Orange County Science & Engineering Fair
Rules and Guidelines

The following are the complete rules and guidelines for the Orange County Science and Engineering Fair (OCSEF). These regulations keep projects uniform for judging and ensure that they abide by the laws of the State of California, the State of California Education Code, and the rules of the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF). The Board of Directors will enforce these rules to ensure all students have the opportunity to compete fairly.

Table of Contents:

PRE-APPROVAL NOTICE:

For projects that involve any of the following:

- Human subjects, vertebrate animals, or potential hazards (biological agents, materials, equipment, chemicals, organisms, devices, activities, etc.)...see details below

Students **MUST** do the following BEFORE the start of any experiments:

- Complete Early Registration by November 3, 2025
- Receive Pre-Approval from the Scientific Review Committee (SRC)

HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT NOTICE:

For competition in the California State Fair (CSEF) or the International Fair (ISEF), high school students are required to complete any applicable ISEF forms BEFORE starting their project, if they want to be eligible to compete at ISEF. These ISEF forms will be required, in addition to our OCSEF forms, IF your project is chosen for the ISEF competition. ISEF specific forms are needed for projects that involve human participants, vertebrate animals, potentially hazardous biological agents, or human and vertebrate animal tissue. Additional information can be found on the ISEF Rules webpage.

Ethics Guidelines

Student researchers, as well as adults, who have a role in projects are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. These standards follow ISEF Rules and include, but are not limited to:

Integrity -- Honesty, objectivity, and avoidance of conflicts of interest are expected during every phase of the project. The project should reflect independent research done by the student(s) and presented in their own words with proper citation. The presentation of fraudulent data, evidence of plagiarism or the inappropriate use of AI are prohibited and grounds for the project to fail to qualify.

Legality -- Compliance with all federal, state and local laws and regulations is essential. In addition, projects conducted outside the U.S. must also adhere to the laws of the country and jurisdiction in which the project was performed. All projects must be approved by a Scientific Review Committee (SRC), and when conducted at a [Regulated Research Institution](#) must also be approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB), Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), and/or Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC). It is recommended that students refer to CA and/or federal laws and regulations.

Respect for Confidentiality and Intellectual Property -- Confidential communications, as well as patents, copyrights, and other forms of intellectual property must be honored. Unpublished data, methods, or results may not be used without permission, and credit must be given for all contributions (including mentors) to the research.

Stewardship of the Environment -- It is the responsibility of the researcher and the adults involved to protect the environment from harm. Introduction or disposal of native, genetically-altered, and/or invasive species, (e.g. insects, plants, invertebrates, vertebrates), pathogens, toxic chemicals or foreign substances into the environment is prohibited. It is recommended that students reference their local, state or national regulations and quarantine lists.

Acknowledgment of Risks -- All projects involve some amount of risk. Everyone is expected to recognize any actual or potential hazards, assess the risks, minimize the risks, and prepare for emergencies.

Animal Care -- Proper care and respect must be given to all animals. The use of non-animal research methods and alternatives to animal research are strongly encouraged and must be explored before conducting a vertebrate animal project. The guiding principles for the use of animals in research includes the following "Four R's:' Replace, Reduce, Refine, Respect.

Human Participant Protection -- The highest priority is the health and well-being of the student researcher(s) and human participants.

Potentially Hazardous Biological Agents (PHBAs) -- It is the responsibility of the student and adults involved in the project to conduct and document a risk assessment, and to safely handle and dispose of organisms and materials according to prescribed methods for that situation.

Scientific fraud and misconduct are not condoned at any level of research or competition. This includes plagiarism, forgery, use or presentation of other researchers' work as one's own, and fabrication of data. A violation of this ethics statement may result in disqualification from participating in OCSEF and ISEF, and forfeiture of any awards, prizes, and acknowledgment received.

Multi-Step Process

Students must complete Registration and SRC Approval (either steps 1 & 2 or steps 3 & 4). The deadlines depend on whether the project requires Pre-Approval.
- The Scientific Review Committee (SRC) reviews all projects at Registration to determine if the project can be done safely and if all required documentation has been provided.
- All projects need SRC Approval in order to move to the Project Submission step. Only Pre-Approval projects require SRC Approval UNDERLINE_BEFORE students start their project.
- Use the Pre-Approval Flowchart to determine if your project needs pre-approval BEFORE you start your project.

Step 1 Early Pre-Approval Project Registration:

Use the Pre-Approval Flowchart or check the OCSEF Rules below to determine if your project needs pre-approval BEFORE you start your project. If so, you'll need to use the Online OCSEF Application to register your project for OCSEF by the Early Pre-Approval Deadline.
- **Monday, November 3, 2025** (11:59pm PST) -- **Early Pre-Approval Registration Deadline** (if required)
- All Pre-Approval projects require one or more Certification Forms (Human Subjects, Vertebrate Animals, Potential Hazards)
- Students must receive SRC Approval BEFORE starting their project.
- If your project does not require Pre-Approval, then you can skip to Step 3 to complete Regular Project Registration.

Step 2 Pre-Approval SRC Review:

Once registration is completed, your application will automatically be reviewed by our Scientific Review Committee (SRC). Approval is required by SRC before your project is allowed to move to Step 5.
- **Monday, November 17, 2025** -- **Early SRC Approval Deadline (for pre-approval projects)**
- Be sure to check your email often! Students will receive emails from noreply@mail.smapply.net (check spam folder) with either approval or a request for additional information about the project. Students must respond to any SRC requests in a timely manner, so they receive SRC Pre-Approval by November 17, 2025.

- After your project receives Pre-Approval, you can start your project and skip to step 5 since you've already completed Registration and SRC Review.
- Students with a school/district Fair: If your project is registered and approved by SRC before your school/district fair, your project must still qualify for OCSEF through your school/district fair in order to submit your project to OCSEF for judging.
- Please contact the Scientific Review Committee at src@ocsef.org for any additional questions but be sure to review all forms and rules first.

Step 3 Regular Project Registration:

Use the Online OCSEF Application to register your project for OCSEF by the Regular Deadline. Be sure to follow the correct registration deadline for your project (no exceptions).

- **Wednesday, February 4, 2026** (11:59pm PST) – **Regular Registration Deadline** (no pre-approval required)
- If your project requires Pre-Approval, then you need to complete steps 1 & 2 (instead of steps 3 & 4).

Step 4 Regular SRC Review:

Once registration is completed, your application will automatically be reviewed by our Scientific Review Committee (SRC). Approval is required by SRC before your project is allowed to move to Step 5.

- **Friday, February 13, 2026** -- **Regular SRC Approval Deadline**
- Be sure to check your email often! Students will receive emails from noreply@mail.smapply.net (check spam folder) with either approval or a request for additional information about the project. Students must respond to any SRC requests in a timely manner, so they receive SRC Approval by February 13, 2026.
- Students with a school/district Fair: If your project is registered and approved by SRC before your school/district fair, your project must still qualify for OCSEF through your school/district fair in order to submit your project to OCSEF for judging.
- Please contact the Scientific Review Committee at src@ocsef.org for any additional questions but be sure to review all forms and rules first.

Step 5 Project Submission:

This includes an abstract, slide deck, video, and lab notebook, along with a Regulated Research form (if required).

- **Monday, February 23, 2026** (11:59pm PST) – **for ALL projects** (no exceptions)

Step 6 Project Review:

Once submission is completed, your application will automatically be reviewed again. The OCSEF Team will be checking to make sure all submitted items are compliant with the rules, and no additional documents are needed. Final approval by OCSEF is required before your project is allowed to participate in Step 7 Judging.

- **Monday, March 2, 2026** – **Final Project Approval Deadline**
- Be sure to check your email often! Students will receive emails from noreply@mail.smapply.net (check spam folder) with either final approval or a request for changes to the submitted items or additional

documentation (for Regulated Research projects). Students must respond to any OCSEF requests in a timely manner, so they receive Final Project Approval by March 2, 2026.

Step 7 Judging:
Projects are judged for Board Category Awards by a judging panel and occur on Zoom. Students will be assigned an interview time.
- **Wednesday, March 11, 2026**

Step 8 Awards Ceremony:
All participants with judged projects are invited to our in-person awards ceremony at Chapman University. **Date/Location are subject to change****
- **Sunday, March 22, 2026**

Eligibility & General Rules

1. Students must be in the 6th-12th grade.
- Junior Division – students in grades 6-8
- Senior Division – students in grades 9-12

2. Students must attend a public, private, online, or home school AND either:
  a) live in Orange County, CA for the majority of the school year, or
  b) attend an Orange County, CA school AND live in a neighboring county (Los Angeles County, Riverside County, or San Diego County)
- Students may only participate in one County Fair
- Students in an enrichment or after school program must enter their project through the accredited school at which they are registered and attend daily.
- Home-school students must be sponsored by a certificated school teacher, school administrator, or by application to the OCSEF Board (email request to info@ocsef.org), but NOT by a parent/guardian.
- If a student's school and/or district has a local science fair, the student must participate in that local fair and be chosen to qualify for OCSEF.

3. Schools and/or districts must be located in Orange County, CA and include at least one grade level from 6th to 12th grade, in order to be eligible to send projects to OCSEF.
- Schools and/or districts that conduct a local science fair can only send projects that qualify through their local fair to OCSEF.
  - A school fair can send a maximum of 20 projects to OCSEF
  - A district fair can send a maximum of 150 projects to OCSEF
  - A school may exceed 20 projects if they are selected to enter OCSEF through their district fair.

- If a school does not have a local science fair (school or district level), up to 20 projects per school may participate in the OCSEF with the approval of their teacher at that OC school. A school coordinator must determine which projects qualify for OCSEF if more than 20 projects register from that school.
- A school may submit a written request for more than 20 projects for consideration by the OCSEF Board (email request to info@ocsef.org).
- A district may submit a written request for more than 150 projects for consideration by the OCSEF Board (email request to info@ocsef.org).

4. Each student is only allowed to enter one project. That project as presented may include no more than 12 months of continuous research and may not include research performed before January 2025.
- Students may enter either an individual project or a team project (max 3 students per project).
- Projects entered by an individual must only include work done by that individual. If it's discovered that part of the project has been done by additional students, then the project will be disqualified.

5. Team Projects can have a maximum of 3 students but must only include students attending the same Orange County, CA school.
- All work on team projects must be acknowledged, and all team members must be present and prepared to participate in the judging process in order to be considered for category awards.
- Team projects will be placed in the same categories as individual projects. Judges will have higher expectations for the originality, scientific value, and completeness of team projects done by 2 or 3 students working together, in comparison with the work done by one student.

6. Continuation projects will be judged only on experiments or data collected over 12 continuous months beginning no earlier than January 2025.
- Any project based on the student's prior research must document that the additional research is a substantial expansion from prior work (e.g. testing a new variable or new line of investigation). Testing only an increased sample size is not acceptable.
- See the ISEF Rules regarding Continuation Projects here: Continuation Project Rules

7. Multi-year longitudinal studies are permitted if they are testing variables in which time is a critical variable over consecutive years.

8. Students must have their teacher or administrator, from the school they attend, review & approve their project. This can NOT be done by an adult at an enrichment program, after school program, or college laboratory.
- The Teacher Approval process is part of the online application and required before students can complete their Project Registration.
- Students choose the teacher approval method: 1) hard copy Teacher Approval Form that the student uploads to the application, or 2) online Teacher Approval task within the online application system

Project Rules & Guidelines

1. Applications must present an experiment exemplifying the scientific method (Science), a project utilizing the engineering design process (Engineering/Computer Science), a project proving a math theory or concept (Math), or a project using any combination of the above.
- Projects that are demonstrations, literature reviews, simulations, and/or information projects are not recommended.

2. All projects must be approved by the Scientific Review Committee (SRC) before being allowed to compete in OCSEF.
- Pre-Approval by SRC is required <u>BEFORE</u> the project begins if it involves: human participants, vertebrate animals, and potential hazards (biological agents, materials, equipment, chemicals, organisms, devices, activities, etc.). These projects must follow the Pre-Approval Early Registration deadline.
- When conducted at a Regulated Research Institution, a project must also be approved by an additional regulatory board, such as:
  - Institutional Review Board (IRB) – human subjects/participation
  - Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) – vertebrate animal research at research facility
  - Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) – use of recombinant or synthetic DNA/RNA and other biohazards at a research facility

3. Students are responsible for selecting an appropriate category in which to enter the project. **The chosen category should be the FOCUS of the project. This will determine how the project is judged.**
- See the **NEW** list of Project Categories (**HERE**) with descriptions and project examples
- The OCSEF Board will review all applications and may change category assignments, if necessary, to ensure that projects with similar topics are placed in the same category for judging.
- Be sure to provide a complete and accurate description of your project to ensure your project is placed in the proper category.

4. Continuation projects include any project based on the student's prior research.
- These projects must document that the additional research is a substantial expansion from prior work (e.g. testing a new variable or new line of investigation). Testing only an increased sample size is not acceptable.
- Projects will be judged only on experiments and data collection performed over 12 continuous months beginning no earlier than January 2025.
- All continuation projects are required to have a completed Continuation Projects Form (**HERE**) as part of Project Registration. Students must also upload the prior year's abstract and research plan/project summary.
- Project summary, slide deck, and presentation must reflect only the current year's work.
- See the ISEF Rules regarding Continuation Projects

5. Artificial Intelligence may be used only as a tool to conduct the project. Its specific use must be cited including prompts (i.e. text-based inputs/commands). All components of a project submission and presentation (e.g. research plan, abstract, slide deck, etc.) must be in the student's own words and can NOT be generated by an AI application.

6. Students must be present virtually to speak with the OCSEF judges (Zoom breakout room format).
- Appointments for judging interviews virtually through Zoom will be assigned after the Project Submission deadline.
- All students for a team project must be present virtually at the same time and participate in the interview with the judges. Students can login separately.
- Only students being interviewed will be allowed in the judging area (Zoom breakout room).
- Students are not allowed to screen share during the interview. The judges may, at their discretion, screen share a portion of your slide deck (e.g. data table, results, etc.). However, your interview presentation will be judged upon your ability to summarize your project without significant notes.
- Students may show their equipment or short demonstrations relevant to their projects during their interview with the judges.

Pre-Approval & Certification Forms

If a project involves any of the following:
- Human subjects, vertebrate animals, or potential hazards (biological agents, materials, equipment, chemicals, organisms, tissues, devices, activities, etc.)
- Refer to the Pre-Approval Student Flowchart (**HERE**) and details listed below to determine if your project requires pre-approval and a certification form BEFORE you start your project.

Then, students MUST complete the following BEFORE the start of any experiment:
- Complete the corresponding Certification Form(s): Human Subjects, Vertebrate Animals, Potential Hazards, or Regulated Research
- Complete the Step 1 Project Registration process (including uploading Certification Forms) before the Pre-Approval Early Registration Deadline
- Receive Pre-Approval from OCSEF's Scientific Review Committee (SRC)

Below are additional details for all Certification Forms and links to each form can be found: 1) on our OCSEF Website under Certification Forms or 2) within the Online OCSEF Application
- All OCSEF projects follow ISEF Rules.

Human Subjects:
All projects involving human subjects, a survey/questionnaire (online or in-person), experimental/physical activities or device testing on yourself or others, observing humans, or using identifiable data (e.g. names,

addresses, birth date, phone number) from living humans, must conform to the regulations listed here, all ISEF Rules, and the guidance on the OCSEF Human Subjects Certification Form.

- A Certification Form is required even if the human subject is the student themselves and for all human datasets.
- Please refer to the Human Studies Risk Assessment Guide (**HERE**) when designing your research project to ensure the rights and welfare of your human participants are protected.
- Please refer to the Online Survey Consent Procedures (**HERE**) if using an online survey/questionnaire as part of your project.
- All human participant studies, including any type of survey, involving minors (students under 18 years of age) must receive assent from the student participant and written parental permission from a legal guardian.
- Students are prohibited from independently diagnosing disease, providing medical advice, administering medication, and/or performing medical procedures. These projects must also be supervised by a qualified medical professional. This includes publishing diagnostic apps on public websites or app stores without appropriate FDA approvals.
- A student may observe and collect data for analysis of medical procedures, medication/treatment efficacy, and diagnosis of illness, only under the direct supervision of a licensed health care provider/professional. This Healthcare provider/professional must be named in the research plan/ protocol approved by the SRC.

Vertebrate Animal Projects:

All projects involving non-human vertebrate animals (mammals, fish, birds, reptiles, or amphibians) plus cephalopods (which are potential sentient animals), including any invasive work with vertebrates, must conform to all ISEF Rules and the guidance listed on the OCSEF Vertebrate Animal Certification Form.

- The project must be planned and carried out under the direct supervision of a veterinarian, designated supervisor, or qualified scientist as required by the OCSEF Scientific Review Committee.
- Vertebrate animal studies without this certification will not be allowed in the OCSEF for judging.
- Because significant weight loss is one sign of stress, the maximum permissible weight loss or growth retardation – compared to controls – of any animal is 15%. Student researchers are expected to regularly monitor the health of their animals and record their weights.
- Projects that are purely observational studies of wild animals (not pets) in their natural environment are exempt from Pre-Approval and the Certification Form if ALL of the following apply:
  - There is no interaction with the animals being observed
  - There is no manipulation of the animal environment in any way
  - The study meets all federal and state agriculture, fish, game and wildlife laws and regulations, and
  - The student provides enough details in their application for the SRC Team to determine whether the project is purely observational

Potential Hazards:

All projects that involve potential hazards (biological agents, materials, equipment, chemicals, organisms, tissues, devices, activities, etc.) must conform to the regulations listed here, all ISEF Rules, and the guidance listed on the Potential Hazards Certification Form. There are many different potential hazards, so please read carefully through the following examples and guidelines.

1. Materials, Equipment, or Tools -- defined as anything that involves a level of risk above and beyond that encountered in the student's everyday life or whose operation requires a moderate to high level of expertise to ensure safety. This can include but is not limited to the following examples commonly seen in projects.

- soldering iron, stove/oven, saw/drill, generator, lasers, 3D printer, electricity, testing pH, UV light, charcoal, flammable materials, rockets, and building a device from components

2. Chemicals, Organisms, Animal Tissue, or DNA -- defined as any substances that require safety precautions as outlined in the Materials Safety Data Sheet or require a properly equipped laboratory with qualified supervision. This can include but is not limited to the following examples commonly seen in projects.

- solvents, ferrofluid, gases, biofuel, acids, bases
- microorganisms (bacteria, viruses, fungi, viroids, rickettsia, cyanobacteria, parasites, or mold)
- controlled substances (prescription drugs, tobacco, explosives, strong acids & bases, pyrophoric chemicals, organic solvents, etc.)
- meat or non-commercial eggs
- tissues, cell cultures, samples from a human or animal body (swabs, hair, saliva, teeth, bone, blood, etc.) even if from the student
- samples collected from the environment
- DNA, RNA, or Recombinant DNA

3. Students must carefully plan and follow safe procedures. Explicit details about how and where experiments or engineering designs will be done must be listed on the Potential Hazards Certification form, including the materials, tools, and/or equipment used.

- Specific materials and experimental conditions may be exempt. If you are unsure, either contact SRC (src@ocsef.org) or go ahead and complete the Hazards Certification Form so approval of your project is not delayed.
- Culturing & incubating microorganisms (bacteria, viruses, fungi, molds, etc.) in the home environment is prohibited. Contact your teacher with further questions. Projects involving the incubation of microorganisms at home will be disqualified.
- Appropriate safety precautions, including personal protective equipment (eye goggles, aprons, gloves, etc.) must be followed when hazards exist. Students should also have appropriate adult supervision.

4. Projects involving multidrug resistant organisms and Recombinant DNA (rDNA) technologies must be conducted in a Regulated Research Institution and approved by their Biosafety Committee.

- Genome editing studies, that include alteration of germline cells, must be completed in a BSL-2 (Biosafety level 2) laboratory, and approved by the Institutional Biosafety Committee.

- Students may not perform bioengineering for the following purposes:
  - the insertion of antibiotic-resistant traits
  - for designing or selecting multiple drug-resistant organisms.
- Students may not be involved in the direct acquisition of recombinant DNA, tissue, organs, or other body parts (including blood and meat) from humans or vertebrate animals; they must be acquired by qualified adults or from a commercial or medical source.

Regulated Research:

Students who perform projects in whole or part at an industrial lab, university, hospital, or other institution and not their school or home environment must conform to the regulations listed here, ISEF Rules, and the guidance on the Regulated Research Certification Form.

- Approval letters from the appropriate institutional oversight committees on official letterhead (e.g. IRB, Environmental Health and Safety and/or IACUC) must be attached to the Certification of Regulated Research form. Letters from the Principal Investigator of the Laboratory attesting to appropriate approvals will NOT be accepted.
- As part of Project Submission (see below), students will be required to upload any applicable approval documents that attest to any required review by the institutional regulatory board or safety officer (IRB, IACUC, IBC, EH&S, etc). This official document should confirm that you were authorized and received required safety training to work in this laboratory.
- Studies that culture clinically significant multi drug-resistant organisms (e.g. MRSA, VISA/VRSA, VRE, CRE, ESBLs, or fungi with known resistance to antifungal agents) require Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) approval, BSL-2 (Biosafety Level 2) containment and must have written justification for usage and be conducted in a Regulated Research setting.
- Projects involving Recombinant DNA (rDNA) technologies and Genome editing studies that include alteration of germline cells must be completed in a BSL-2 laboratory and approved by the Institutional Biosafety Committee.

Application Guidelines

Be sure to follow these guidelines and tips for completing your application correctly and to avoid any delays in project approval. OCSEF uses an Online Application for Project Registration and Project Submission, along with our own Certification Forms and Slide Deck templates.

1. Project Registration Deadlines:
- **Monday, November 3, 2025** (11:59pm PST) -- **Early Pre-Approval Deadline** (if pre-approval required)
  - Use the Pre-Approval Flowchart (**HERE**) to help determine if your project needs Pre-Approval BEFORE you start your project.
  - All Pre-Approval projects require one or more Certification Forms (Human Participants, Vertebrate Animals, or Potential Hazards).

- **Wednesday, February 4, 2026** (11:59pm PST) – **Regular Deadline** (no pre-approval required)
- No exceptions to the deadlines. Do not wait until the last moment to complete your project registration.

2. DO NOT create duplicate applications. <u>Team Projects</u>: Only create and register one application per project. You will add all partner information to one application, then partners must be invited as Collaborators to the application.

3. Only use a PERSONAL STUDENT email address (**NO SCHOOL email addresses**) when creating your account and in your project application. We will not be able to contact you if you use a school email address. (Sign up for a free Gmail account if you have no other alternative)

4. Students will receive email notifications from noreply@mail.smapply.net (check spam folder). **If parents also want to receive email notifications, the student needs to: 1) invite their parent as a Collaborator to the application and 2) enter a separate email address for their parent when filling out their project application**.

5. The status of your application is shown on the MyApplications Dashboard.

6. You can work on your project application over multiple sessions by saving your progress. After each on-line session with your application, click on "Save & Continue Editing."

7. **All required tasks must be completed before you are able to complete the registration of your project application**. For each task, complete all sections, review to make sure no edits are needed, then select "Mark as Complete". You will see the status of each task in the Task List (on the left-hand side of your application page). The status of completion for each task is represented by a circle symbol.
- Task has not been started = circle with "no color" inside
- Task started but incomplete = circle half-filled with a green color
- Task is complete = circle completely filled with a solid green color plus a white checkmark
- <u>Note</u>: Clicking "Mark as Complete" for a task does not mean your project is registered.

8. Once the "OCSEF Application" task is marked as complete, additional tasks for the following may appear if needed, based on your answers.
- Teacher Online Approval (if online option is chosen)
- Additional Signatures for partners & partner parents (team projects only)

9. Check the "Task List" Column frequently since some of the tasks require signatures from your teacher, parent/guardian and team project partners/guardians. You may need to follow up with them to make sure they complete their part of the application. Once teachers and parents/guardians complete their tasks, you will need to finalize your registration by clicking "Submit".
- Students will need to complete the Teacher Online Approval task AFTER their teacher completes the online form.

10. Once ALL tasks are completed, **be sure to click the "Submit" button to finalize your Project Registration**. If you do not click submit, then your project application will NOT be registered and will not move to the next stage.
- Project applications CAN NOT be edited once finalized. Review your answers carefully before selecting "Submit".

11. For questions on the Project Registration tasks or if you are having technical difficulties, contact OCSEF at info@ocsef.org. Please read the instructions carefully before contacting OCSEF.

12. You will receive a confirmation email from noreply@mail.smapply.net once your project registration has been finalized. All applications will then undergo review by the OCSEF Scientific Review Committee (SRC) to check for compliance with the OCSEF rules, safety concerns, and inclusion of any necessary Certification Forms. After SRC Review, you will get an email stating one of the following:
- Your application is approved and will move to the Project Submission stage
- Your application needs additional information before being approved

13. If the SRC Team requires additional information, the email notification from noreply@mail.smapply.net will include the information needed and how to update your application. Check your email and spam folder often. **Students are responsible for making ALL requested changes to their application and resubmitting it for additional SRC Review in order to obtain SRC Approval.**
- **Projects requiring SRC Pre-Approval can not start until approved by SRC and must complete any requested changes by the Early Registration Deadline of November 3, 2025.**
- All other projects that do not require Pre-Approval must complete any requested changes by the Regular Registration Deadline of February 2, 2026.
- After the registration deadline, you will no longer be able to update/resubmit your application.
- Only projects with SRC Approval will be eligible for Project Submission.

Project Registration Requirements

All projects must be registered by the appropriate deadline as the first step in being eligible for OCSEF. All of the following items must be completed as part of the registration process. Students are expected to read and follow all OCSEF rules and guidelines.

1. Student Information - please provide all required information about the student(s). If a team project is selected, additional fields will appear to enter information for each student. Be sure to provide current and complete email addresses, phone numbers, and residential addresses for communication and mailing purposes.

2. <u>Project Information</u> - be sure to provide detailed information for each question about your project, as this is what the SRC Team uses to determine if they will approve your project. Your application will be sent back to you for revisions if the information is incomplete, which could result in your project approval being delayed.

3. <u>Certification Forms</u> - if your project includes any of the following, you will need to complete & sign the corresponding forms as part of your project registration application.
- Human subjects, vertebrate animals, or potential hazards (biological agents, materials, equipment, chemicals, tissues, organisms, devices, activities, etc.)
- Regulated research projects will need to complete page 1 of the Regulated Research Certification Form and upload it as part of Project Registration. The remaining pages of this form should be completed after your project is done and uploaded as part of your Project Submission.
- Continuation projects will need to complete the Continuation Projects Form and upload it as part of Project Registration. Students must document that the additional research is a substantial expansion from prior work. Students must also upload the prior year's abstract and research plan/project summary.

4. <u>Teacher Approval</u> - the teacher at the school they attend and listed on the application must review the project application and provide their approval. This process is done through the online application system. Students invite their teacher to review their application and sign the Teacher Approval form online.

5. <u>Student & Parent Signatures</u> - separate signature tasks will appear for each student and parent/guardian to provide their acknowledgement of the rules and their individual signature.

6. <u>Collaborators</u> - students must use this feature to invite their parent/guardian and other students (for a team project) so that:
- their parent/guardian receives all email communications
- other students on a team project receive all email communications
- other students on a team project can help complete the application
- parents/guardians and other students (for a team project) can provide their signatures

Final Project Submission Requirements

Once the project is approved by the SRC and completed, the following project components must be uploaded to the application to complete Step 5 Project Submission prior to the deadline. Be sure to follow additional guidelines for each component below.

Abstract:
Students must write an Abstract (maximum of 250 words) after finishing their project. This must be written in their own words. It is recommended that the Abstract include the following:
- Purpose of the experiment or design

- Procedure/methodology used
- Most important/significant results you found
- Conclusions and research applications

Slide Deck:

Students must create and submit a Slide Deck about their project using one of the digital templates. The use of a standard presentation format assures equity in judging.

- Maximum of 12 slides and maximum file size of 10 MB
- Save your file as a pdf before uploading to your Project Submission application
- Follow and comply with all criteria and formatting clearly outlined on the first slide of the template. Be sure to delete the first slide with the formatting instructions before submitting.
- The slide deck must be in the student's own words/design and can NOT be generated by an AI application.
- Students may NOT include links to any websites or additional project information.
- Slides 1-11 must cite sources for all graphics, photos, and resources.
- Slide 12 can include web addresses for online resources cited (following APA Citation guidelines).
- Use the **NEW** template that matches your project type.
  - Science Slide Deck (download **HERE**)
  - Engineering/Computer Science Slide Deck (download **HERE**)
  - Math Slide Deck (download **HERE**)
- Projects may not display procedures detrimental to the health and well-being of vertebrate animals or humans. The OCSEF Board of Directors reserves the right to deny any display of photographs/visual images/charts/tables and/or graphs of such, as determined by the OCSEF Scientific Review Committee

Video:

1. Students must create and submit a Video about their project for the judges to view.

- Maximum of 3 minutes
- Videos must be uploaded to YouTube and marked as "Unlisted"
- The video must be in the student's own words/design and can not be generated by an AI application.
- You will provide a link to your YouTube video as part of your Project Submission
- For team projects, each student must participate in the video and be given equal time
- Your video should include the following:
  - Student(s) must be visible throughout the video
  - Students need to talk about what they did (summary of your question/problem), how they did it (procedures), and what they learned (results and analysis, conclusions, applications, and next steps)
- If you need help editing your video, YouTube has great resources

2. Uploading a video to YouTube is simple. If you have a gmail account, then you already have a YouTube account. Follow these steps to upload your video to YouTube and obtain a link for your OCSEF project.

- Go to YouTube.com and sign in using your Gmail/google account

- In the top-right corner, click on the "Create" button and choose Upload video
- Select the video file you want to upload
- Add a title to your video, then click "No, not for kids"
- Click "Next" until you get to the Visibility page, then choose "Unlisted", and click "Save"
- In the new window that appears, click on the "Copy Link" icon (next to the video link shown) and paste it into a new browser window to confirm that the link works.
- Then be sure to copy the link from that browser into a separate document and use this new link for the "Upload Video" task of your project submission. Your link should now begin with "https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=".

Lab Notebook:

Students must use a Lab Notebook while conducting their science experiment, engineering/computer science design, or math project. The Lab Notebook serves as a log that documents what you did, how you did it, and why so someone else can repeat what you did.

- Each image of a page can be a maximum size of 10 MB each
- File types accepted: jpg, jpeg, png and pdf
- Can be handwritten or digital, but pages should be dated & signed and easy to read by the judges.
- Types of image uploads required:
  - Raw Data (3 images max)
  - Observations, quantitative and qualitative (2 images max)
  - Additional images depending on the type of project:
    - Science - Calculations (2 images max)
    - Engineering – Prototype(s)/Model Design(s), labeled (2 images max)
    - Computer Science – Code/Algorithm, written by you (2 images max)
    - Math – Proof/Theory (2 images max)
- Note: graphs, references, & pictures of yourself doing the project belong in the slide deck

Regulated Research Projects:

Students must indicate whether or not they conducted any part of their research at a private or academic lab, college/university lab, hospital, industrial lab, or any private facility (other than at the school they attend), including in both the US and other countries. If yes, students need to do the following as part of their Project Submission:

- Complete the Regulated Research Certification Form AFTER the project is finished and upload it to their application.
- Also upload any applicable approval documents that attest to any required review by the institutional regulatory board or safety officer (IRB, IACUC, IBC, EH&S, etc). This official document should confirm that you were authorized and received the required safety training to work in this laboratory.