SDG OLYMPIAD
GENEVA 2025

The SDG Olympiad
Participant
Handbook

Your Competition Guidelines: Criteria, Deliverables, and Awards

UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE

SDG SOLUTION SPACE

Welcome to the SDG Olympiad

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Welcome to the Participant Handbook, your essential guide for navigating the SDG Olympiad competition. This handbook is designed to empower you with the knowledge and tools you need to thrive in this unique learning experience.

Inside you will find everything you need to succeed, from understanding our Prize and Award criteria, Deliverables, and Participant Expectations, to exploring a wide range of opportunities for personal growth and global impact throughout your journey.

We believe that a well-informed and engaged participant is key to our collective success in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Let this handbook be your roadmap to a meaningful and rewarding experience, contributing to a better future for all.

General Rules

1. Objectives

The SDG Olympiad seeks to achieve the following objectives, among others:

    a. Challenge students to imagine, design, and deliver bold solutions that move the world closer to achieving the SDGs.
    b. Transform ideas into real-world projects, prototypes, and ventures ready for impact and global scale.
    c. Build critical knowledge, sharpen practical skills, and foster an innovation mindset geared toward solving urgent global challenges.
    d. Facilitate connections between emerging professionals and organisations committed to sustainability, unlocking pathways for collaboration, mentorship, and future opportunities.

2. How to Participate

The SDG Olympiad 2025 offers two ways for student teams to enter the competition. All participants are expected to work in teams and maintain an academic affiliation or support as they develop their projects. Your choice of pathway should depend on your access to official SDG events and how you prefer to collaborate:

- **Local SDG Innovation Events (SPARKs):** SPARK stands for SDG Projects for Action, Research & Knowledge. This pathway involves participating in a short-term, challenge-based program hosted by a university.

- **Independent Track:** If you do not have a local SPARK event available or prefer a global, online collaboration.

Both tracks ultimately lead to the SDG Olympiad finals, but they differ in format, scope, and support structure.

Here's what to expect from each route and how to choose the one that fits your goals:

2.1 Participation Pathways

SDG OLYMPIAD GENEVA 2025	**SPARKs** SDG Innovation Events	**Independent Track**
Who is it for?	Students who can join an official SDG event hosted by a university or partner institution.	Students who do not have access to a local SPARK or prefer to work remotely with a self-formed team.
Format	Short-term, team-based events like hackathons, summer schools, or course projects focused on sustainability challenges.	Online or hybrid collaboration to solve one of the two global challenges provided by the Olympiad.
Teamwork	All projects must be done in teams. You'll join or form a team during the event.	Teams of 3–5 students are required. You must form your own team and register together.
Support	Built-in academic and expert support provided by the host. No need to find your own mentor.	You must secure an academic supervisor. Teams are required to spend 30–50 hours on their project, with support from their supervisor.
Focus	Each SPARK has a local or regional sustainability theme defined by the host.	Global sustainability challenges defined in partnership with a global partner. Challenges are open to SPARKs as well.
Qualification	One team per SPARK is nominated for the final phase of the SDG Olympiad.	One team across all Independent Track entries will be selected to advance to the SDG Olympiad final phase.

3. Competition Phases

The SDG Olympiad runs in two phases. Finalist teams from either track receive expert coaching to prepare for the Award Event, held this year in Geneva.

1st Phase: Prototype	SPARKs and Independent Track as entry points to the Olympiad.	One nominated team per competition.
2nd Phase: Produce	Dedicated coaching and a 2.5 days final event in Geneva, Switzerland.	Teams will be recognized with Gold, Silver, and Bronze medals, along with additional special awards.

4. Elegibility Criteria

To join the SDG Olympiad, you must:

- Be enrolled in a recognised higher education institution (Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD)
- Participate through either:
  a. An official SPARK event, or
  b. The Independent Track, with academic support and 30–50 hours of structured learning (e.g. summer school, research, hackathon, or supervised coursework).

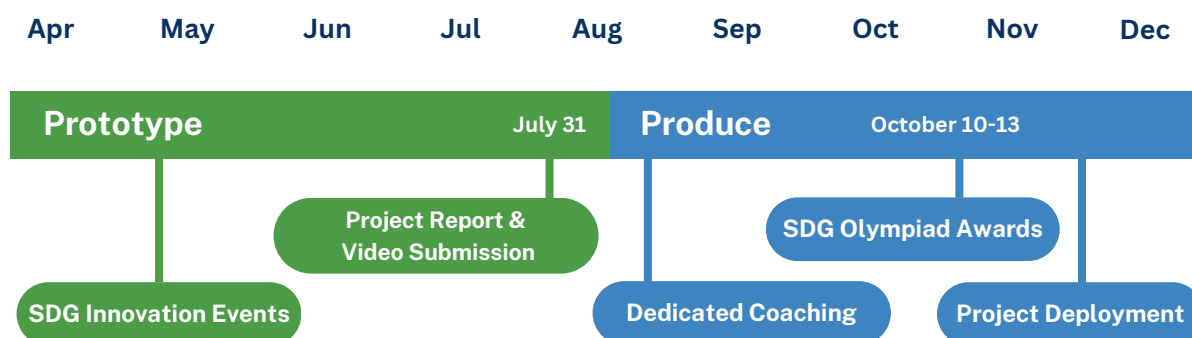False declarations of student status or academic support will result in disqualification.

6. Innovation Challenges

The SDG Olympiad is built on challenge-based learning that turns ideas into action. All teams will work on real sustainability problems, framed by innovation challenges co-designed with international partners.

- **SPARK Track**: Participants tackle local or regional challenges defined by the host institution. Some SPARKs may also choose to adopt one of the global challenges.

- **Independent Track**: Teams choose one of two global challenges developed in collaboration with The Global Citizen, an NGO working to end poverty, advance equity, and protect the planet.

To explore the current list of SPARK hosts, their themes, and this year's two global challenges, visit the official **SDG Olympiad website.**

5. Timeline

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Prototype — July 31 | **Produce** — October 10-13

- SDG Innovation Events
- Project Report & Video Submission
- Dedicated Coaching
- SDG Olympiad Awards
- Project Deployment

Prototype Phase

Your project should propose a concrete, real-world solution to the selected challenge, something that could realistically be developed and implemented to create impact. This may take the form of a product, service, process, system, or other intervention that addresses the problem you identified.

You will bring your idea to life through two key deliverables: a short report and a 3-minute video. Together, they tell the story of your solution, what it is, why it matters, and who's behind it.

1. Final Project Report

(800 to 1000 words)

A project report helps you reflect on your progress and clearly communicate the core elements of your solution. It also supports evaluation, learning, and the possibility of scaling your project beyond the competition. Consider covering the following elements in your report:

Project Overview and Introduction	• Project Title • Names of Team Members • University/Organisation Affiliation • Brief Description of the Project • Relevance to the SDGs
Problem Statement and Objectives	• Clearly define the problem the project aims to address • Include background information and context • List the main objectives of the project • Specify the goals related to SDGs
Proposed Solution and Prototype	• Describe your proposed solution and highlight its innovative aspects. • Explain the methods, technologies, and prototype development process used. • Include technical specifications, unique features, and challenges faced, along with how they were addressed. • Summarize key findings and outcomes from prototype testing, including relevant data or observations. • Discuss the technical and economic feasibility of the solution.
Conclusion and Future Work	• Summarize the significance and impact of your project. • Discuss potential future improvements or next steps. • Acknowledge any support or partnerships that contributed to the project. • List any references or sources used (if applicable).

You are welcome to include additional research or technical reports as an appendix to your project report. However, focus on the feasibility and real-world application of your solution. Supplementary materials support, but do not replace, a strong core proposal.

2. Video

(3 minutes)

A video pitch is your chance to bring your project to life in a clear and engaging way. It complements your written report by showing your team, your ideas, and your solution in action. The jury will use your video to better understand your project and the people behind it, so keep it concise, compelling, and authentic.

Consider covering the following elements in your video recording:

Content	• Problem and Solution • Project Justification • Prototype Demonstration • Potential data or data collected trough the project.
Recording	• You can record using professional equipment, a phone, or a laptop. • Choose a quiet space to avoid background noise. • For group pitches, it is possible to use Zoom and record together. • Make sure slides and audio are clear; subtitles are optional but helpful. • You can edit your video using free tools like Canva.
Specifications	• Length: Max 3 minutes. • Record at normal speed, in horizontal format. • Upload to YouTube and email us the link with your final report.

The video and final report must be sent to the SDG Olympiad Coordination team by **July 31**, whether the project is nominated through SPARKs or Independent track paticipants.

Final Phase: Produce

Congratulations on reaching the Final Phase! Your team now joins a global cohort of finalists representing diverse backgrounds and top institutions. Your project report and video were selected for their potential, and you will receive tailored coaching from sustainability experts to refine your solution's feasibility and impact. This stage also allows time to explore partnerships with those interested in using your solution or its data. For the final submission, you are expected to update and strengthen your original report and video. While the format and content requirements remain the same as in the Prototype Phase, all final materials must be submitted through the Learning Planet Institute (LPI) Projects Platform, where your work will be stored and showcased globally.

The deadline for your final submission is **September 30**. Instructions on how to submit via the LPI Projects Platform will be shared with all selected teams.

PRIZES & AWARD CRITERIA

Understanding how your project will be evaluated is key to submitting strong deliverables. Use the criteria below as a checklist to guide and refine your written report and video. Each category is scored from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), and together they reflect what the jury will be looking for in high-impact, SDG-aligned solutions.

1. Impact Criteria

The jury will assess your project based on:

Measurable Impact Potential	Your project should aim to produce data that can help measure, monitor, or advance progress on one or more SDGs.	• Link your results to the SDG targets. • Include the data produced or the data you plan to gather. • Show how the data can be used.
Demonstrated Impact on People and Planet	The solution shows potential to benefit people, communities, or the environment.	• Identify who benefits from your solution. • Describe the type of impact (social, environmental, etc.) • Share any early results or feedback.
Innovative Use of Available Tools	You are encouraged to creatively leverage AI, citizen science, social media, or any other tool that enhances your solution.	• Relevant tools for goals and users. • Technology adds value or originality. • Highlight what's new compared to existing solutions.
Novelty of the Idea	Your project should present original ideas or apply existing concepts in a new and meaningful way.	Consider sharing what inspired your idea and how your creative process unfolded.
Relevance to the Challenge	Your project should be directly aligned with the problem or SDG challenge you selected.	• State the problem clearly. • Explain why it matters now. • Support with evidence.
Feasibility	Judges will assess whether your project can be realistically implemented within the proposed timeframe and available resources.	• Outline a simple implementation plan. • List potential partners, including any confirmed support.
Prototype Development	Your project should include a prototype, whether physical, digital or conceptual, that brings your idea to life.	• Present a working model or mock-up. • Storyboards, wireframes, and demos are accepted as prototypes.
Presentation Skills	How well you communicate your idea matters. Your presentation should be clear, engaging, and well-structured.	• Open with a strong hook. • Show your solution in action with visuals. • Keep it clear, practical, and under 3 minutes.

2. Awards and Recognition

The SDG Olympiad honors both overall excellence and standout contributions to advancing the SDGs through two award categories:

- **The Global Awards** recognize the top three finalist teams with Gold, Silver, and Bronze medals, celebrating the most impactful and well-rounded solutions. These awards are based on the jury's evaluation using the Impact Criteria
- **Special Prizes** will be awarded to additional teams that demonstrate excellence in specific areas such as innovation, inclusion, or community impact.

All awardees will receive certificates and be featured in Olympiad communications. Outstanding teams may also be invited to present at partner events and connected to mentorship, acceleration programs, or collaborative opportunities to advance their solutions.

This approach reinforces the Olympiad's focus on social innovation, long-term impact, and meaningful collaboration rather than financial incentives.

2.1 Special Prizes

Research Excellence Award	For outstanding academic grounding, methodological rigor, and contribution to knowledge in an SDG domain.	• Strong literature grounding and/or data interpretation • Clear methodology or theoretical framework • Contribution to academic or policy knowledge
Tech for Impact Award	For strategic use of AI, data science, open-source tools, or digital platforms to deliver ethical, inclusive, and scalable solutions.	• Thoughtful use of emerging or digital technologies • Tech applied ethically and accessibly • Demonstrates potential for real-world use or scale
Cross-Sector Collaboration Award	Exemplary teamwork across public, private, academic, or community sectors to co-create sustainable, multidimensional solutions.	• Involves actors from multiple sectors or disciplines • Evidence of shared leadership or co-creation • SDG impact through collaboration
Scalable Solution Award	This prize honors a team whose project shows high potential for replication, expansion, or integration into markets, public services, or open models.	• Designed for replication or growth • Aligns with existing systems, markets, or institutions • Clear strategy for long-term implementation
Strategic Innovation Award	For bold, forward-thinking solutions that challenge the status quo and address root causes.	• Demonstrates systems thinking or policy awareness • Anticipates future trends or shifts • Addresses root causes or structural challenges