilities (military/research/correctional)

Category C: Technology Systems

- Computer/software technology
- Communications
- Acoustics
- Software systems
- AI

Category D: Structural Systems

- Foundations
- Tunnels
- Buildings
- Seismic design
- Towers
- Bridges
- Stadiums

Category E: Surveying, Geospatial, and Digital Engineering

- Geometrics, ALTA, land title, and rights surveys
- Control, GPS, monitoring, or construction surveying
- Survey mapping, GIS/LIS, photogrammetry

Category F: Environmental

- Hazardous waste
- Solid waste
- Restoration/reclamation/remediation
- Air quality
- Noise
- Recycling
- Waste pond management
- Carbon sequestration and trading
- Mitigation

Category G: Waste and Storm Water

- Wastewater collection/treatment and disposal
- Residuals management and reuse
- Graywater systems
- CSOs
- Mine tailings
- Agricultural
- Storm water management
- Erosion control

Category H: Water Resources

- Hydraulics, hydrology
- Surface and groundwater supply development
- Treatment
- Transmission, distribution and storage
- Watershed management
- Water use reduction
- Flood risk management
- Climate adaptation
- Coastal and eco-system restoration
- Locks/dams/water control structures
- Irrigation

Category I: Transportation

- Highways
- Rail
- Airports
- Marine/ports
- Public transit
- Intermodal facilities

Category J: Special Projects and Innovation

- Safety and security
- Corrosion protection/cathodic protection
- Data centers

Category K: Energy and Utilities

- Transmission and distribution
- Power generation
- Renewable energy; cogeneration
- Energy storage technologies
- Energy usage reduction programs
- Demand side management

Category L: Industrial and Manufacturing Processes and Facilities

- Petrochemical
- Biotech
- Manufacturing
- Heavy industry
- Industrial waste
- Materials handling
- Mining, metallurgy
- Mineralogy

Category M: Community and Municipal Infrastructure

- Parks and recreational facilities
- Community and visitor centers
- Greenways and multi-use paths
- Educational facilities

Category N: Development and Site Infrastructure

- Land development
- Public-private partnerships
- Urban construction
- Stadiums

Category O: Geotechnical/ Subterranean

- Foundation assessment
- Trenchless technologies/directional boring
- Subsurface engineering
- Slope stabilization
- SUE
- Micro-tunneling

Category P: Aviation

- Landside
- Airside

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

The following main components must be submitted for the state EEA competition entry:

Item	Deliverables	Due Date	Method of Delivery
Part 1	Entry Form and Consent Form	Monday, September 14, 2026	Email to kanderson@acectn.org, scook@acectn.org, and katherine@acectn.org with the subject line "EEA Project Submission - [Project Category]"
	Fees	Monday, September 14, 2026	Pay via ACEC website
Part 2	Submission Materials	Friday, October 9, 2026 by 5pm CT	Upload materials to custom project link (<i>this link will be emailed from ACEC Tennessee upon submission of Part 1</i>)
	Photographic Display Panel	Friday, October 9, 2026 by 5pm CT	Deliver to: ACEC Tennessee Attn: Kasey Anderson Tennessee Engineering Center 800 Fort Negley Boulevard Nashville, TN 37203

While similar in most guidelines and submission requirements, ACEC Tennessee's 2026 EEA Call for Entries is NOT fully consistent with ACEC National requirements. If your firm plans to enter the ACEC National EEA competition, carefully review the ACEC National Call for Entries. Grand Award winners in ACEC Tennessee's new or updated project categories may need to adjust the category for a national submission.

Part 1: Entry Form, Consent Form, and Fees

Entry and Consent Form documents are available to download on the ACEC Tennessee website. All fields must be completed. Signatures by the submitting firm(s) and the client(s)/owner(s) are required. The firm, project, and client/owner's name should be entered exactly as they are to appear on the award.

Finalized forms should be emailed to kanderson@acectn.org, scook@acectn.org, and katherine@acectn.org with the subject "EEA Project Submission – [Project Category]" no later than Monday, September 14, 2026.

Entry Fees

Entry fees must be paid through the ACEC Tennessee website no later than Monday, September 14, 2026. Online payment methods include Visa, Master Card, American Express, or Discover.

2026 EEA Entry Rates	Entry Fee
ACEC Tennessee Members	\$575
Non-ACEC Tennessee Members	\$950

Part 2: Submission Materials and Photographic Display Panel

Part 2 of the entry process involves two components:

- ▶ Uploading materials to a custom project link by no later than Friday, October 9, 2026 at 5pm CT (*this link will be emailed from ACEC Tennessee upon submission of Part 1*)
- ▶ Delivering the photographic display panel to the ACEC Tennessee office by no later than Friday, October 9, 2026 at 5pm CT

Submission Material Requirements

The following items must be uploaded to the custom project link that is emailed from ACEC Tennessee. **Include each of the following items as the file type indicated, in the order given, and titled as shown. Please do not organize this information into individual file folders.** No QR codes or embedded links are permitted in any portion of an award submission.

01. Client/Owner Letter (*one page max, PDF file*)

Letter addressed to ACEC Tennessee describing the relationship of the client/owner and entrant in the development of the project and how it exceeded the client/owner's needs.

02. Project Description *(no page limit, PDF file)*

Give an overview of the project that tells its story in a way that answers the following items using text, photos, graphics, or charts as needed.

- Role of entrant's firm in the project
- Role of other consultants participating in the project
- Entrant's contribution to the project: A brief description of the entrant's contribution addressing each of the following guidelines (refer to the "Judging Guideline Definitions" section for detailed rating and judging information):
 - Uniqueness and/or innovative application of new or existing techniques
 - Future value to the engineering profession and enhanced public awareness/enthusiasm of the role of engineering
 - Social, economic, and sustainable development considerations
 - Complexity
 - Successful fulfillment of client/owner needs
- Summary *(limit summary to 100-500 words)*: Briefly describe in layman's terms why this project is worthy of special recognition. Explain all factors that comprise the project's uniqueness and complexity, such as innovative engineering, challenges faced, and overall social impact.

NOTE: This summary will provide the basis for publicity on the project.

03. Photos or Graphics *(high resolution JPEG file - RGB, 300dpi, 15mb max; separate word file for captions)*

Six different photos or graphics with captions describing the subject matter. Captions shall be provided in a separate Word document and begin with: Photo 1, Photo 2, etc.

Three of the photographs must show the completed project and provide the highest level of visual impact for publicity. Three of the photographs must display the planning, startup, and/or construction phases of the project.

NOTE: Because the photographs will be projected on a large screen during the EEA Gala, it is very important to submit sharp, high-quality, high-resolution images.

04. Photographic Display Panel *(high resolution JPEG file - RGB, 300dpi, 15mb max)*

Copy of the photographic display panel.

05. 100 Word Narrative *(100 word limit, PDF file - 8.5x11, 1-inch margins, 12 point font, double spaced)*

Narrative of no more than 100 words (no acronyms, abbreviations, or bullets, please) for use during the audiovisual presentation at the EEA Gala.

06. PowerPoint Presentation *(PowerPoint file, 8 slides)*

PowerPoint file containing eight slides, including a title slide with the ACEC Tennessee logo (download the most current logo from the ACEC Tennessee website), firm name, project name, project location (city and state), followed by six slides that include photos 1 through 6 (same photos provided for Item 3 above), plus a final slide that contains the photographic display panel. This presentation will be used by the judges as part of their evaluation. Do not include sound, transition effects, animation, preset timing, or slide show sequencing.

07. Supplementary Report *(PDF file, ONLY required for (A) Planning, Studies, and Program Management submittals)*

Include a supplementary report containing the findings portrayed with text, graphs, or photos, as needed.

Photographic Display Panel Requirements

Panel text and photos should demonstrate the challenges, solutions, innovation, complexity, and unique aspects of key project elements. The panel should be prepared with high-quality photos and graphics with minimal text.

All entries are eligible for the People's Choice Award. Project panels will be displayed during the Gala reception for attendees to place their votes. The winner will be announced during the Gala. The panel should convey key, succinct messages related to the project and graphics explaining the work conducted to quickly capture attendees' attention and impact their decision.

Photographic panel requirements:**01. Panel Size**

30" x 30" square, with a matte finish, on 3/16" gator board (black or white), and laminated over the front. Gloss laminate is also acceptable if this is the only option given by the printer.

NOTE: Framed panels will NOT be accepted.

02. Photos/Graphics

Maximum of six photos and/or graphics shall be used on the panel. Each image shall be a minimum of 7" x 5" or 35 square inches in area. A background photo is not considered a photograph.

03. Text/Fonts

Panel text may not exceed 250 words total, not including captions. Minimum font sizes should be 32 point for text or descriptions and 25 point for captions and graphics.

04. Required Elements

The front of the panel shall include the ACEC Tennessee logo (download the most current logo from the ACEC Tennessee website), title and location of the project or study, client/owner's name and location, and entering firm's name and location (minimum 32 point font).

05. Back of Panel Label

Add a label to the back of the panel with the name of the entrant's firm, the project name, and the project entry number assigned by ACEC Tennessee (sent via email after Part 1 submission).

NOTE: If production/printing services for your photographic display panel are not available in your community, contact Suzanne Cook (scook@acectn.org) or Katherine Schumann (katherine@acectn.org) at ACEC Tennessee for sources.