



BATTLE OF THE COUNTIES

JUDGING RUBRIC & JUDGE GUIDE

2026–27 Pilot

EXPLORE ► LISTEN ► INVESTIGATE ► IMAGINE ► DESIGN ► SHARE



PURPOSE OF JUDGING

Recognize student teams that demonstrate thoughtful community understanding, learning and evidence, purposeful design, and a clear team voice. Minecraft is the medium students use to communicate their thinking. Technical building skill is not a separate judging category.

Judges review each team's Virtual Tour: a video walkthrough of 3 minutes or less, submitted as an MP4. The tour should show the team's build, Board, and NPC and explain what the team learned and the reasoning behind its decisions. The project summary gives context but is not scored.



1. JUDGE WITH THESE PRINCIPLES IN MIND

- Evaluate civic thinking, not Minecraft expertise. An elaborate build does not automatically represent a stronger proposal.
- Evaluate the work within its grade division. Expectations for grades 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12 should reflect developmentally appropriate levels of sophistication.
- Judge the proposal, not video production quality. Editing, graphics, expensive equipment, or professional polish should not create a scoring advantage.
- Look for evidence across the entire Virtual Tour. Student thinking may appear in what students say, the Minecraft build, the Board, NPC dialogue, and the NPC's external link.
- Reward thoughtful reasoning. Judges should be able to understand what students learned, why they made their choices, who their proposal serves, and how it responds to the challenge.
- Remain open to different solutions. Community challenges rarely have one correct response.



THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Does this proposal show that students explored, listened, investigated, imagined, designed, and can explain why their idea could strengthen the community?



2. RECOMMENDED REVIEW PROCESS

1. Read the project title and challenge. Skim the project summary for context; it is not scored.
2. Watch the full Virtual Tour once without scoring so you understand the team's overall idea.
3. Open the Battle Prompt & Rubric for the team's challenge and grade band, and score each of the four criteria using evidence from the Virtual Tour.
4. Record a brief strength and constructive feedback note for the team.
5. Review the total score and confirm that it reflects the quality of the civic proposal rather than Minecraft skill or video polish.



3. OFFICIAL JUDGING RUBRIC

Every challenge uses the same four criteria, each scored 1–4, for a maximum of 16 points. Each challenge and grade band has its own Battle Prompt & Rubric with specific requirements, such as 2+, 3+, or 4+ purposeful features. Always score with the rubric that matches the team's challenge and grade band. The descriptors below show the common structure those rubrics share.



LEVEL 3 = ALL REQUIREMENTS MET

Level 3 (Progressing) means the team met every requirement in its prompt. Level 4 (Excelling) means it went beyond. Each grade band has its own rubric, so strong elementary work may be simpler than strong high school work while earning the same level.

Challenge

Named for each community (for example, “Fullerton Challenge”). Does the proposal respond to a meaningful need, strength, or opportunity and show who it serves and its intended impact?

Score	Performance Descriptor
4 — Excelling	Deep, thoughtful understanding of the community; a relevant response with clear intended impact.
3 — Progressing	Responds to a meaningful need, strength, or opportunity from the community and shows who it serves and how it helps.

Score	Performance Descriptor
2 — Developing	An idea or general issue is identified, but purpose, audience, or impact is only partly developed.
1 — Emerging	No clear need, opportunity, or intended impact yet.

Learning & Evidence

Named for each community (for example, “Community Learning & Evidence” or “Evidence, Place & Tradeoffs”). Is the design grounded in specific learning from the community and, in grades 9–12, a credible external source?

Score	Performance Descriptor
4 — Excelling	Synthesizes learning, perspectives, and evidence to make a convincing case for the design.
3 — Progressing	Uses specific learning from the community to shape the design, as the prompt requires (grades 9–12 add a credible external source).
2 — Developing	Mentions the community or evidence, but the link to the design is weak or unclear.
1 — Emerging	Not grounded in learning from the community or outside evidence.

Design & Creativity

Original · coherent · purposeful. Does the build include the number of purposeful features the prompt requires, working together as a clear solution?

Score	Performance Descriptor
4 — Excelling	Original, detailed, and intentional; features work together as a compelling proposal.
3 — Progressing	Meets the prompt's feature requirement (2+ for grades 3–5, 3+ for grades 6–8, 4+ for grades 9–12) with purposeful features that support a clear, creative solution.
2 — Developing	Some purposeful features, but they are underdeveloped or loosely connected.
1 — Emerging	Incomplete, or the purpose is hard to understand.

Communication & Team Voice

Board · NPC · source · Virtual Tour. Do the Board, NPC, and Virtual Tour explain the proposal, with every team member's voice heard?

Score	Performance Descriptor
4 — Excelling	A clear, persuasive proposal. Everyone contributes meaningfully and advocates for why it matters.
3 — Progressing	Board and NPC explain the idea, the NPC includes a relevant link or source, and the Virtual Tour includes every voice.
2 — Developing	Some parts done; explanation, source, or team voice is limited.
1 — Emerging	Board, NPC, link, or Virtual Tour is missing, or participation is unclear.



4. SCORE SUMMARY

Category	Score	Notes
Challenge	____ / 4	
Learning & Evidence	____ / 4	
Design & Creativity	____ / 4	
Communication & Team Voice	____ / 4	
TOTAL	____ / 16	



5. JUDGE FEEDBACK

One strength of this team's proposal:

One question, suggestion, or idea for continued thinking:



6. TIE-BREAKING GUIDANCE

When two or more teams receive the same total score and advancement requires a tie to be resolved, judges should not create an additional Minecraft or presentation category. Use the following sequence:

1. Higher score in Challenge.
2. Higher score in Learning & Evidence.
3. Higher score in Communication & Team Voice.
4. If still tied, judges should conduct a brief comparative review and select the proposal that most clearly demonstrates thoughtful civic reasoning and a meaningful response to the community challenge.



7. WHAT JUDGES SHOULD NOT SCORE

- Advanced Minecraft commands, Redstone, scale, architectural complexity, or technical building skill by themselves.
- Professional video editing, special effects, graphics, music, camera quality, or expensive production tools.
- Whether judges personally agree with the students' proposed solution.
- How polished or confident individual students appear on camera.
- Whether a student speaks aloud or, with teacher approval, contributes through captions or on-screen text. Both count as that student's voice.
- Access to outside resources, mentors, equipment, or technology beyond what is necessary to communicate the proposal.



8. FAIRNESS, CONFIDENTIALITY & CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Judges should evaluate only the evidence presented in the official submission and apply the rubric consistently. Student submissions should be treated as competition materials and should not be downloaded, reposted, publicly shared, or used for other purposes unless authorized through the competition process.

A judge should disclose any relationship that could reasonably affect impartiality, including a close personal, professional, or supervisory relationship with a participating student, advisor, school team, or project. When a meaningful conflict exists, the judge should not score that submission and should notify the competition coordinator.



9. CIVIC LEARNING ALIGNMENT

The judging framework emphasizes inquiry into real community challenges, consideration of different perspectives and possible responses, purposeful action through a civic proposal, communication, and reflection. These elements are consistent with the type of informed civic engagement described in California's State Seal of Civic Engagement guidance.

Battle of the Counties participation does not automatically satisfy State Seal of Civic Engagement requirements. Local educational agencies determine whether students meet statewide and locally adopted criteria.



10. FINAL JUDGE CHECK

- ☐ I watched the full Virtual Tour.
- ☐ I evaluated the team's civic proposal rather than Minecraft expertise or video production quality.
- ☐ I used the Battle Prompt & Rubric for the team's challenge and grade band.
- ☐ My scores are supported by evidence shown in the submission.
- ☐ I provided constructive feedback.
- ☐ I have disclosed any potential conflict of interest.



11. PROGRAM INFORMATION

Battle of the Counties is organized by The Level Up Civics Foundation. Minecraft Education is the software platform students use to develop and communicate their proposals.



NOT AN OFFICIAL MINECRAFT OR MINECRAFT EDUCATION PROGRAM OR EVENT

Not approved by or associated with Mojang or Microsoft.