



— 2026 —  
ENGINEERING  
EXCELLENCE  
AWARDS

# **2026 PROJECT: CALL FOR ENTRIES**

Submit by: November 3, 2025  
Prescreening: November 6, 2025  
Judging: November 13, 2025  
Awards Gala: February 18, 2026

# 2026 PROJECT: CALL FOR ENTRIES

The American Council of Engineering Companies of Illinois (ACEC Illinois) Engineering Excellence Awards (EEA) program annually recognizes consulting engineering firms for projects that demonstrate an exceptional degree of innovation, complexity, achievement, and value. Although the ACEC Illinois EEA program generally follows entry guidelines established for the ACEC National EEA program, ACEC Illinois' rules are different; therefore, please review ACEC Illinois Official Rules thoroughly. Projects being entered must be substantially completed and ready for use from November 1, 2023 – October 31, 2025.

## ENTRY FEES

ACEC Illinois Member Firm: \$700

Non-member Firm: \$1400

(Note: Each entered project requires a separate entry fee. Each entry fee is non-refundable and nontransferable, regardless of whether entry material is submitted for a project.)

\*Please request a credit card link by emailing: [info@acecil.org](mailto:info@acecil.org)

\*Mail a check by November 3rd: 5221 S. 6th St. Rd., Springfield, IL 62703

*ACEC Illinois members are considered members if their 2025-2026 dues have been paid prior to October 31, 2025. Please contact [info@acecil.org](mailto:info@acecil.org) with questions.*

## ELIGIBILITY

Any Illinois engineering or surveying firm is eligible to enter the EEA program, regardless of whether the firm is an ACEC Illinois member. Projects entered into the ACEC Illinois competition may have been executed anywhere in the world; however, to be eligible, at least *50 percent of the project work must have been done by the entering firm's Illinois office*. Construction of projects entered into the 2026 competition must have been substantially completed and ready for use between November 1, 2023 – October 31, 2025. Noncompliance with the Official Rules may disqualify an entry. The ACEC Illinois Awards Committee reserves the right to determine the eligibility for all entries. Entries must meet the judges' rating guidelines found in the Official Rules.

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## AWARD DESCRIPTIONS

All submissions are considered ACEC IL Award Winners: Honors, Special Achievement or Merit Awards.

The panel of judges will select all awards at their discretion. A Lincoln's Grand Conceptor Award will be selected as the top project from the Honor Award winners. The Lincoln's Grand Conceptor Award will be announced at the Gala as the top ACEC Illinois winner selected by the judges, whose decisions on all awards are final. This award recognizes an engineering achievement which demonstrates a high degree of merit, is original and innovative, adds future value to the engineering profession & public perception, has economic & sustainable design considerations, demonstrates complexity and exceeds owner/client needs. Awards will be presented to the clients/owners and entering firms submitting the winning entries.

### Awards Given

**Judges Choice Awards:** One winner from each category, announced at the Gala.

**Outstanding Graphics Award:** One overall graphics winner chosen from all submittals, by the judges.

**Crowd's Choice Award:** Chosen by the ACEC Illinois members. Voting conducted through the 2026 EEA Website.

**Honor Awards:** Honor Awards are given for projects which are recognized for exceptional engineering that meet the needs of the client and benefit the public welfare.

**Special Achievement Awards:** Special Achievement Awards are given for projects worthy of special recognition of the engineer and the owner/client for achieving engineering excellence.

**Merit Awards:** Merit awards are given for projects worthy of recognition of the engineer and the owner/client for achieving engineering excellence.

## JUDGING

Entries are judged for overall engineering excellence based on work performed by only the entering engineering firm and according to the rating guidelines listed. For the state competition, as well as the national competition, each project is judged and rated on its own merit, regardless of what the national category classification is for the project. Each year, a diverse panel of judges is convened and typically consists of leadership of allied organizations, public and private sector, industry professionals, educational, and media personnel. Each of these distinguished judges evaluates entries using a standard rating process to determine award winners. The Illinois judging is based on review of all the contents submitted.

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## RATING GUIDELINES

### 1.ORIGINAL OR INNOVATIVE APPLICATION OF NEW OR EXISTING TECHNIQUES:

- Does the entry demonstrate the use of a new science or a breakthrough in the general knowledge of engineering?
- Does the entry represent a unique application of new or existing technology, techniques, materials, or equipment?

### 2.FUTURE VALUE TO THE ENGINEERING PROFESSION AND PERCEPTION BY THE PUBLIC

- Will the entry redefine current engineering thinking?
- Does the entry advance a positive public image of engineering excellence?

### 3.SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND SUSTAINABLE DESIGN 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?

### 4.COMPLEXITY

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

### 5.EXCEEDING OWNER NEEDS

- Did the engineer or entrant successfully engage the client/owner in the overall project development process?
- Is it an economical and cost-effective solution?
- How did final cost relate to 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?

## PROJECT CATEGORIES

**CATEGORY A: Studies, Research and Consulting Engineering Services** *Non-design services, projects not involving the preparation of construction documents consisting of but not limited to the following types of projects:*

- ♦ New Products, Materials and Technologies
- ♦ Expert Testimony
- ♦ Basic Research and Studies
- ♦ Computer/Software Technology
- ♦ Technical Papers
- ♦ Public Outreach / Involvement
- ♦ Water Conservation
- ♦ Security Plans
- ♦ Project Feasibility Studies/Economic Risk
- ♦ Value Engineering
- ♦ NEPA Documents

### **CATEGORY B: Building/Technology Systems**

- ♦ Mechanical/Electrical / Plumbing
- ♦ Computer/Technology
- ♦ Communications
- ♦ Acoustics
- ♦ Software Systems
- ♦ Sustainability or Carbon Neutrality
- ♦ Efficiency Certification Standards, e.g. LEED
- ♦ Energy Efficiency (New and Retrofit)
- ♦ Secure Facilities (military, research, correctional)

### **CATEGORY C: Structural Systems**

- ♦ Foundations
- ♦ Tunnels
- ♦ Buildings
- ♦ Seismic Design
- ♦ Towers
- ♦ Bridges
- ♦ Stadiums

### **CATEGORY D: Surveying and Mapping Technology**

- ♦ Geometrics, ALTA, Land Title and Rights Surveys
- ♦ Control, GPS, Monitoring, or Construction Surveying
- ♦ Survey Mapping, GIS/LIS, Photogrammetry

### **CATEGORY E: Environmental**

- ♦ Hazardous Waste
- ♦ Solid Waste
- ♦ Restoration/Reclamation/Remediation
- ♦ Air Quality
- ♦ Noise
- ♦ Recycling
- ♦ Waste Pond Management
- ♦ Carbon Sequestration and Trading
- ♦ Mitigation

### **CATEGORY F: 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 G: 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 H: Transportation**

- ♦ Highways
- ♦ Rail
- ♦ Airports
- ♦ Marine/Ports
- ♦ Public Transit
- ♦ Intermodal Facilities

### **CATEGORY I: Special Projects**

- ♦ Safety and Security
- ♦ Corrosion Protection / Cathodic Protection
- ♦ Program and Construction Management
- ♦ Land Development
- ♦ Trenchless Technologies/Directional Boring
- ♦ Recreational Facilities
- ♦ Subsurface Engineering
- ♦ Construction Engineering and Inspection

### **CATEGORY J: Small Projects**

Total project construction budget does not exceed \$2.5 million. At the entrant's discretion, except for entries in Category A, projects under \$2.5 million are not limited to this category.

### **CATEGORY K: Energy**

- ♦ Transmission and Distribution
- ♦ Power Generation
- ♦ Renewable Energy
- ♦ Cogeneration
- ♦ Energy Storage Technologies
- ♦ Energy Use Reduction Programs
- ♦ Demand Side Management

### **CATEGORY L: Industrial and Manufacturing Processes & Facilities**

- ♦ Petrochemical
- ♦ Biotech
- ♦ Manufacturing
- ♦ Heavy Industry
- ♦ Industrial Waste
- ♦ Materials Handling
- ♦ Mining, Metallurgy and Mineralogy

### **CATEGORY M: Innovative & Effective Use of Construction Materials**

- Innovative or new to the industry
- Lower Life cycle costs
- Sustainable
- Experimental feature implementation
- Repurposing of alternate materials
- New construction technology

### **CATEGORY N: Public Engagement and Communications**

- Stakeholder Engagement
- Public Input and Communication
- Paid Media (traditional, digital and social)
- Social Media
- Earned Media
- Communications Technology and Innovation

## **DELIVERABLES**

Once your firm decides to enter the ACEC Illinois 2026 EEA competition, you will prepare the submittal material. The following section describes, in detail, the main parts.

NOTE: No QR Codes or embedded links are permitted in any portion of the award submittal. Judges may not seek any additional information or conduct research; only the information submitted is used in judging process.

## **CLIENT/OWNER LETTER**

- Accepted file format is PDF.
- Letter addressed to ACEC Illinois on letterhead describing the relationship of the client/owner and entrant in the development of the project and how it exceeded the client/owner's needs.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- Accepted file format is PDF.
- This is the overview of project. Describe the problem and solution.
- Project title and entry category must appear at the top of the page.
- Specifications: 8.5" x 11", 1" side margins; single-spaced text; 12 pt. minimum size font; PDF format.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

- Accepted file format is PDF – Up to six pages.
- Entrants may use text, photos, graphics, or charts as needed.
- Specifications: 8.5" x 11"; 1" side margins; single-spaced text; minimum 12 pt. font size.
- Project Description, tells the story of the project, text must include:
  1. a. Role of entrant's firm in the project
  2. b. Role of other consultants participating in the project
  3. c. Entrant's contribution to the project (i.e., address "Rating Guideline Definitions" section)
  4. d. Total project budgeted cost, total project actual cost, entrant's portion of the budgeted cost, entrant's portion of the actual cost, scheduled and actual dates of completion
  5. e. Closing summary of project in layman's terms about why this project is worthy of special recognition (minimum 100 words, maximum 500). Explain all factors that comprise the project's uniqueness and complexity, such as innovative engineering, challenges faced and overall social impact. Remember: Please do not leave unanswered questions for the judges (e.g., "Why did you go over budget?", "What happened to the waste stream that the project produced?") in your project description.

## **KEY PARTICIPANTS**

- Accepted file formats are Excel XLS and XLSX.
- Include name, physical mailing address, firm/organization name and e-mail address for each.
- Include contractors, subcontractors, other engineering firms, architects and other designers.

## **SIX PHOTOS:**

- Accepted file formats are JPEG or PNG – Upload six files.
- Five different photos or graphics with captions describing the subject matter. At least 300 DPI (1920x1080 pixels) in RGB with landscape orientation (max. 1.2 MB each)
- The sixth photo should be labeled "project display" this photo will be used for the publications.