



2025 Competition Rules

I. Eligibility

Entrants must be pre-collegiate students, registered in grades 4-12 at the time of project submission, from public schools or non-public schools including online schools or home schools, who have not yet received a high school diploma or equivalent.

Students can work individually or in a team of two, but can participate in only one entry.

Entrants may work on the challenge through a school, a club, an "educational pod," or independently, but entries must be submitted to the state from their primary school of record (a recognized school or home school), regardless of engaging in activities at more than one location.

Any school or home school program can submit to the state a maximum of five (5) entries total, counting the sum of middle school and high school entries.

II. Entries

Entry forms will be made available on **March 5, 2025**. Forms will be emailed to all who registered and posted on the Virginia Geographic Website.

Student entries must be from an ArcGIS School Bundle license's ArcGIS Online Organization (not a "public account", Developer license, Personal Use license, StoryMaps.com license, higher ed license, or other licenses). Any K12 school (public, non-public, or homeschool) or formal youth club can request for free an ArcGIS School Bundle (includes an ArcGIS Online Organization).

Entries must be an ArcGIS StoryMap (must use a current template [standard or "Briefing"], not one of the "classic" templates), using an address of "**storymaps.arcgis.com**" (not "storymaps.com"), and be a single ArcGIS StoryMap (not a Collection, nor a story that launches other stories as integral parts of the project).

Entries must focus on content within the state borders of Virginia. The project may reference data outside the state "for context," but may not extend the focus of the study beyond the state borders. For example, broader patterns of environmental characteristics or demographic movements may be referenced for context, but the focus must be on phenomena within the state.

Schools must announce their own internal deadlines, in time to complete judging and provide information to the state by its deadline of **May 5, 2025**.

III. Awards

Virginia Geographic Alliance judges will choose awardees up to 5 High School projects and up to 5 Middle School projects. Awardees will each receive a prize of \$100, following release of the results.

VGA will announce its awards decision by 3pm EST on Friday, May 27, 2025.

VGA will post winning entries on the VGA Website.

Because it is impossible to foresee all circumstances, awards are subject to postponement, change, or elimination at the discretion of VGA.

This listing of awards should not be interpreted as constraining how individual teachers, schools, or states can celebrate their scholars who create entries. Indeed, there are so many positive benefits that can come from participation that we encourage such celebrations, especially for those who do not earn a state award.

IV. Design/Judging Criteria

Account: Entries must be from the ArcGIS Online Organization of an ArcGIS School Bundle license. This license can be operated by, e.g., the student's school or club, the district, the state GIS Education Team, or a similar group. The entry must be able to remain visible publicly without login through at least June 2025 (one year past the close of this event), ideally longer.

Login/Sharing: Entries must be shared with the public, and visible without requiring a login. Entries using "premium data" (login required, such as premium content from Living Atlas) must set the display to permit access without needing a login. **Be aware if you share any premium content, any credit use incurred will be charged back to your organizational account.**

Originality: Entries must be "current original work by the students," conceived, created, and completed during the 2024-25 academic year by the student(s) submitting the entry. Class projects turned into an entry by one student, and teacher-directed projects, are not acceptable. **Use of "generative artificial intelligence" is not permitted; basic spell-check and grammar-check tools are permitted.** Projects may use data generated by outside persons or institutions, within guidelines of "fair- use."

Students are encouraged to use appropriate professionally generated GIS data, but these must be documented as to source, and the integration, treatment, and presentation must be original. Entries must represent the students' work from the current academic year, 2024-25. Incorporating data (layers or maps) from a previous year's entry is permitted for historical reference, but the focus must be on current work that is substantively beyond the previous content, and the documentation must clarify what previously created content is being re-used; for instance, a student working on a project in Year1 might reuse some data in a somewhat similar project in Year3 but must expand substantively on the data, change the project focus, improve the analysis, and document what has been re-used.

Visual Supports: Because this is meant to be a "map-centric" exploration, analysis, and presentation of a geographic phenomenon, permission to use "non-map visuals" (images and videos) is very limited. Exceeding the limits means a "progressive reduction in judged score." The limits are:

- Total of up to five images created by the project author (replication of project maps as smaller/thumbnail images and items visible in pop-ups within interactive maps do not count against these limits; icons used to help delineate organization within the entry do not count against these limits).
- Entries may include static map images, but final and active maps must be generated with Esri products.
- Total of up to two images not created by the project author (e.g., 1 historic portrait photo plus 1 historic landscape photo)
- If used, no more than 60 seconds total of video. The video must be created by the project author (animated images count as a video; time-enabled map layers do not count as a video)

Submission Requirements

- URLs: Entries must provide to the school and state three pieces of URL data: the URL prefix for the Org hosting the entry, and two links in "short form" (e.g. <https://arcg.is/1a2b3c>). User should login and ensure the Story map is shared publicly
- ALWAYS test links in a "private/incognito" browser window before submitting. The three items needed are:
 - The "Org URL prefix," which is the set of characters between "https://" and ".maps.arcgis.com" distinguishing this Org from all other Orgs, for example, the "XYZ" in "https://XYZ.maps.arcgis.com."
 - A short URL of the StoryMap link going to the publicly visible ArcGIS StoryMap, i.e. leading to "https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/{32_character_code}". This can be generated by clicking the "Share" button at top right of the published ArcGIS StoryMap and choosing "Copy Link".
 - A short URL of the item details "Overview" page (metadata page) for the publicly visible storymap.

In the URL bar, erase all text preceding the storymap's 32-character code.

- In front of the 32-character code, paste the text shown here between the quote marks: "https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id="
- Click "Enter." The window should show the metadata page, with a "public URL" format.
- Partway down the page, below the "ID: [32-character-code]", click the "Share" button, and a "ShortURL" window appears. Copy the short URL.
- (For more info on the item details page, see also <https://doc.arcgis.com/en/arcgis-online/share-maps/link-to-items.htm>)

Scoring: The VGA competition will use this system at all school levels: ([See Scoring Rubric](#))

- a clear focus/topic/question/story,
- appropriate data,
- effective analysis,
- effective cartography is shown at an appropriate zoom level,
- thoughtful presentation, and
- complete documentation

Project Tips:

Look at previous national winners and honorable mention projects, and the 2024 results. This is above all a "map competition." Entries should address an identified issue/ puzzle/ challenge, not just document what's where, but look at "why it's there, and so what." Entries should be analytical in nature, map-centric rather than photo-centric or relying on too much text. The use of videos or static images generated by anyone other than the team members must be carefully documented, and such media should be used very sparingly; links to external content generally detract from the judging. The project must emphasize student work, though using professionally generated GIS data is encouraged and does not detract from scores. A good way to judge project balance quickly is to identify the amount of time a viewer would spend consuming the entire project; map-based time and attention should be more than half.

Good projects help even a viewer unfamiliar with the region know quickly the location of the project focus. Requiring a viewer to zoom out several times to determine the region of focus detracts from the viewing experience. (Pretend the viewer is from a different part of the country or a different country.)

Maps should invite interactive exploration by the viewer, not be static ("images"). The presentation should hold the attention of the viewer from start to finish.

Maps should demonstrate "the science of where" -- the importance of location, patterns, and relationships between layers. There is an art to map design; too much data may feel cluttered, but showing viewers too little data at a time may limit the viewers' easy grasp of relationships.

Care should be taken to make "pop-ups" useful, limited to just the relevant information. They should add important information, and be formatted to make the most critical information easily consumable. These pop-ups can include formatted text, key links, images, data presented in charts, and so forth. Long lists of unformatted attributes generally detract, especially if they include data with meaning and relevance not immediately clear.

Document the project thoroughly.