



ACEC Minnesota 2026 ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE AWARDS



2025 EEA Grand Conceptor, Excellence in QBS &
People's Choice Award Winner:

I-35W Underground Stormwater Storage Facility

BARR

Save the Date
for the Gala:

Friday, February 6th, 2026
At the McNamara Alumni
Center in Minneapolis

ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE AWARDS (EEA) GUIDELINES

ACEC Minnesota's annual Engineering Excellence Awards competition recognizes engineering firms for projects that demonstrate excellence in the categories of innovation; complexity; sustainability and social benefit; value to the future of the engineering profession and public awareness; and fulfillment of client needs.

These guidelines will assist you in preparing your entry for the 2026 EEA competition. There are updates from last year as well as differences between ACEC Minnesota guidelines and ACEC National guidelines, so please read this document carefully.

On this page you'll find a high-level overview of key dates and information for the ACEC Minnesota and ACEC National Competitions, as well as submission links and other resources.

Key dates for the 2026 ACEC Minnesota EEA Competition:

- Informational Meeting: **12PM, Tuesday, September 9, 2025**
 - This will be held online via Zoom; archived video will be posted for those unable to attend live.
- Preliminary State Entries Due: **5PM Thursday, October 2, 2025**
 - [Submit your Preliminary Entries using the web form linked here](#)
- Final State Entries Due: **5PM Thursday, October 23, 2025**
 - [Submit your Final Entries through the portal linked here](#)
 - *Please Note: though they look similar, submitting materials through this portal does not enter the project into the ACEC National EEA competition.*
- State Judging: **Wednesday, November 12, 2025**
- Notice to State Grand/Honor Winners: **November 17-21, 2025**
- Photographic Display Panel file due (if not provided with Final Entry): **Wednesday, January 7, 2026**
- ACEC/MN EEA Gala: **Friday, February 6, 2026 at the McNamara Alumni Center**

Key dates for the 2026 ACEC National EEA Competition:

- Only projects awarded a Grand Award in the ACEC Minnesota competition are eligible to enter the ACEC National Competition – submission details are provided to all Grand Award winners.
- National Entries Due: **Wednesday, January 7, 2026**
- The entrant's company representative must be available by phone: **Wednesday, January 14, 2026**
- National Judging Event: **Friday thru Sunday, Feb. 20-22, 2026**
- 2025 National Awards Gala is scheduled for **Tuesday, May 5, 2025 in Washington D.C.**
- For more information on the ACEC National EEA Competition, [see the 2026 Call for Entries brochure](#).

ACEC Minnesota EEA Competition Entry Fees:

- ACEC/MN member rate: \$1000
- Non-member rate: \$2000
 - Firms that have not submitted to this contest before or in the previous 5 years (last EEA submission was 2019-2020 or older) are eligible for a 50% discount on their entry/entries.
 - Entries include two awards plaques. Additional plaques are available for \$200.

ACEC Minnesota EEA Competition – Judging, Awards & Eligibility:

A distinguished panel of judges, representing a variety of engineering disciplines and other experts in the AEC industry, will be selected to review, evaluate and score submitted entries. Judges receive entry materials in advance of the judging event so that they are prepared to review and discuss each submission.

Awards Details:

- At least five Grand Awards will be presented.
- ACEC/MN reserves the right to limit the number of Honor Awards presented.
- The **Grand Conceptor Award** will be awarded to the project that received the highest overall score.
- The **People's Choice Award** will be awarded to the project that receives the most votes in open public voting conducted online during January & February 2026. Voting will close before the Gala program starts on Friday, February 6, 2026.
- The **Excellence in QBS Award** will be awarded to the top scoring project using QBS in three geographic categories:
 - Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul)
 - Metro Area (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington Counties excluding Minneapolis and St. Paul)
 - Greater Minnesota & Beyond
- Project judging will be held on Wednesday, November 12, 2025.
- Entrants will be notified of their results by email the week of November 17-21, 2025.
 - ACEC/MN will notify all members of the project team who have contact information included on the Preliminary Entry form.
 - We ask that you share the results and Gala details with your project client / owner.
 - Please do not publicly share your project results until after the EEA Gala on February 6, 2026
- For more details, including a list of last year's award winners, [please visit the ACEC/MN EEA website](#).

Project Eligibility:

- Projects may be submitted by a single firm or by multiple firms who worked on the same project. Make sure this information is clearly stated in your entry materials.
- Projects can be located anywhere in the world, but to be eligible the majority of design work for the project needs to be done by staff based in Minnesota / working for Minnesota-based offices.
- Construction projects must have been ready for use between **November 1, 2023 and October 31, 2025**.
- Studies and Research or Surveying and Mapping projects must have been publicly disclosed by the client between **November 1, 2023 and October 31, 2025**.

New for 2026 & Reminders of 2025 Changes:

- **Last year's new Excellence in QBS Award, which is awarded to the highest scoring project using Qualifications-Based Selection (QBS) will be expanded to three categories:** Twin Cities, Metro Area and Greater Minnesota & Beyond. A question asking if your project entry used QBS is already built into the Final Entry portal.
- **To highlight your impressive submissions, we are adding the option to submit four additional photos / images of your project during the final submission.** If you choose to upload additional pictures, please include write-ups for them in the Descriptions of Images/Graphics document (#6 under Final Entry Requirements) and appropriate references in the Jury Statement (#7 under Final Entry Requirements).
- Like last year, ACEC/MN will print all entrant Photo Panels, please make sure those are completed and submitted to us by or before **Wednesday, January 7, 2026**.

- Like last year, Entrants have the option to present their project at the EEA Gala with a 60-second video (rather than the slideshow of project images and Gala Description). We highly encourage this option.

Preliminary EEA Entry Requirements:

Preliminary entries are due by **5PM, Thursday, October 2nd, 2025**. [Please use this web form to submit your preliminary entry](#). After completing your preliminary entry, you will be redirected to this payment page.

Required materials for preliminary entries:

- Project name, location, category, date of completion, and client
- One digital image, drawing, artist rendering, table/chart, or report that indicates the nature of the project or achievement (digital image, format as JPEG, CMYK at 300 dpi)
- A brief project description, not to exceed 125 words
- EEA Entry Fee

All preliminary entries should be considered accepted unless you are contacted by ACEC/MN for additional information / clarification. After submitting your Preliminary Entry, you will be redirected to [our payment page for EEA Entries](#).

If you need assistance setting up your member account, checking if your firm is a member of ACEC/MN, or if you are eligible for the 50% off discount for firms who have not submitted a project in the last 5 years, please reach out to John Krapek at john@acecmn.org.

Final EEA Entry Requirements:

Final entries are due by **5PM, Thursday, October 23, 2025**. [Please use this portal to submit all files for your final entry](#). Please submit all documents in the required format and please identify a project category on the entry form.

There are two steps for the Final Submission when using the web portal:

- In Step 1, you will provide the information to generate your Entry Form, which includes information about the project as well as key contacts at your firm and for the client and/or owner.
- In Step 2, you will upload documents for your entry, including the signed Entry Form from Step 1 above.

Required Documents for Final Entry:

1. **A signed copy of the entry form.** The contact for your firm and client (and owner if applicable) must sign the original entry form. Please keep a copy of the original form for your records. Be sure to indicate a project entry category. Electronic signatures are accepted. (PDF file format required)
 - a. Contacts for the project need to be entered on the portal in Step 1 and once entered those will generate signature pages when you finish Step 1 of your final entry. **We strongly recommend starting with this item first as it requires coordination with clients, owners and staff.**
2. A copy of the **original client/owner letter addressed to the ACEC/MN EEA Judging Panel**, describing the relationship the client/owner had with the entrant in the development of the project and how it met and/or exceeded the client/owner needs. Not to exceed one page, 8.5" x 11"; 1" side margins. (PDF file format required)

3. An **executive summary**, that provides an overview of the project, describing the project's specific problem and solution. Project and firm name must appear at the top of the page. Not to exceed one page, 8.5" x 11"; 1" side margins; minimum 12 pt. type, double-spaced text. (PDF or Word file format required)
4. A **project description** that tells the story of the project and addresses items a, b, c, d and e listed below. Project name, firm name, and page number must appear at the top of each page. Entrants may use text, photos, graphics, or charts as needed. Not to exceed five pages, 8.5" x 11"; 1" side margins; 12 pt. minimum type; single-spaced text. (PDF or Word file format required)

The project description must include the following:

- a. Role of entrant's firm in the project
 - b. Role of other consultants participating in the project
 - c. Entrant's contribution to the project: A brief description of the entrant's contribution addressing each of the following Rating Guidelines i-v below (See page 5, "Rating Guidelines for Judging" in the [ACEC 2026 National Call for Entries brochure](#) for more details on these categories):
 - i. Uniqueness and/or innovative application of new or existing techniques
 - ii. Future value to the engineering profession and perception by the public
 - iii. Social, economic, and sustainable development considerations
 - iv. Complexity
 - v. Successful fulfillment of client/owner needs
 - d. Summary: Describe in lay terminology why this project is worthy of special recognition. Explain all factors that demonstrate the project's uniqueness and complexity, such as innovative engineering, challenges faced and overall social impact. The word count for the summary should be 100 - 500 words.
 - e. Be sure to include this information in the project description:
 - Total project construction budget cost and actual cost
 - Entrant's portion of the total project construction budget cost and actual cost
 - Scheduled and actual dates of completion for the project
 - *Reminder: These costs are not Engineering Fees.*
5. **Six High-Quality Images/Graphics.** Six different photos or graphics of the project. Please make sure to include images/graphics that show the planning, startup, and/or construction phases of the project in addition to the completed project and before-and-after images when applicable. Wide-screen images (16:9) are preferred. (JPG, JPEG or PNG file format required, RGB at / above 300 dpi)
- a. **Additional Images/Graphics.** Up to 4 additional images or graphics can be uploaded for your project. Please include descriptions in #6 below if you choose to provide additional images. *This section is optional, you do not need to provide additional images .*
6. **Descriptions of Images/Graphics.** Please make sure descriptions clearly relate to the images/graphics by using "Photo #1", "Photo #2", etc. to identify which text matches with image/graphic. Maximum of 50 words per image. (Word file format required)
7. **Jury Statement.** This is the first document judges will review and should address the five criteria outlined in 4c above as well as highlighting special features of the project. This document should be 500 words or fewer in length (approximately two pages, double-spaced). Statements longer than 500 words will be edited. (PDF or Word file format required)
- a. Please include the entering firm name, the project name, and project category at the top of the document (not included in word count).

- b. Please indicate where photos should appear when the jury statement is read at the judging event by indicating “Photo #1”, “Photo #2”, etc., within the text. Do not include photographs or formatting in this document.
 - c. **The Jury Statement is the most direct opportunity to address the judges and tell them what you want them to know about your project and your firm’s role.** It is in your best interest to ensure your firm’s role and achievements are clearly explained with respect to the criteria in 4c above.
8. **Awards Banquet Image.** This should be an image of the projects that you would like displayed most prominently during the Awards presentation, in printed materials, as well as on post-Gala webpages/galleries. (JPG, JPEG or PNG file format required, RGB at / above 300 dpi)
9. **Gala Description.** This document will be read at the Awards Gala and used in digital and printed marketing materials. Please do not include any formatting, headers, footers, logos, or photos – just text. This document should be a maximum of 125 words. (Word file format required)

Like last year, Entrants have the option to present their project at the EEA Gala a 60 second video, rather than the slideshow of project images and Gala Description. If you choose this option, please make sure to follow these guidelines:

- Widescreen format (16:9) in HD quality (resolution of at least 1920 x 1080 / 1080p), mp4 format preferred.
 - The submitted video gives Gala attendees an overview of the project and its impact on the client / community.
 - If possible, submitted video shows project in use by the client or general public.
 - The submitted video may use still images / graphics, video, narration, interviews, and renderings.
 - If any AI-generated images or video are used, please note this when submitting your video.
 - Videos may be created by firms or by external videographers.
 - For firms looking for a videography partner, ACEC/MN has worked with [Gamut One Studios](#) on several EEA Galas.
 - Gala Project videos are due by **Thursday, January 15th, 2026.**
 - Submitted videos should be sent to john@acecmn.org. Tools such as [wettransfer](#) may be helpful in submitting videos. Videos may also be provided by flash drive and dropped off or sent to the ACEC/MN Offices (ACEC Minnesota, 30 7th Street East, Suite 2725, St. Paul, MN 55101-4914)
10. **Photographic Display Panel.** You may upload this file when submitting your Final Entry. If not submitted at that time, it is due by Wednesday, January 7, 2026, [this link may be used to upload the panel](#). See below for more details on panel requirements.
11. **Supplementary Report (only required for Studies / Research category projects).** Studies / Research Projects must include a digital copy of a supplementary report containing the findings portrayed with text, graphs, or photos, as needed.

EEA Photographic Display Panel Requirements:

Please Note: Like last year, ACEC Minnesota will be producing all physical display panels and will bring them to the Gala (as well as other events throughout 2026).

There are differences between the panel requirements for the ACEC Minnesota EEA competition and the ACEC National EEA competition.

- *To learn more about how to format and prepare your panel for the ACEC National EEA competition, please see the [ACEC 2026 National Call for Entries brochure](#) (page 8).*

The Photographic Display Panel (Panel) is a key part of the project submittal, and the text and photos should demonstrate the challenges, solutions, innovation, complexity and unique aspects of key project elements. Panels should be prepared with high-quality images and graphics with minimal text. [Please see our EEA webpage](#) for examples of panels for your reference.

- If not submitted with your final entry, panel are due to ACEC/MN by **Wednesday, January 7, 2026**.
- Panels will be produced by ACEC Minnesota from the digital files you submit.
- Panels will be displayed in an online gallery starting **Monday, January 12, 2026** for public People's Choice voting.
- If you have any questions, please contact ACEC/MN staff at john@acecmn.org or kelly@acecmn.org.
- Panels are required for all project entrants.
- Panels will be displayed at the Awards Gala in February 2026.
- Panels can be submitted with your Final Entry, [through this link](#), or emailed to john@acecmn.org.
- Submitted Panels files should be high resolution, print ready, and in pdf format.

Key Elements to include on panels:

1. The ACEC/MN EEA logo, which is available on the EEA website linked here. Here are direct links to the [white text](#) and [black text](#) logos.
 - *Please note that there are different logos for the ACEC National EEA competition.*
2. A maximum of six images/graphics. Each image should be a minimum of 7" x 5" or 35 sq in. A background photo is not counted as an image/graphic.
3. Panel text may not exceed 250 words, not including captions. Font sizes: minimum 32 pt. type size in text and/or descriptions and minimum 28 pt. type for captions and graphics.
4. Title and location of the project/study, owner's and/or client's name and location, and entering firm's name and location should be shown on the front of the panel in minimum 32 pt. type. Additional reference to the firm's name may be made within the panel text.

ACEC Minnesota EEA Competition – Suggestions for Successful Entries:

- Proofread, proofread, proofread.
- Review full explanations for judging and scoring criteria in the [ACEC National Call for Entries brochure](#) on pages 4-5 – there are several questions to consider under each of the five categories and judges will refer to these as they score entries. Keep these in mind when preparing all parts of your entry.
- The jury statement should be reviewed by someone not involved in the project to ensure that the description of the project in lay-terms is clear, easily readable / understood.
- Spell out abbreviations and provide phonetics for less commonly used words and phrases wherever possible.
- Ensure the role that your firm played in the project is crystal clear – the last thing you want is to highlight an impressive aspect of a project but to leave judges unclear on whether you or other members of the project team were responsible for the accomplishment.
- Coordinate with the client and/or owner of your project on the Client/Owner letter to make sure there is a consistent ‘story’ being told by all entry materials. Remember that “successful fulfillment of client/owner needs” is one of 5 categories that judges consider for scoring.
- Try to include at least three images of the planning, start-up and/or construction phases of the project along with three images of the completed project.
- When appropriate, people-oriented photos that show the use of the project are encouraged.
- When possible, images should feature key elements and innovations of the project as well as highlighting complexity and challenges overcome during design and construction.
- High-resolution, high-quality, aesthetically pleasing images can be an asset to your entry.