MathWorks Math Modeling Challenge
A program of siam

Official Rules and Guidelines
MathWorks Math Modeling Challenge (M3 Challenge) 2026

This competition is void where prohibited by law. All decisions by M3 Challenge judges are final.

Visit M3Challenge.siam.org for resources and information about M3 Challenge or go directly to MyM3Challenge.siam.org (referred to as the *MyM3 site*) to register a team.

2026 Deadlines and Important Dates

Note that times are provided in Eastern Standard Time (ET). Adjust as necessary for your time zone.

DATE	EVENT
November 2025	Registration opens
February 20, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. ET	**Registration closes**
February 24, 2026	Deadline for teams to request MATLAB
Friday, February 27, 2026, 12:01 a.m. ET through Monday, March 2, 2026, 11:00 p.m. ET	**Challenge Weekend: Teams may choose any continuous 14-hour work time to participate**
March 3, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. ET	Deadline for (1) coaches and students to log in and make changes to the team record, and (2) parents/participants to complete the consent form
March 6, 2026	Deadline for coaches to log in to (1) confirm that the paper their team submitted is authentic and was completed according to the Official Rules and Guidelines, and (2) identify whether their school is Title 1 eligible (public schools in the U.S. only)
March 5—18, 2026	Triage judging
March 19, 2026	Teams making it through triage judging and into Round 2 are notified
March 19—22, 2026	Contention judging
March 25, 2026	Finalist, semi-finalist, honorable mention, SPARK, and MATLAB technical computing awardee teams and coaches are notified
Monday, April 27, 2026	Final Event in New York City: Validation judging with presentations by finalist and MATLAB technical computing awardee teams, followed by an awards ceremony

Eligibility

Teams consisting of three (3) to five (5) students with one (1) coach, may register for M3 Challenge, so long as the students, coach, and school all meet the following eligibility criteria.

Individual eligibility

- Participants must be students enrolled in a secondary school who are on track to receive a diploma.
- Participants must be:
    - **High school juniors or seniors attending school in the U.S. (including U.S. territories and DoDEA schools), or sixth form students (age 16–19) attending school in England or Wales.**
    - No exceptions will be made to allow underclassmen.
    - In the case of students for whom these classifications do not apply (e.g., homeschooled or cyber school students), participants must be 16–18 years old.
- No one under the age of 13 may participate**.**
- Participants under the age of 18 must have parent/guardian consent to participate. Participants aged 18 or over must provide their own consent. The form is available upon logging in with your team credentials.
- Individuals are eligible to participate in two consecutive M3 Challenges only.
- International and exchange students may participate in M3 Challenge provided they are officially enrolled at an eligible school at the time of registration and through completion of all aspects of the Challenge.
- Children, grandchildren, and siblings of employees, officers, directors, or trustees of SIAM, and of employees of MathWorks who are on the Challenge staff team, are not eligible to participate in MathWorks Math Modeling Challenge.

Coach eligibility

- Coaches are typically full- or part-time teachers or administrators employed by a school or by the district in which the school is located. However, any professional (e.g., a retired teacher or a volunteer who leads a math club) may serve as a coach. By registering a team, a coach certifies that the associated school approves of their role as team coach.
- If a school has more than one team participating in M3 Challenge, the teams may have different coaches or may have the same coach.

More details on the role of the coach appear below.

School eligibility

- High schools in the U.S. (including U.S. territories and DoDEA schools) are eligible. Schools with sixth form students (age 16–19) in England and Wales (including British Schools Overseas) are eligible.
- Homeschooled and cyber school students may either form their own team(s) or request to participate on a team at a school in the district or community in which they reside. All efforts to contact the local school are up to the homeschooled or cyber school student. Homeschooled and cyber school students must adhere to the following guidelines:
    - Students taking classes below a full-time course load are not eligible.

  - A signed Homeschool Affidavit Form is required for each homeschooled student participating in the Challenge.
  - A signed Cyber School Affidavit Form is required for each cyber school student participating in the Challenge.
- Teams from the following may be eligible to compete, at the discretion of SIAM:
  - dual/joint enrollment programs
  - magnet programs
  - other academic or training programs that draw students from more than one school for a subset of classes or academic enrichment
  - online high schools
  - other self-formed groups of students

  For such teams, a coach must petition for eligibility by sending an email to m3challenge@siam.org at least one week prior to the registration deadline indicating the origin of the team and confirming that the team members and coach all meet the eligibility requirements.

  Once such a team is deemed eligible, it will receive instructions on how to register. M3 Challenge does not guarantee eligibility to an organization other than a recognized school, and eligibility decisions are final.

How M3 Challenge works

Participants in M3 Challenge use math and data to solve open-ended and timely real-world problems. Participants should provide insight and suggest solutions via the use of the modeling process. The Challenge problem is unknown to students until teams download it over Challenge weekend to begin their work time.

Registration and role of coach

- Coaches must register teams at the MyM3 site by the registration deadline above.
- Coaches are responsible for ensuring team members have the SHARED login credentials (team ID and password) for the MyM3 site.
  - The MyM3 site serves as the registration site for the team, and also as the Challenge platform. During Challenge weekend, teams use the platform to access the problem and upload their solution.
  - Note that care should be taken to safeguard login credentials, as they allow full access for the team's contest participation.
- Coaches may be involved at the level that suits the team. Some choose to help prepare the teams for the Challenge while others simply point teams to the free resources on the M3 Challenge website.
- **Coaches are not required by M3 Challenge to be present during the Challenge.** If school policy requires it, coaches may act as proctors only, giving absolutely no help.
- Teams may log in to the MyM3 site to make changes to their registration information through 3:00 p.m. ET on the Tuesday immediately following Challenge weekend (per the deadlines above). This allows teams to (1) verify that the team record accurately reflects who participated

and (2) adjust for no-shows or last-minute substitutions. All team data must be finalized by the Tuesday following Challenge weekend.

- Within a week after the Challenge ends, the coach will receive an email notification that the authenticity certification form is available on the "Authenticate" page of the MyM3 site.
    - To complete this certification, the coach must speak with the team (or a team representative on behalf of the team) after their final submission. Based on this conversation, the coach must confirm, to the best of their knowledge, that the team did not violate any Challenge rules.
    - Authenticity certification is required for a team to be eligible for scholarship awards.
    - Coaches of teams associated with public schools in the U.S. will be prompted to indicate whether their school is Title 1 eligible. This determines the team's eligibility for SPARK Awards.

Logistics

- Teams choose their continuous 14-hour work time during Challenge weekend (Friday at 12:01 a.m. ET through Monday at 11:00 p.m. ET). Note that times are provided in Eastern Standard Time (ET).
- The problem becomes available for download on the MyM3 site during Challenge weekend. Once any member of a team (coach or student) downloads the problem, the team has exactly 14 continuous hours to submit a solution.
- The clock cannot be paused. Teams should start at least 14 hours before the end of Challenge weekend to make use of the full 14 hours allowed.
- Teams are encouraged to take breaks as needed throughout the 14-hour work period.
- Teams must upload a solution paper via the MyM3 site before their time expires. More details about the solution paper are provided below.
- Teams can work from any location they choose.
- It is the sole responsibility of the individual schools to (a) provide any specialized staff or assistance for team members with special needs to participate as required by law and (b) provide and be responsible for any transportation of the team members to M3 Challenge events. Neither SIAM nor MathWorks is responsible for any risk, injury, or damage related in any way to any student's or team's participation in the Challenge.

Disclaimer regarding the inability of a team to register and/or compete

MathWorks Math Modeling Challenge, SIAM, and MathWorks are not responsible for local weather conditions, power or internet outages, pandemic or disease spread, and related common-sense actions, or any other situation or circumstance that would prevent a potential team from registering or fully participating in the Challenge, (including, for example, by preventing the submission of a paper during their selected M3 Challenge work time) or that prevents normal M3 Challenge processes or procedures from occurring (including for example, cancelation or replacement of the final event). No accommodation can be made for teams if such unfortunate circumstances were to occur during registration or at any time during the Challenge, up to and including the final event.

During Challenge weekend

- Teams may use computers, software packages, books, reference works, internet resources, or any other inanimate sources, all of which must be properly referenced within the solution paper.
- Use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools: Teams are advised not to rely solely on AI tools to answer Challenge questions, as doing so is unlikely to yield responses that meet the standards for distinction. However, the use of AI is not prohibited and may be incorporated as a resource if teams choose to do so. Any use of AI tools must be properly cited.
- **Team members may not discuss any aspect of the problem, nor seek help, via any means or method, from a coach or anyone other than their teammates during Challenge weekend.** Attempts to get help from human sources—in person or via any medium—will result in disqualification. This includes assistance through interactive "help" websites or social media.
- Teams will be disqualified for posting or sharing part or all of the problem statement anywhere during Challenge weekend.
- Use of MATLAB software, or any technical computing software, is not required and will not influence the selection of comprehensive awards. Use of MATLAB may put teams in contention for a MATLAB Technical Computing Award. See details below.
- **In their solution paper, teams must identify themselves ONLY by their team number**. Including any other identifying information will exclude the team from any of the top six finalist awards and the MATLAB Technical Computing Awards. This ensures the integrity of our blind judging process.
- Unethical or disrespectful submissions will be flagged for follow-up.
- By uploading a solution paper during Challenge weekend, the team is certifying that the work is completely their own, with attribution provided for any ideas found during research. All suspected instances of rules violations and/or plagiarism will be taken seriously and investigated. Rules violations and/or plagiarism will result in disqualification.

Preparation of the solution paper submission

- Format
    - Solution papers must be typed and in English.
    - Teams may use one of three available solution templates if they like. Teams do not need to cite the use of a template.
    - Papers must be submitted as a PDF file, with a maximum file size of 10MB.
        - Charts, tables, code, and other graphics must be embedded into the PDF document.
        - No supplemental files should be uploaded with your solution paper.
        - Multiple files contained in a ZIP file or other format (including a PDF portfolio) will not be accepted.
        - Teams should set aside time to create their PDF, review it to ensure nothing was lost during conversion, and upload the final version.
        - M3 Challenge organizers will attempt to convert any non-PDF submissions to PDF, but we cannot guarantee the file integrity after this process.

- **Links to cloud-based documents (including Google docs) will not be accepted**. If a team uses a cloud-based document to create their solution, they must export it as a PDF and upload it for submission.
- Each page of the solution paper should contain the team's ID number and page number in the header at the top of the page. For example: *Team #12345, page 1 of 15.*
- **Teams must NOT include the name of their school, team members, coach, or location in their solution paper.** The team ID number is the only identifying information permitted on the solution paper.
- It is recommended that teams use 1" margins all around, a minimum of 11pt font size, and a simple, readable font.
- **The main body of the paper is recommended to be not more than 20 pages** in length, using standard letter size (8.5" by 11") or A4 formatting. Judges are not required to read beyond the first 20 pages.
- Appendices may be included if there is content (such as code) that the team wishes to submit. If a team includes an appendix, they should refer to it in the main body of the paper, alerting judges to what they will find should they choose to read it. Appendices do not count toward the recommended 20-page limit.
- If teams need more guidance on what should be included, free resources are available on the M3 Challenge website.

- Content
  - It is critical that the paper be organized, concise, and clearly written.
  - Do NOT include any identifying information in your solution paper (e.g., team member names, school name, hometown); only team number should be included.
  - The solution paper should answer the questions posed and should include the following elements:
    - A clearly identified summary of results—not more than one page in length—should be the first page of your solution paper. It should be a concise, straightforward explanation of the questions and main results, written with minimal use of technical language.
    - The body of your paper should include: your interpretation of the questions, assumptions and justification for assumptions, a mathematical model, results, and discussion of the results—potentially including strengths, weaknesses, accuracy, and sensitivity to assumptions.
    - References/citations.
    - Appendices are optional.
- Citations
  - Teams are required to provide attribution when using ideas that are not original.
  - When a quote, figure, equation, statistic, paraphrased idea, insight, or any other information from a source is used in the solution paper, it should be marked with an in-text citation (e.g., a reference number [17] or author + year [Simmon 2011]) referring to the list of all references used, which should be placed at the end of the paper).
  - Any consistent citation style is allowed.
  - Citations do not count toward the recommended 20-page limit.

- Code
  - Code may be in the main body of the paper or included as an appendix, or a combination of the two. Teams are advised that long blocks of code are better suited for an appendix, so as not to interrupt the flow of the solution paper. Appendices do not count toward the recommended 20-page.
  - If a team uses MATLAB and wishes to be considered for the MATLAB Technical Computing Awards, they must check the appropriate box when uploading their solution. Refer to the scoring guide for more information on what judges look for when evaluating papers for this award.
  - Teams are not required to use technical computing to compete in the Challenge.
- Submission of record
  - The solution paper upload must be contained in a **single PDF file**.
  - You may upload versions of your solution paper at any time from the start of your Challenge time until your deadline. **If you upload your paper more than once, your most recent upload will entirely replace any previous versions and will become your submission of record.** The last upload before your time expires is the submission on which you will be judged.
  - If the MyM3 site is not functioning as you upload your solution, you may follow these instructions as a last resort:

    Step 1: Immediately email a copy of your solution PDF to m3challenge@siam.org.
    - Be sure to attach the file. Links to cloud documents will not be accepted.
    - This email must be sent within or immediately following your 14-hour work time.
    - Include your team ID number in the email.

    Step 2: Document the error.
    - Take a screenshot of the error that prevented your team from uploading your paper. If possible, capture the date and time in the screenshot.
    - Send a follow-up email, within an hour from the first email, to m3challenge@siam.org.
      - Explain the error you experienced.
      - Include the screenshot you took.
      - Include your team ID number.

    Solutions that are not uploaded via the MyM3 site may not be accepted.
  - A team's complete submission will become the sole and confidential property of MathWorks and SIAM. The coach and team members agree to permit MathWorks and SIAM to use any information contained in their entry for any purpose deemed relevant. Teams may share their submissions with their local school and community after Challenge weekend.
- Partial solutions
  - M3 Challenge values creativity, quality work, and honest reflection—especially when teams acknowledge challenges and share what they might have done with more time. The judges are particularly interested in each team's approach and methods. Judges will read, score, and provide feedback and comments on partial solutions. Teams are strongly encouraged to submit their work, even if they feel it is incomplete.

Judging, scholarship awards, and recognition

Submissions are judged by highly qualified, well-educated professionals with a background in applied mathematics. Judging takes place in stages over four weeks in a blind judging process that involves calibration of judge scores for consistency and rigor.

- All decisions made by the judges are final and are not subject to challenge or appeal.
- All participants who submit a viable solution paper, along with their coaches, will be able to download and print certificates of participation. Coaches will be emailed a link to their team's certificate files within eight weeks of Challenge weekend.
- Teams recognized with any of the following awards will receive scholarships for higher education:
    - Finalist
    - Semi-Finalist
    - Honorable Mention
    - MATLAB Technical Computing Awards
    - SPARK Awards
    - Outstanding Communication of Results Award

  Each scholarship award is shared equally among the members of a team.
- Scholarship awards are paid directly to the college or university at which students enroll, in one payment, and preferably in the first year of post-secondary education.
- Scholarship awards may be used for tuition, fees, or placed in school-sanctioned (flexible) spending accounts that are administered by the institution and used for educational materials.
- Students may have their scholarship award payment held in escrow by SIAM until they are ready to use it. **Any scholarship, or portion thereof, that remains unused or unclaimed six (6) years after the date of the award notification email will be considered abandoned. At that time, the recipient's right to the scholarship will expire, and the funds will revert to SIAM.**
- M3 Challenge reserves the right to limit the number of Finalist and MATLAB Technical Computing Awards to two per school.
- To be eligible for the Finalist and MATLAB Technical Computing Awards, the entire team must present their solution at the final event for the final validation phase of judging. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of the organizers.
- **Main awards**:
    - **Honorable Mention:** 19 team scholarship awards of $1,000 each recognize teams whose papers are judged to be worthy of recognition for their superior efforts.
    - **Semi-finalist:** six team scholarship awards of $1,500 each recognize teams whose papers were highly ranked and underwent in-depth, specific discussion by judges.
    - **Finalist:** scholarship awards recognizing the top six teams overall for outstanding mathematical approaches to the main prompts in the Challenge problem are awarded as follows: Team scholarship amounts: Champion $20,000; Runner Up $15,000; Third Place $10,000; Finalist (3) $5,000 each.
- **MATLAB Technical Computing Awards** recognize teams for their outstanding use of MATLAB in solving the Challenge problem. To be eligible for these awards, **teams must perform the**

majority of their coding in MATLAB but are free to use additional programming languages. These awards may be added onto other awards; they are not mutually exclusive. Team scholarship amounts: Winner $3,000; Runner Up $2,000; Third Place $1,000.

- **SPARK Awards** recognize teams that develop ***S****olutions with* ***Pa****ssion,* ***R****esourcefulness, and* ***K****nowledge* in solving one or more parts of the Challenge problem. Team scholarship amounts: Winner $3,000; Runner Up $2,000; Third Place $1,000. In addition to team awards, each SPARK Awardee school receives $750 to support and strengthen its math program—this may be used for supplies, educational programs, teacher training, and more.

  Eligibility for SPARK Awards:

  - Teams from Title 1 eligible schools in the U.S. (including U.S. territories) are eligible for SPARK Awards. Coaches must indicate their school's Title 1 eligibility during the certification process immediately following Challenge weekend.
  - Teams from magnet programs, private schools, online schools, academic or training programs that draw students from more than one high school for a subset of classes or academic enrichment, and other self-formed groups of students are not eligible.
  - Teams that win any other scholarship-bearing award are not eligible for a SPARK Award.

- Teams that present their solutions at the final event are eligible to win the **Outstanding Communication of Results Award**. More details are provided below.
- Scholarship awards sent to schools outside the U.S. will have the currency converted at the time the award is sent.

Claiming scholarship awards

- Each team member of each winning team must fill out the online scholarship payment form to indicate the college/university to which the scholarship award is to be disbursed.
- M3 Challenge contacts all student winners—typically in the spring and fall—via the email address on file, requesting that they complete the Scholarship Payment Form. It is the responsibility of the student or parent/guardian (if the student is under the age of 18) to update the email address on file, if necessary, by sending an email to m3challenge@siam.org.
- The Scholarship Payment Form emails will include a deadline for responses.
  - Scholarship processing will begin after the response deadline. Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for checks to be mailed and/or for funds to be transferred (to schools outside the U.S.).
  - Information submitted after the deadline will be included in the next processing cycle.
- Once a scholarship award payment has been processed by SIAM, any further movement of funds is the responsibility of the scholarship recipient.

Final event/validation judging

M3 Finalist and MATLAB Technical Computing Awardees will be invited to present their papers for the final validation phase of judging.

- Presentations by the **entire** team are a requirement for winning one of the awards. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of the organizers.
- Barring unforeseen events, the final event will be held in New York City, New York.

- Travel and expense funds will be provided for teams.
- Securing travel documents (e.g., passports, visas, any other necessary documentation) to get to the final event on time is the responsibility of individual team members, coaches, and chaperones; M3 Challenge cannot provide guidance on travel documents.
- M3 Finalist and MATLAB Technical Computing Awardees will receive an email notification with instructions for arranging travel. Travel rules and guidelines are available here.
- The Outstanding Communication of Results Award is determined at the final event and is given to the team that delivers the "best" presentation. Judges will look for clarity, presence, and polish. This award adds $500 to the team scholarship award amount.

Consent and certification

Understanding Rules and Guidelines

As part of the team registration, coaches must acknowledge that they and their student team members have read and understand the rules and privacy and data policy (below). This certification is built into the registration process.

M3 Challenge Consent Form

Participants under the age of 18 must have parent/guardian consent to participate. Participants aged 18 or older must provide their own consent. The consent form is available upon login with your team credentials. All team members' consents must be completed by Challenge weekend. By entering the optional racial/ethnic/gender information on the consent form, students/parents/guardians are consenting to the processing of sensitive/special personal data.

Authenticity Certification

The coach for each team will be prompted via email immediately after Challenge weekend to electronically certify the authenticity of the team's final solution paper. Coaches of teams associated with public schools in the U.S. will also be prompted to indicate whether their school is Title 1 eligible (determining eligibility for SPARK Awards).

Privacy and Data Policy

Please review the M3 Challenge privacy policy prior to registration. Coaches should not enter data for any participant under the age of 16. If a team has a participant between the ages of 13-15, their parent/guardian must log in and add the participant directly. Individuals under the age of 13 are not eligible to participate.

By submitting a registration form, the coach acknowledges that they received consent from all registered students for their personal data to be processed for the purposes of M3 Challenge participation, including receipt of email communications.

Only teams that earn Finalist or MATLAB Technical Computing Awards and are invited to present their work in New York City will be required to provide additional personal information for the purpose of arranging travel. Teams that provide such additional information consent to M3 Challenge sharing such personal data (such as name, address, date of birth, etc.) with a travel professional for the purpose of arranging travel to the Final Event.

For teams recognized with Honorable Mention, Semi-Finalist, Finalist, SPARK, or MATLAB Technical Computing Awardee status, each winning team member will be invited to provide personal information via an online Scholarship Payment Form so that M3 Challenge may provide scholarship checks directly to the participant's college or university.

Consent for communication

By registering, you agree to receive messages from M3 Challenge via email and/or the email communication service used by the Challenge (RealMagnet), sent directly by SIAM. Please whitelist *m3challenge@siam.org* and *m3mailer@siam.org* to receive these emails.