

2026 Middle & high school Student Design Challenge

CALL FOR ENTRIES

DEADLINE TO SUBMIT: SEPTEMBER 30, 2026

Texas
Society of
Architects

ABOUT

The Texas Society of Architects and the Education Outreach Committee are excited to continue, for the sixth year, the TxA Student Design Challenge. This challenge is designed to recognize the incredible work done at the middle and high school levels and to showcase our industry's future leaders and designers. Designs of all types are acceptable, including buildings, structures, community centers, temporary housing, and transportation. Theoretical design solutions such as mobile apps, events or festivals, and any other non-traditional design solutions are acceptable. Design solutions that go beyond the boundaries of architecture to address the challenge's theme of *GATHER* are highly encouraged. Finalists and winners will be recognized at TxA26 Annual Conference & Design Expo in San Antonio on Oct. 15-17, 2026.

DESIGN CHALLENGE BRIEF: GATHER

"ARCHITECTURE CAN'T FORCE PEOPLE TO CONNECT, IT CAN ONLY PLAN THE CROSSING POINTS,
REMOVE BARRIERS, AND MAKE THE MEETING PLACE MORE USEFUL AND ATTRACTIVE."
DENISE SCOTT BROWN

As architects, our job is to not only design buildings, but to create spaces. Spaces for business, spaces for housing, spaces for learning, and spaces for gathering. Poorly designed gathering spaces discourage engagement, erode trust, and diminish the shared experiences that are vital to our well-being. When spaces fail to serve communities, they can stifle connectivity and reinforce inequity. We need strong places that allow people to gather. What does it mean for people to gather? Why is it important for communities to gather?

CREATIVE PROCESS

1. Research your local community (ex. school, neighborhood, city, etc.).
2. Create a collage, process diagram, and/or creative document detailing the community. Gather the essence of the community.
3. Identify something unique and valuable about the existing community.
4. Adapt, create, and build upon the community's existing strengths.
5. Design an intervention to address the needs of the community—tell us about how the community comes together!

POINTS FOR THOUGHT

- Third space (a welcoming social space beyond home and work, where everyday life unfolds and people come together to connect and interact): Consider a site in your community where a third space does not exist but would benefit the community.
- Decommissioned/non-functional spaces: Was there a previous space that historically activated your community? Why does it no longer meet the community's needs?

PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

To be considered for selection as a TxA 2026 Student Design Challenge finalist, projects must be submitted in accordance with the following requirements:

- Projects can be submitted by either an individual student or a group of students (maximum four) currently in either middle school or high school in the state of Texas.
- Projects must be submitted in their appropriate category based upon their current grade as of August 2026:
 - Middle School Category (Grades 6 - 8)
 - High School Category (Grades 9 - 12)
- If a group of students that contains multiple grades submits, they must submit into the category of their oldest (by grade) student.
- Each project must have a supervisor, such as a teacher, counselor, parent, etc. Supervisors are encouraged to support and engage with students about their submissions, but cannot submit the project on the student's behalf.
- Students may enter the challenge as both an individual entrant and also in a student group submission. No student may be included in more than one group submission.
- Do not identify the entrant(s) or school on the slides, images, or in any text in your presentation so judges can remain impartial.

SELECTION & CRITERIA

All submissions will be reviewed and evaluated by the TxA Education Outreach Committee, which will select the finalists in each category for final review by jurors using the following criteria:

- Meets Submission Criteria (5 pts)
- Design & Process (5 pts)
- Quality & Craftsmanship (5 pts)
- Meets Design Challenge Brief (5 pts)

ENTRY CHECKLIST

Entries must be [submitted online via Submittable](#).

Each entry must contain the following:

- PDF Presentation (13 slides max)
- Project Description (250 words max, to be included on slide 2)
- Completed [submission form](#) online

ENTRY DEADLINE

All entries must be received by **Wed., Sept. 30, 2026 at 5:00 pm CT.**

See past projects, examples, and learn more about the competition at texasarchitects.org/student-design-challenge.

SPECIFICATIONS

All entries must be received by
Wed., Sept. 30, 2026 at 5:00 pm CT.

PRESENTATION TIPS

- Order your presentation pages/slides so that they tell a clear, concise story.
- Use drawings and graphics to support the story. Show simplified, clean plans, sketches, or other drawings that allow for quick comprehension. Drawings should support and complement the graphics.
- Select only the best graphics (renderings, sketches, images, or drawings) to represent your project. You may not need all 13 slides (pages) to illustrate the design solution.
- Edit your images for screen presentation. Process and size images accordingly.
- Show images as large as possible on each slide. You may group multiple images on one slide.
- Brief captions or labels will help jurors quickly grasp important information.
- Adhere to the digital requirements, checking to be sure your PDF presentation is no larger than 15 MB.
- Test your files prior to submitting your entry.

EXAMPLES

See these projects below to help spark ideas. Remember, this competition is open to your interpretation of the theme and your own creative design solution.

[The Post Houston](#)

[Heritage Community Garden](#)

[Alief Community Garden](#)

[Mabel Peters Caruth Center](#)

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

The following are guidelines for preparing your entry, which should be [submitted online](#).

PDF PRESENTATION

- Do not identify the entrant(s) or school on the slides, images, or in any text.
- Provide one presentation in PDF format with no more than 13 pages/slides, sized 11 x 8.5 inches (landscape). The file name should be the same as the project name (for example, "JonesHouse.pdf") and should not include the school name.
- The **first slide** should include one image that best showcases the project (can be a rendering, sketch, etc.).
- The **second slide** should include the project's title and proposed location (if the solution has no physical location, such as an app, then a link or code to the digital solution is required.) This slide should also include a project description with bullet points and/or a brief paragraph describing the project, all on a white background. The narrative must describe the project in no more than 250 words. Include programmed elements and design solutions, and briefly detail information supporting objectives such as community impact, sustainability, how the solution provides or supports "Gather," etc. This slide should include the project name; it may also include an image.
- Font sizes should be 9 pt or larger.
- Presentations should be concise and of high graphic quality. They may not contain sound, animation, video clips, or panorama movies. HOWEVER, you may submit any of those items as additional elements to support your project by including either links in the PDF presentation, and/or in your submission.
- Each PDF presentation file should not exceed 15 MB.

COMPLETED ENTRY FORM

- Each entry must include a completed submission form approved by all participants.
- Submit your entry through the [online form via Submittable](#).

AWARDS

- Middle School | Most Outstanding Project
- High School | Most Outstanding Individual
- High School | Most Outstanding Group
- Either Category | People's Choice

JURY

All submissions will be reviewed and evaluated by the TxA Education Outreach Committee. The committee will select the finalists in each category for final review by the jury. The jury will be reviewing the finalists' submissions and presentations during the TxA Conference in October. The finalists will be asked to submit a pre-recorded video which will be shared live at the conference. Jurors will base their decisions on the entrants' design submissions and final presentations. Jurors will deliberate at the conference and announce the winners to those participating in the live session. Once the final selections have been made, winners will be notified and then announced publicly on our blog.

See past projects, examples, and learn more about the competition at texasarchitects.org/student-design-challenge.