

# NATIONAL STUDENT ADVERTISING COMPETITION



**POLICIES &  
PROCEDURES  
2025-2026**



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## Contact Information

Member Services, American Advertising Federation  
 1101 K Street NW | Suite 420 | Washington, DC 20005  
[aaf.org/nsac](http://aaf.org/nsac) | [nsac@aaf.org](mailto:nsac@aaf.org)

# WHAT IS THE NATIONAL STUDENT ADVERTISING COMPETITION?

The American Advertising Federation's (AAF) National Student Advertising Competition is America's preeminent student advertising competition. The NSAC has helped more than 150,000 students launch their advertising careers since it began in 1973. The program affords AAF College Chapter members nationwide tangible, real-world experience employers look for, as well as provide the sponsoring client integrated marketing campaigns, steeped in insights. Past NSAC sponsors include a wide range of brands such as AT&T, Tide, Indeed, Meta, Tinder, Adobe, Snapple, Bank of America, Ocean Spray, American Airlines, Toyota (3x sponsor), Coca-Cola (2x sponsor), Pizza Hut (2x sponsor) State Farm, and many more blue-chip brands.

Through the NSAC, student teams work as mini agencies responding to a real-world advertising challenge as provided in the client case study. The teams conduct in-depth research and prepare a plans book and presentation outlining their solution and campaign. All teams begin with the first tier of the competition held in AAF Districts. Winners then advance to NSAC Semi Finals. Those winners compete for the ultimate title in the Finals held in conjunction with the Federation's annual conference.

**The following Policies & Procedures cover the 2025-2026 competition only. Please read thoroughly as there have been updates for clarification and refinement to previous versions of the policies and procedures.**

## RESOURCES AND CONTACTING THE NATIONAL OFFICE

All NSAC-related forms and materials are uploaded to the AAF website under National Student Advertising Competition ([aaf.org/NSAC-Resources](http://aaf.org/NSAC-Resources)). Faculty must be logged in to access the materials. Research tools are also accessible through NSAC at [aaf.org/NSAC-Resources](http://aaf.org/NSAC-Resources). Access to these resources should be sought for the sole purpose of participating in the NSAC.

The AAF Member Services team oversees the National Student Advertising Competition and will maintain regular email communication with all NSAC teams. For questions or assistance at any time, please contact: [nsac@aaf.org](mailto:nsac@aaf.org).

# IMPORTANT DATES & DEADLINES

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>August xx, 2025</b>      | <b>NSAC Case Study Released to Faculty Advisors</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>October 9, 2025</b>      | <b>Online Q&amp;A Session #1 with NFL</b><br>3:00pm EST, advance registration required.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>January 16, 2026</b>     | <b>Intent to Participate Form Due by 5:00pm ET</b><br>Schools must complete this form in order to gain access to the case study.<br>All schools who will be competing in NSAC 2025-2026 MUST complete the Intent to Participate form by this date in order to be eligible for the competition.               |
| <b>January 30, 2026</b>     | <b>Spring Membership Deadline by 5:00pm ET</b><br>All students working on NSAC in the fall and/or spring who have access to the case study must be registered and pay dues by this date. The Code of Conduct is included in the membership registration process.                                             |
| <b>February 19, 2026</b>    | <b>Online Q&amp;A Session #2 with NFL</b><br>3:00pm EST, advance registration required.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>March 26, 2026</b>       | <b>Materials Due by 3:00pm ET</b><br>NSAC plans books which include strategy and two media pages, a maximum of five non-video creative pieces, any original video content that will be shown in the presentation, and a full list of team members must be submitted electronically to National by 3:00pm ET. |
| <b>April 2026</b>           | <b>District Competitions</b><br>Dates/locations for your district will be available as soon as they are finalized.<br>Each District Competition will be held either the weekend of April 10-12 or 17-19, 2026.                                                                                               |
| <b>April 30-May 1, 2026</b> | <b>Semi-Finals</b><br>Semi-Finals are held virtually.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>May 29, 2026</b>         | <b>Finals</b><br>Finals will be held at ADMERICA in Austin, TX.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

# COMPETITION ELIGIBILITY

## Institution Eligibility

To compete in NSAC, a school must establish an AAF College Chapter. To establish a chapter, an institution must:

- Offer a sequence of at least two courses in advertising or subjects closely related, such as marketing, promotion or advertising design.
- Operate at an institution accredited by a recognized accrediting agency. Community and junior colleges, portfolio schools, or other two-year college-level schools are allowed.
- Maintain at least 10 student members registered for at least one for-credit course.
- Appoint a faculty advisor.

Email [nsac@AAF.org](mailto:nsac@AAF.org), with questions on establishing your chapter.

Each school may only have one team. If your institution has two or more campuses, teams from each campus can compete as long as their campuses have separate student bodies, faculties, geographic locations and separate AAF College Chapters.

## Course Eligibility

NSAC may be taught as a course, under the following conditions:

- All students registered in the course must be dues-paying AAF College Chapter members.
- The course is intended for undergraduate students. Graduate students are not eligible to compete on an NSAC team.
- You will submit materials for competition. You cannot use the NSAC case study or resources for a class project without competing in NSAC.

## Student Eligibility

Undergraduate degree-seeking college students who are current AAF College Chapter members in good standing are eligible to compete in NSAC. Graduate students are not eligible to compete in NSAC. Dual-enrollment high school students are not eligible to compete in NSAC.

Students are expected to adhere to the Student Code of Conduct throughout the competition. This includes NSAC related conduct on social media, when conducting research, during District, Semi-Final, and Final competitions, and any other NSAC related events and activities.

# ORIGINALITY

The intent of NSAC is to allow students to build an understanding of a real-world advertising environment, including research, strategy, creative, production, and presentation. The faculty advisor may guide and mentor the work of NSAC teams, but all content must be produced by students.

In no instance may NSAC teams, individual students, or faculty contact advertising professionals for assistance with the competition. This includes but is not limited to advice, critiques, concept testing, practice presentations, Q&A practice sessions or any campaign assistance.

In some instances, it may be appropriate to contact advertising professionals to complete research necessary to the campaign. This should be limited to general industry research relevant to the case study or the target audience, obtaining media and event costs, and/or requesting media kits and rate cards.

Gathering information from advertising professionals is allowed; getting professional advice is not allowed.

The use of AI is permitted within the scope of any guidelines provided by the competition client each year. All AI usage must be ethical and align with the principles of fairness, transparency, and integrity. AI use can be considered for exploratory research and/or creative development or content. Any content generated using AI must be clearly identified as AI generated. This transparency is essential to maintain the integrity of the competition and ensure proper attribution of work. Specific client requirements regarding use of AI can be found online among the competition resources on [aaf.org](http://aaf.org)

# ANONYMITY

To promote a fair and equal competition, all NSAC teams will be assigned a Team Number to protect anonymity. Teams should represent themselves only by this Team Number in all competition materials including the Plans Book, Presentation, and Reference Materials. Your school name and team number should never be connected in any materials or communication, except with AAF Staff or your District Coordinator.

In all campaign materials, teams must avoid including identifying information that would violate anonymity, including but not limited to school apparel, notable campus landmarks, school mascot, school mottos or cheers, or school colors. While on-site at any level of competition, team members must not wear identifying apparel such as school t-shirts or team shirts that have school names, logos, colors, or mottos on them.

Students and faculty should only identify themselves via first name on all materials and presentations. Name tags should not be worn during presentations or Q&A sessions with judges at any phase of the competition.

Teams may promote their participation in the competition on social and/or traditional media using only their school name. Team number and any campaign elements/materials are NOT allowed to be included in any promotions. This includes tagline, logos, characters, etc. In no instance is it allowed to publish both your team number and school name together. Any violation of the anonymity rules may lead to disqualification.

# INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

By entering the NSAC competition, all participants, students and advisors agree that all ideas expressed in written or presentation form become the property of the sponsoring company for any use whatsoever, without compensation of any sort to any person.

## USE OF CAMPAIGN MATERIALS

NSAC work may be shared under the following conditions by students and schools.

Public sites (such as LinkedIn) may link to a student portfolio, but campaign materials cannot be publicly posted directly to public sites or social media.

### Student Use

Student NSAC team members may only share NSAC campaign work in the following manner:

- A student's portfolio for the sole purpose of demonstrating work product while seeking employment. All NSAC work featured in a student's portfolio must be labeled as "NSAC work."
- Award competitions, such as the American Advertising Awards Student Division, that are submitted AFTER the completion of the NSAC competition in its entirety at ADMERICA.
- Public sites (such as LinkedIn) may link to a student portfolio and cannot be directly posted to public sites or social media.

### Schools/Institutions/Team Use

- Award competitions, such as the American Advertising Awards Student Division, that are submitted AFTER the completion of the NSAC competition in its entirety at ADMERICA.
- No campaign materials or work may be directly posted to public sites or social media (such as LinkedIn or Instagram) at any time.
- After the completion of the competition at ADMERICA, creative work may be posted on a school's own site or a site such as YouTube as long as it is only identified and labeled as NSAC work.
  - » For example, a video posted to a school's YouTube page labeled as "NSAC 2026 Ad".
  - » It may not be labeled in such a way as to be searchable by the client or brand name. A way not to label, for example, is "NSAC2026\_NFL Ad".
  - » The approved posting of work as mentioned above should be for sole purpose of generating interest in the competition with the school's/institution's AAF members (or potential members).

# COMPETITION COSTS

National Student Advertising Competition teams/advisors should prepare a budget in advance that anticipates all potential expenses which may be paid individually, funded by the school/institution, or by team fundraising efforts. You may incur some, or possibly all of these expenses:

## AAF Student Membership Dues

\$60 per student

## District Participation Fees

Depending on your AAF District, you may have individual or team fees to participate in your District Competition. This fee is used to cover rental of facilities/presentation rooms, A/V equipment, awards, judging expenses and certain “all participant team” meals, receptions, or gatherings.

## Competition Expenses

Ancillary expenses that you may incur to participate in your District Competition

- Travel to District Competition site (car, bus, train, air)
- Lodging (# rooms needed x # room nights x lodging for quad/double rooms)\*
- Parking
- Gasoline (if driving)
- Student meals going to-and-from District Competition

*\*Be sure to inquire about local lodging taxes/assessments that may be added on to the room rate stated. Some Districts may also arrange a discounted hotel rate for the competition. Ask your District Coordinator for more information.*

# COMPETITION DELIVERABLES

## Plans Book

Each team must submit a plans book by the March 26, 2026, at 3:00pm ET deadline. The plans book must follow the format requirements below.

- 13 pages: 12 pages of content, plus the title page. Additional pages will be deleted.
- Content should include Research, Insights, Strategy, Big Idea/Creative Concept, and two media pages which must include a Media Flowchart and Budget Breakdown.
- 1920 pixels wide x 1080 pixels high (16:9 aspect ratio)
- Each page must be numbered, excluding title page.

- Title page must include: team number, NSAC logo and the client logo.
- Plans book cannot include links.
- Research must be properly cited. The source sheet may be separate from the 13 Plans Book pages.
- Two-page spread discouraged.
- No cropmarks or printer/production marks.
- Must be uploaded as a PDF.
- Do not password protect your book.
- Teams must not use full names of team members, faculty advisor, school officials, etc.
- Filename must follow this format: NSAC2026\_Team123\_FinalPlansBook.pdf.
- Failure to submit the properly formatted Plans Book online by the deadline may lead to disqualification.

## Videos and Non-Video Creative Work

- Video Files
- Video Checklist
- Non-Video Creative Work

### Video Files–Original Content

- Any original content video file that will be used in your team’s presentation must be uploaded by March 26, 2026, at 3:00pm ET.
- Original video content is considered any moving assets that a team creates or modifies in any way, including, but not limited to creative piece, brand manifesto, target market recording, or filmed research.
- **There is no limit on the number of video files your team can upload.**
- Teams can upload videos they don’t ultimately use in the presentation. However, you cannot include videos in the presentation that were not uploaded by March 26, 2026, at 3:00pm ET.
- Judges will have access to video files that were shown in the presentation as reference while they are scoring. Judges will not be shown files that were uploaded but not used in the presentation.
- Files must be uploaded to the OpenWater site.
- Each uploaded file may only contain a single video element—for example, teams cannot combine related social media videos into a single video file.
- Acceptable file formats include: .MOV, .MP4.
- File name must be labeled with the team number and type of content. Example: Team123\_TVSpot1.mov
- No original content video files will be allowed in your presentation that were not uploaded by this deadline. **Teams that show additional original content videos in the presentation (other than publicly available stock video or b-roll used for presentation purposes) will be disqualified.**

## Video Checklist

- Teams must provide a checklist listing all uploaded Video files.
- This list will be used by District Coordinators and AAF Staff to ensure presentations only include video files submitted by the deadline.
- Each video file must be listed separately.
- Checklist must be uploaded as a PDF.
- File Name must follow this format: NSAC2026\_Team123\_Checklist

## Non-Video Creative Work

- Upload up to five pieces of non-video creative work by the March 26, 2026 deadline.
- Uploaded files may be given to the judges as reference material when they are scoring the presentation. Submitted pieces should represent work that a judge may want a longer or closer look at during judging and that a team may want to showcase in that manner should a judge choose to review. Please see FAQs for further explanation.
- Teams do not need to link or separately submit these materials once they have been uploaded. Each uploaded file may only include a single creative execution—for example, schools cannot post all of their social media executions on the same document.
- Acceptable file formats include: MP3, WAV, JPEG, PDF. Work cannot include a link to an external site and must not be executable programs, applications, or downloadable.
- Files must be labeled with the team number and type of content. Example: Team123\_IGAd1.jpg
- **NOTE: Teams are not limited to 5 pieces of non-video creative work to use in their presentation but may only submit 5 during the submission deadline for further review by judges.**

### Eligible Non-Video Creative Work

- Audio Spot
- Print Ad
- Social Media Post (one per document)
- Op Ed
- Out-of-Home Ad
- Podcast Sample
- Trade Show Booth Mock Up
- Creative Manifesto (written/audio)
- Press Release
- Event Design
- Microsite
- Other materials that would be used as an advertising execution meant for the target audience

### Ineligible Non-Video Creative Work

- Research Findings
- Event Calendar
- Multiple Creative pieces on one document (ex: more than one social media post)
- Other materials that are solely designed to provide supplementary information to the project

## Sources

- Teams must submit a source sheet separate from the Plans Book.
- File name must follow this format: NSAC2026\_Team123\_SourceSheet.
- Source sheet must be uploaded as a PDF.

## Creative Assets

- Teams can use any music, sound effects, or photos in any part of their campaign.
- Costs associated with the campaign use of copyrighted music, creative images, licensed properties, and talent fees, including influencers, must be included in the budget.
- Use of the AAF, NSAC, and client logo are permitted and will be provided by the AAF. You can access these and other resources at [aaf.org/NSAC-Resources](http://aaf.org/NSAC-Resources).
- Reference Originality section for guidelines on use of AI.

## Reminder Sheets

- Each team must submit reminder sheets for judges at each level of competition that includes a headshot and first name only of each presenter, the team number, and tagline. Reminder Sheets should follow the template provided.
- Reminder sheets will be printed by District Coordinators for District competitions and by National for the final round of competition.

## Submission

- Plans Book and all submission materials must be uploaded by March 26, 2026, at 3:00pm ET to the OpenWater portal.
- Plans Book, original content video files, five (5) non-video creative work reference materials, judges reminder sheet, video checklist and source sheet must be uploaded by March 26, 2026, at 3:00pm ET
- Do not upload .zip files

# PRESENTATIONS

Teams create a 20-minute Presentation to deliver in front of a panel of judges at the District level of the Competition. Presentations must follow the guidelines outlined below:

- Presentations are limited to 20-minutes. The official timekeeper will begin when the first word, music, movement, or slides begins.
- The team will be stopped after 20 minutes.
- Teams may request a one and/or a two-minute warning.

- Teams must use the title slide provided by AAF. Do not make any changes to the title slide except to insert your team number.
- A faculty advisor must accompany the team to any in-person competition.
- No more than four team members may present.
- Even if a student only runs the audio/visual equipment or handles displays for the team, but doesn't speak, they are considered a presenter.
- A prerecorded narrator is considered a presenter unless it's part of a creative execution.
- All Presentation materials, including campaign deliverables, must be covered/hidden prior to the start of your Presentation. For example, brochures or other materials can be placed on a table and then covered until they are introduced and then shown. Large boards, including cut-outs, that will not fit on an easel must also be covered.
- No items showing any aspect of creative work may be shown or be visible in any way prior to the start of the presentation. This includes but is not limited to items including stickers, posters, banners, clothing, hats, bags, etc.
- If your team flips your boards, the back of Presentation boards must be blank.
- Video files containing campaign creative work/elements used in the Presentation are limited to those submitted by the Materials deadline. **Teams who use additional video files containing campaign creative work/elements in their presentation will be disqualified.**
- Presenters can hand materials to the judges, but they must be collected after the Q&A session or they will be discarded.
- Presentation material cannot be posted online at any time other than under the guidelines set forth in the section titled Use of Campaign Materials.
- Presentation content cannot be changed between District, Semi-Final, or Final levels of competition.

## Virtual Presentations

All virtual presentation must be recorded in Zoom.

## Presentation—Semi-Finals

The winner(s) of each District must submit a Zoom recorded video presentation file for semi-finals competition.

### District Competition Winner:

1. **Record presentation on Zoom and upload to OpenWater for Semi-Finals within seven days (7) of District Competition.** For example, if the winner is announced on Saturday, the video is due the next Saturday. Recordings should follow these guidelines:
  - » Videos must be recorded using Zoom. Recording must be in one continuous take with no editing, special effects or enhancements permitted to the recording.
  - » Videos must not exceed 20 minutes from the time the first word, music, movement or slide begins until the last speaker stops.
  - » File name must be labeled with the team number and type. Example: Team123\_Presentation.mov.

- » Recording must be uploaded as a.MOV or .MP4 file.
- » Do not submit a link to a cloud recording, it must be a file.
- » Presentation content cannot be changed between District, Semi-Final, or Final levels of competition.

**2. Upload PDF of presentation file used in District competition to OpenWater within one day of winning District competition.**

- » For example, if your competition is on Friday you must upload your presentation deck file by Saturday night 11:59pm.
- » Files must be labeled with the team number and type of content.  
Example: Team123\_ PresentationFile.pdf.

## Reminder Sheets

Teams will not need to provide a physical copy of Reminder Sheets to judges at any competition level. These will be shared with judges from the team's OpenWater submission of this item.

## Recordings

- No video or audio recordings or still photography of presentations will be permitted during the District or Final competitions unless a district representative, the AAF national office, or the client is recording the Presentation.
- Recordings of presentations, whether recorded for semi-final submissions or recorded for virtual submission, cannot be posted or shared publicly online at any time. Teams may only share or distribute their presentation recordings to students, faculty, or others related to their institution but recording may not be publicly posted.

# COMPETITION RESEARCH

- Research partners provide platforms only for competing teams who have met AAF college chapter eligibility requirements for the current academic year. Information on accessing research tools can be found at [aaf.org/NSAC-Resources](http://aaf.org/NSAC-Resources).
- Teams may reach out to professionals for general research of the industry relevant to the case study or the target audience, obtaining media and event costs, and/or request media kits and rate cards. Be mindful not to share campaign information or creative for advice, as outlined on page 4 regarding "Originality."
- Teams may conduct creative concept testing with the target audience.
- Teams, students, and faculty members cannot contact client, their ad agency, dealerships, franchisees or client-related outlets, and any companies specifically highlighted by the sponsor in the case study for research purposes. Secret shopping is acceptable.
- When conducting research, including on social media, teams may not mention their team number, sponsor, NSAC, or American Advertising Federation. We recommend teams use language such as "Team of students conducting research for a university project."

- Teams may not contact client's social media followers for research purposes.
- All teams must follow standard industry marketing research practices.
- Teams may not be in contact with client for any reason outside of AAF scheduled Q&A sessions. This includes but is not limited to research purposes.

# AFTER THE COMPETITION

## Sharing Outcomes

Teams and institutions may announce their outcome on social or traditional media following any level of competition. **However, announcements cannot include team number or any creative assets. You should only reference your school name. Violation could result in disqualification of the team.**

## Public Presentations

- Prior to your District Competition, teams may present only to their own school's faculty and students.
- Teams can give public presentations following their District Competition, even if they are advancing in the competition. Public presentations cannot be recorded or shared by anyone. Public presentations cannot be used as a fundraising opportunity. Furthermore, the audience should be cautioned to not share campaign content in any way publicly.
- For any public presentation outside of the District, Semi-final, or Finals Competition, teams may not use their team number in their presentation. Teams must only refer to their school or agency name when making these presentations outside of the competition.

## Preparing for Semi-Finals/Finals

- See *Competition Structure: Semi-Final Competition* section for details.

## Student Portfolios

- See *Use of Campaign Materials* section for details on use.

# COMPETITION STRUCTURE

## District Competition

There are 15 geographic AAF districts, each of which hosts an NSAC District Competition. All teams begin the competition at this level. The AAF National Office will share team contact information with the District Coordinator after receiving the Intent to Participate form. The District Coordinator will be your main contact for the district competition.

If a District only has one team that intends to compete at the district level, that team will automatically be placed in the Semi-Finals.

Districts that have 14 or more teams by the Intent to Participate deadline qualify as mega-districts. In this case, teams will be evenly divided by AAF National into two randomly selected competition tracks with two separate panels of judges. First-place winners from each competition track will advance to the Semi-Finals.

Districts with 20 or more teams Will be evenly and randomly divided by AAF National into three with three separate panels of judges. First-place winners from each competition track will advance to the Semi-Finals.

The following guidelines apply to both in-person and virtual competitions as applicable.

- **Equipment**

At District, you will be provided with the following:

- » One front/rear-projection screen (16:9 screen ratio)
- » Tables and chairs
- » Six easels
- » Speakers/sound system

Teams are responsible for the following:

- » Computer equipment (hardware and software, including adaptors)
- » Internet. If your team needs Internet connection, you should contact the District Coordinator. Your team will be responsible for all charges. You should use the facilities' Internet connection at your own risk.

- **Costs**

- » Each team is responsible for its own transportation, food and lodging expenses.
- » Participation fees vary from district to district.

- **Set Up**

- » Teams will be allowed 30-minutes to set up before their presentations.
- » If a team is the first school of the day, they are allowed 45 minutes of set up.
- » Only faculty, students, their relatives, and people associated with the school will be allowed in the Presentation room during set up.
- » Your faculty advisor or any student from your team may assist you during set up.
- » The District may provide professional assistance to help set up audio/visual equipment, but they cannot operate equipment during a team's Presentation, except during a time-out due to equipment failure.

- **Presentations**

- » Presentation rooms will have the students facing the audience with the judges' backs to the audience.
- » District Coordinators may contact you about the layout of the room.
- » No one, except the A/V technicians, designated photographer or videographer may enter the competition room once the doors have been closed for the Presentation to begin.
- » All Presentation materials, including campaign deliverables, must be covered/hidden prior to the start of your Presentation. For example, brochures or other materials can be placed on

a table and then covered until they are introduced and then shown. Large boards, including cut-outs, that will not fit on an easel must also be covered.

—Any public display of a team's creative or campaign work outside the allotted 20-minute Presentation time, including on social media, is prohibited. This includes display on clothing, stickers, bags, etc.

- » If your team flips your boards, the back of Presentation boards must be blank.
- » Only members of the four-student Presentation team may speak or operate visual equipment, lights and/or displays during the Presentation.
- » Presenters can hand materials to the judges, but they must be collected after the Q&A session or they will be discarded.

• **Time Out**

- » Only a member of the Presentation team may call a time-out and only for equipment failure or a medical emergency.
- » The limit for time-outs will be 15-minutes, after which time, the Presentation may be rescheduled as long as it occurs during the course of the District competition.

• **Q&A**

- » All members of the team, not just the presenters, should move to the front of the room or the stage during the Q&A.
- » Each team has exactly 15-minutes to respond to questions from the judges.
- » Any student member of a team—not just the Presentation team—may answer any question.
- » Any team member can answer any question at any time. Team members do not need to be called on to answer a question.
- » The team's designated faculty advisor(s) may be present during the Q&A session, however, faculty are not allowed to assist or participate in the Q&A in any capacity.
- » No additional creative or supplementary materials can be introduced during Q&A.
- » Only faculty, students, and people associated with the school will be allowed in the room during the Q&A session.

• **Judging and Awards**

- » A Judges' Caucus is held immediately that considers the Plans Book and Presentation score sheets, reflects on the work of all teams and determines a first-place winner to advance to the Semi-Finals.
- » Additional prizes and awards may be given at the discretion of the AAF district and local sponsors.
- » Winners will be recognized at an award ceremony and all participating NSAC students will receive certificates of recognition.
- » There is also a NSAC review session. During the judge's session, judges share their general observations about the competition, which provides students an educational opportunity.

• **Scoring**

- » Plans books are reviewed and scored prior to the Presentation date.
- » Presentations will be scored on the Presentation date.

- » Reference materials are not scored separately from the Plans Book and Presentation. All information must be included in the Presentation in order to be scored.
- » Each team's ranking will be based on the Plans Book and Presentation scores.
- » District Coordinators will provide a copy of your team's overall scores as generated by the NSAC scoring software and any open-ended judges' comments to your faculty advisor within one week of the Presentation.
- » Faculty advisors will be informed of the team's ranking and will also be told the Plans Book, Presentation and Total Scores of the other competing teams.
- » Schools in a mega-district will only receive scores in their track.

## Semi-Final Competition

Winners of the District Competition will advance to the Semi-Finals round. The number of schools competing in the Semi-Finals will vary each year, contingent on the number of mega-districts.

For Semi-Finals, judges review a Zoom-recorded presentation video in advance and teams participate in a live video Q&A session. The Semi-Finals will take place April 30-May 1, 2026. Semi-finals are always held virtually. No changes can be made to the presentation or plans book between levels of competition.

### • Presentations

- » **District Competitions:** Teams advancing from a District Competition will have seven (7) calendar days after their presentation date to upload a Zoom presentation recording video for Semi-Finals. The video must follow the criteria for the Virtual District.
- » The maximum 20-minute Zoom recording from each qualifying team will be forwarded to a judging panel for review.

### • Q&A

- » The AAF national office will contact the faculty advisor from each team with a date/time for a 15-minute Q&A video call with the judges.
- » Students should be prepared to answer questions about their presentation.
- » Any member of the team may answer questions.
- » AAF national office staff will provide a one or two-minute warning prior to the call ending.
- » Only faculty, students, and people associated with the school will be allowed on the video session during the Q&A session.

### • Scoring

- » Semi-Finals judges are not provided with any previous scores or comments.
- » Semi-Finals will be scored based solely on the 20-minute video and 15-minute Q&A.
- » The top eight teams will advance to the Finals Competition.

- » Your faculty advisor will be informed of your team’s ranking and will be told the total number of points awarded to the other competing teams.

- **Semi-Finals Video Presentation Criteria**

Videos must follow all criteria under “Semi-Final Presentations” outlined above.

## Finals Competition

The top eight teams from Semi-Finals advance to the Finals Competition. The Finals take place during the ADMERICA conference, May 28–June 1, 2026, in Austin, TX.

The Finals Competition follows the same Presentation, Time Out, and Q&A rules as outlined under the District Competition.

- **Judging and Awards**

- » Each team will present before a panel of judges comprised of client representatives.
- » To determine the winning team, a judges’ caucus is held immediately after the last Presentation.
- » The top three teams will be recognized during ADMERICA 2026 receiving trophies and cash prizes: 1st place \$5,000; 2nd place \$3,000; and 3rd place \$2,000.
- » Additional prizes and awards may be given at the discretion of the sponsoring company and/or NSAC research partners.
- » An NSAC review session will be held, where judges will share their general observations about the competition, which provides students an educational opportunity.

- **Scoring**

- » Plans Books will be reviewed and scored prior to the Presentation date.
- » Presentations will be scored on the Presentation date.
- » Reference materials are not scored separately from the Plans Book and Presentation. All information must be included in the Presentation in order to be scored.
- » Each team’s ranking will be based on the Plans Book and Presentation scores.
- » AAF national office will provide a copy of your team’s overall scores and any open-ended judges’ comments to your faculty advisor within one week of the day of Presentation.
- » Your faculty advisor will be informed of your team’s ranking and will also be told the Plans Book, Presentation, and Total points awarded to the other competing teams.

## Connecting and Making the Most of Competition Day

The NSAC is a great way to connect with peers and professionals. Below are some suggestions on how to make the most out of your experience, especially at competitions.

- This is a great opportunity to connect and network with peers from other schools inside and outside your district. They could be future colleagues or clients!
- Once the NSAC is completed in its entirety at ADMERICA, you may connect with AAF members and NSAC judges. If your team doesn't advance past a competition level, you must wait until the conclusion of the NSAC at ADMERICA to connect with the judges.
- Team Number and School: It's okay to share what school you are from when meeting others (team members, advisors, attendees, etc.), but not share your school's team number. You may share your school name with judges after that level of the competition is completed.
- Conference, competition and/or event badges received by teams participating in the competition should not be worn during the competition or in the presence of judges to avoid the presence of potential identifying school information.

## INFRACTIONS & DISQUALIFICATION

- Violating any rules laid out in the Policies & Procedures or Student Code of Conduct may lead to scoring point deductions or disqualification proceedings for an individual student, advisor, or entire team.
- When a team is under review for a disqualification, the following steps will occur:
  - » AAF National and the District Coordinator of the team under review is notified of the infraction.
  - » AAF National notifies the team under review by telephone and email.
  - » The team under review may submit evidence or justification to contest the disqualification to AAF National.
  - » AAF National will remove any identifying information from the submitted evidence or justification (including faculty name and email) before sending to the NSAC sub-committee.
  - » NSAC sub-committee will convene to discuss the evidence and vote on the issue.
  - » AAF National will notify the team under review of the NSAC sub-committee decision by telephone and email.
  - » AAF National will notify the District Coordinator of the NSAC sub-committee decision by telephone and email.
  - » If the infraction occurred during the course of a District Competition and will affect the outcome of the final scores, the District Coordinator will notify all other teams in the district of the NSAC sub-committee decision via email.

# FAQs

## Videos and Non-Video Creative Work

- You may upload up to five pieces of non-video creative work by the March 26, 2026 deadline.
- Submitted pieces should represent work that a judge may want a longer or closer look at during judging and that a team may want to showcase in that manner should a judge choose to review. This does not mean that judge's will necessarily look at these submissions.
- For example: If you use 2 lines of a radio script you've crafted in your presentation, the entire radio script may be submitted as non-video creative work should the judge's want to take a more in depth look after your presentation.
- As stated on page 7: There is no limit on the number of video files your team can upload to OpenWater.

## Substitutions

- If there is a change of presenters, please contact Dawn Reeves at [dreeves@aaf.org](mailto:dreeves@aaf.org). All substitutions must be approved by AAF National in advance of any tier of the competition..

# APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Eligibility Checklist
- Appendix B: Plans Book Checklist
- Appendix C: Additional Creative Checklist
- Appendix D: Presentation Checklist
- Appendix E: Student Code of Conduct
- Appendix F: Scoresheets

## Appendix A:

# ELIGIBILITY CHECKLIST

- My school has established or renewed an AAF College Chapter for 2025-2026.
- Only one team is competing from my school.
- My team has appointed a faculty advisor.
- NSAC is being taught as a course and all students in the course are 2025-2026 AAF College Chapter Members.

–OR–

- NSAC is NOT being taught as a course and all students participating in the project are 2025-2026 AAF College Chapter Members.
- My team filled out the Intent to Participate form prior to accessing the case study and by the January 16, 2026 deadline.

**Appendix B:****PLANS BOOK CHECKLIST**

- 13 pages: 12 pages of content, plus the title page.
- Content includes Research, Insights, Strategy, One-Page Media Flowchart, Budget Page and Big Idea/Creative Concept.
- Dimensions of plans book must be 1920 pixels wide x 1080 pixels high (16:9 aspect ratio)
- Each page is numbered (excluding title page).
- Title page includes: team number, NSAC logo and the client logo.
- Plans book does not include links.
- Research properly cited (source sheet may be separate from the 13 Plans Book pages).
- No cropmarks or printer/production marks.
- Plans book is saved and submitted as a PDF.
- Plans book is not password protected.
- Team members, faculty advisors, school officials, etc. are only referred to by first name if at all.
- Plans book contains no identifying school information such as school name, mascot, motto, colors, or notable campus locations.
- Filename follows this format: NSAC2026\_Team123\_FinalPlansBook.pdf.
- Plans Book is uploaded to OpenWater by March 26, 2026, at 3:00pm ET.

**Appendix C:****MATERIALS CHECKLIST****Non-Video Creative Work**

- No more than five pieces of non-video creative work.
- Files must be uploaded to OpenWater using the same process as for the Plans Book.
- Each uploaded file only includes a single creative execution.
- Uploaded file is in one of the following file formats: MOV, MP4, MP3, WAV, JPEG, PDF.
- Work does not include a link to an external site and is not an executable program, application, or downloadable.
- Files are labeled with the team number and type of content. (Ex: Team123\_TVSpot1.mov).
- All materials are uploaded to OpenWater by March 26, 2026 at 3:00pm ET.

**Video Files**

- My team has uploaded all video files we intend to use in our Presentation.
- We understand that we cannot use video files in our Presentation that are not uploaded by this deadline.
- Files are .MOV or .MP4 format.
- Files contain only one video each.
- We have submitted a Video Checklist with our video files.

**Appendix D:****PRESENTATION CHECKLIST****District Presentation**

- Presentation lasts no more than 20 minutes from when the first word, music, movement, or slide begins to when the last word, music, or movement occurs.
- Presentation deck begins with title slide provided by the AAF, with no changes other than adding team number.
- No more than four team members are presenting.
- No one outside of the four presenters is running audio/visual equipment.
- All presentation materials are covered/hidden prior to the start of the presentation.
- Back of presentation boards are blank.
- All videos included in our presentation were uploaded by the Materials deadline.
- Reminder Sheet was uploaded to OpenWater by March 26, 2026 at 3:00pm ET.

**Presentation—Semi-Finals**

- Zoom presentation lasts no more than 20 minutes from when the first word, music, movement, or slide begins to when the last word, music, or movement occurs.
- Presentation deck begins with the title slide provided by the AAF, with no changes other than adding the team number.
- No more than four team members are presenting.
- Videos must be recorded using Zoom. Recording must be in one continuous take with no editing, special effects or enhancements permitted to the recording.
- No edits, special effects or enhancements are permitted (tilting, panning and zooming in and out is permitted).
- The presentation video files must be submitted as a.MOV or .MP4 file within seven days of District competition.

## Appendix E:

# STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT

The American Advertising Federation expects each student attending the NSAC to present a professional image as a representative of your college/university and of the advertising industry.

Each student and faculty must act responsibly at all times and comply with the following:

- I understand I am representing my school and will remember that my behavior will be observed by my peers and key industry leaders.
- I have reviewed the Policies & Procedures and will adhere to all rules outlined therein.
- I will not post or upload the NSAC Case Study or any part thereof to public sites or servers where individuals outside of the competing team may download a copy.
- I will maintain good standing at my academic institution. Any violation of school policy that results in disciplinary action may also impact my ability to compete in NSAC.
- The American Advertising Federation opposes all illegal acts. Any participant convicted of a crime during the competition year may be disqualified from participation.
- The District Competitions and ADMERICA Conference are not a vacation or holiday. They are professional business meetings. I have been invited to compete in a professional forum and will act accordingly.
- I understand that I may use NSAC materials in my password protected portfolio for the express purpose of job seeking.
- By entering the NSAC competition, I agree that all ideas expressed in written or presentation form become the property of the sponsoring company for any use whatsoever, without compensation of any sort to any person.
- Violation of the Policies and Procedures and the guidelines above will result in penalties against my NSAC team, including disqualification, at the discretion of the AAF National Office.
- When using AI to assist in the creation of artistic work, I commit to upholding the following principles:
  - » Ethical Considerations: I will ensure that my use of AI respects ethical guidelines, including privacy, inclusivity, and transparency. I will be mindful of the ethical implications of the data and algorithms I employ.
  - » Creative Ownership: I will acknowledge that AI is a tool and will not substitute my creative intent. The artistic output remains a reflection of my vision and ideas.
  - » Responsible Use of Data: I will use data ethically and responsibly, respecting intellectual property rights and data privacy laws, and obtain permissions when necessary.
  - » Accountability: I will be transparent about the involvement of AI in my creative process, ensuring I am accountable for the choices made and the use of AI technology.
  - » By adhering to these principles, I aim to use AI as a constructive and responsible tool in my artistic endeavors, fostering both innovation and ethical practice.

**Appendix F:**

# PLANS BOOK SCORE SHEET

**(35% of total score)**

Team Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Judges:** Write your scores in this column.

- 10 = Exceptional**
- 8–9 = Good to Very Good**
- 6–7 = Average**
- 4–5 = Deficient**
- 1–3 = Unacceptable**

Please look for the following achievements. Score each section from 1–10 with 10 being the highest. Write your scores in the right column. Write any comments on the reverse side of this page only. Constructive comments are encouraged; they help the students PLEASE DO NOT WRITE COMMENTS ON THIS SIDE, TEAMS WILL NOT SEE THEM.

**Research: 15%**

- Includes both Primary and Secondary sources, properly cited
- Reflects quantitative and qualitative findings
- Addresses the industry, trends and business challenges
- Reflects a good understanding of the market.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Target Audience: 20%**

- Outlines objectives, key challenges, target audience, and segmentation decisions
- Uses research findings to define target persona

\_\_\_\_\_

**Insight & Strategy: 25%**

- Identify an insight that goes beyond research findings
- Delineates a strategic approach that is clear, concise, supportable, ownable, and relevant to the brand challenges
- Taps into audience persona insights to appeal to the target audience at the personal and professional motivation level
- The strategy presented would address the business needs of the client

\_\_\_\_\_

**Paid & Earned Media, Scheduling and Budgeting: 15%**

- Outlines a holistic media strategy that demonstrates an efficient, realistic, and impactful use of budget to meet campaign objectives
- Calculates target audience exposure levels accurately
- Campaign is realistic and achievable within the given budget

\_\_\_\_\_

**Overall Quality of Plans Book: 10%**

- Exhibits a creative design and layout
- Communicates clearly
- Easy to read and understand
- Demonstrates a thoughtful storytelling process that is substantiated by research
- Presents no translation, grammatical, spelling, or syntax errors

\_\_\_\_\_

**Overall Plans Book Reactions: 15%**

- The research approach was reasonable based on the ask from the client (0, 1, 2, 3 pts.)
- The campaign demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the client and the ask (0, 1, 2, 3 pts.)
- The campaign strategy is clearly linked with research findings and insight (0, 1, 2, 3 pts.)
- Media plan demonstrates innovative thinking to connect brand with target audience (0, 1, 2, 3 pts.)
- I am excited to see the executions for this campaign (0, 1, 2, 3 pts.)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix F:**

# PLANS BOOK SCORE SHEET

Team Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Judges:** Write your scores in this column.

- 10 = Exceptional**
- 8–9 = Good to Very Good**
- 6–7 = Average**
- 4–5 = Deficient**
- 1–3 = Unacceptable**

## COMMENTS:

**Appendix F:**

**PRESENTATION SCORE SHEET**  
**(65% of total score)**

**Judges:** Write your scores in this column.

- 10 = Exceptional**
- 8–9 = Good to Very Good**
- 6–7 = Average**
- 4–5 = Deficient**
- 1–3 = Unacceptable**

Team Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please look for the following achievements. Score each section from 1–10 with 10 being the highest. Write your scores in the right column. Write any comments on the reverse side of this page only. Constructive comments are encouraged; they help the students PLEASE DO NOT WRITE COMMENTS ON THIS SIDE, TEAMS WILL NOT SEE THEM.

**Creative: 25%**

- Strategic blend of different initiatives including but not limited to:
  - » Channel & content strategy
  - » Influencer strategy
  - » Paid Media
  - » Brand Partnerships
  - » Experiential activations (digital and/or in person)
- Establishes an ownable campaign platform within the industry
- Stays true to client brand, mission, and core values
- Includes a singular message and theme that is differentiated from the competition and can be used across all channels
- Highlights a unique advertising approach, distinct from other teams
- Campaign elements are substantiated by research
- Presents well-crafted and impactful writing, art direction, design, and production work

\_\_\_\_\_

**Paid & Earned Media, Scheduling and Budgeting: 15%**

- Identifies and justifies the most effective media channels to capture and engage the target audience, supported by research, across paid and earned media (PR, social, influencers, etc)
- Provides a thoughtful and purposeful media schedule for the length of the campaign and the milestones to consider
- Demonstrates innovative and creative use of media channels.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Measurement and Evaluation Planning: 10%**

- Clearly addresses the KPIs in the brief
- Recommend strategy to track performance during campaign and optimize as needed/possible

\_\_\_\_\_

**Overall Quality of the Presentation: 25%**

- Addresses all deliverables in the original brief
- Demonstrates a thoughtful storytelling process
- Displays well-crafted visuals that enhance the presentation
- Delivers a professional, logical, clear and engaging pitch

\_\_\_\_\_

**Overall Quality of the Q&A: 10%**

- Answers the judges' questions effectively, accurately, and thoroughly.
- Demonstrates comprehensive understanding of campaign.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix F:**

# **PRESENTATION SCORE SHEET**

**Presentation Reactions: 15%**

- This campaign could be put to market with little or no revision (0, 1, 2, 3 pts.)
  - This campaign addresses the problem the client presented (0, 1, 2 pts.)
  - This campaign is unique, ownable, and memorable (0, 1, 2, 3 pts.)
  - This campaign was realistic based on the client's constraints, and ask (0, 1, 2 pts.)
  - This campaign was cohesive, and the elements complemented each other throughout (0, 1, 2, 3 pts.)
  - This team acted professionally throughout the presentation and Q&A and I would be comfortable putting this team in front of a client (0, 1, 2 pts.)
-

**Appendix F:**

# PRESENTATION SCORE SHEET

Team Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Judges:** Write your scores in this column.

- 10 = Exceptional**
- 8–9 = Good to Very Good**
- 6–7 = Average**
- 4–5 = Deficient**
- 1–3 = Unacceptable**

## COMMENTS:

Appendix F:

# SEMI-FINALS SCORE SHEET

Team Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Judges:** Write your scores in this column.

- 10 = Exceptional**
- 8–9 = Good to Very Good**
- 6–7 = Average**
- 4–5 = Deficient**
- 1–3 = Unacceptable**

Please look for the following achievements. Score each section from 1–10 with 10 being the highest. Write your scores in the right column. Write any comments on the reverse side of this page only. Constructive comments are encouraged; they help the students PLEASE DO NOT WRITE COMMENTS ON THIS SIDE, TEAMS WILL NOT SEE THEM.

**Research + Target Audience: 10%**

- Includes both Primary and Secondary sources, properly cited
- Reflects quantitative and qualitative findings
- Addresses the industry, trends and business challenges
- Reflects a good understanding of the market.
- Outlines objectives, key challenges, target audience, and segmentation decisions
- Uses research findings to define target persona

\_\_\_\_\_

**Insight + Strategy: 10%**

- Identify an insight that goes beyond research findings
- Delineates a strategic approach that is clear, concise, supportable, ownable, and relevant to the brand challenges
- Taps into audience persona insights to appeal to the target audience at the personal and professional motivation level
- The strategy presented would address the business needs of the client

\_\_\_\_\_

**Creative: 20%**

- Strategic blend of different initiatives including but not limited to:
  - » Channel & content strategy
  - » Influencer strategy
  - » Paid Media
  - » Brand Partnerships
  - » Experiential activations (digital and/or in person)
- Establishes an ownable campaign platform within the industry
- Stays true to client brand, mission, and core values
- Includes a singular message and theme that is differentiated from the competition and can be used across all channels
- Highlights a unique advertising approach, distinct from other teams
- Campaign elements are substantiated by research
- Presents well-crafted and impactful writing, art direction, design, and production work

\_\_\_\_\_

**Paid & Earned Media Planning, Scheduling + Budgeting: 15%**

- Outlines a holistic media strategy that demonstrates an efficient, realistic, and impactful use of budget to meet campaign objectives
- Identifies and justifies the most effective media channels to capture and engage the target audience, supported by research, across paid and earned media (PR, social, influencers, etc)
- Provides a thoughtful and purposeful media schedule for the length of the campaign and the milestones to consider
- Calculates target audience exposure levels accurately
- Campaign is realistic and achievable within the given budget

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix F:**

# SEMI-FINALS SCORE SHEET

**Measurement + Evaluation Planning: 10%**

- Clearly addresses the KPIs in the brief
- Recommend strategy to track performance during campaign and optimize as needed/possible

**Overall Quality of the Presentation: 10%**

- Addresses all deliverables in the original brief
- Demonstrates a thoughtful storytelling process
- Displays well-crafted visuals that enhance the presentation
- Delivers a professional, logical, clear and engaging pitch

**Overall Quality of the Q&A: 15%**

- Answers the judges' questions effectively, accurately, and thoroughly.
- Demonstrates comprehensive understanding of campaign.

**Presentation Reactions: 10%**

- The research approach was reasonable based on the ask from the client (0 or 1 pt.)
- The campaign strategy is clearly linked with research findings and insight (0 or 1 pt.)
- The campaign strategy is built around a genuine insight (0 or 1 pt.)
- This campaign could be put to market with little or no revision (0 or 1 pt.)
- This campaign addresses the problem the client presented (0 or 1 pt.)
- This campaign is unique, ownable, and memorable (0 or 1 pt.)
- This campaign was realistic based on the client's constraints and ask (0 or 1 pt.)
- This campaign was cohesive, and the elements complemented each other throughout (0 or 1 pt.)
- I could imagine this team working with this client (0 or 1 pt.)
- This team acted professionally throughout the presentation and Q&A and I would be comfortable putting this team in front of a client (0 or 1 pt.)

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**Appendix F:**

# SEMI-FINALS SCORE SHEET

Team Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Judges:** Write your scores in this column.

- 10 = Exceptional**
- 8–9 = Good to Very Good**
- 6–7 = Average**
- 4–5 = Deficient**
- 1–3 = Unacceptable**

## COMMENTS: