# Teach ME
# National Students' Innovation Competition
# 2026

## OFFICIAL GUIDELINES

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## PROGRAMME BACKGROUND

The Teach ME Programme is designed to inspire young people to explore the exciting world of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) while developing the knowledge, skills, confidence and creativity needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Through its initiatives, the programme seeks to strengthen students' interest and capabilities in STEM and foster essential 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, problem-solving and adaptability.

The programme aims to contribute to improving the levels of creativity and innovation in Trinidad and Tobago by building and strengthening capacities in Science, Technology and Innovation, with a particular focus on Science Education. It seeks to support education at the primary and secondary levels in preparing young people to navigate and contribute meaningfully to an increasingly complex and technology-driven world.

One of the programme's key deliverables is the development and hosting of the *Teach ME National Students' Innovation Competition*. In 2026, the competition enters its seventh year and remains open to students at both the primary and secondary school levels across Trinidad and Tobago. The competition provides students with an opportunity to apply their STEM knowledge and 21st-century skills to real-world challenges through research, creative thinking, problem-solving, experimentation and innovation.

The theme for the 2026 Teach ME National Students' Innovation Competition is "**Future Ready: Designing Solutions for the World of Tomorrow**." Under this theme, participating students, with guidance from teachers and mentors, will identify a problem or opportunity and develop an innovative solution that responds to the evolving needs of society. Students are encouraged to think beyond existing solutions, and demonstrate how STEM knowledge, emerging technologies, and 21st-century skills can be applied to address challenges, explore opportunities, and design solutions for a better future.



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## COMPETITION OVERVIEW

The Teach ME National Students' Innovation Competition challenges students to use creativity, technology and problem-solving skills to design innovative solutions to real-world problems or opportunities. Under the 2026 theme, **Future Ready: Designing Solutions for the World of Tomorrow**, students will use coding, game development and game design to create a virtual prototype that demonstrates their idea.

Through the competition, students will:

- Identify a problem or opportunity that could be addressed through an innovative solution.
- Develop and communicate a creative idea that responds to a real-world need or opportunity.
- Build their *Habits of Mind* and *21st Century Skills*, including critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, perseverance and adaptability.
- Explore how their idea could be developed, marketed and potentially commercialised.

### Developing Your Idea

As you develop your solution, consider the following questions:

- What problem or opportunity are you addressing?
- How does your idea solve the problem or take advantage of the opportunity?
- Who will benefit from your solution?
- What benefits could your innovation have for people, society or the environment?
- How could your idea be implemented in Trinidad and Tobago or beyond?
- What research have you done to determine whether your idea is new or different?
- Could your idea be marketed or developed into a viable business?

Your goal is not simply to create a virtual prototype. **Show us an innovative idea that could make a difference in the real world.**



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## ELIGIBILITY

1. All entrants must be nationals of Trinidad and Tobago currently in Standards 3 – 5 and Forms 1 – 5.

2. Individuals or teams of up to five (5) persons can enter the competition. All team members must be eligible for the same category i.e. Primary or Secondary.

3. Judging and prize giving will be divided into the following categories:

   Primary
   Class Level: Standards 3 – 5

   Secondary
   Class Level: Forms 1 – 5

4. Multiple entries are allowed and should be done on separate entry forms.

5. Members of the organizing committee and their families are not eligible to enter this competition.

6. Individuals who have been winners in the competition on three (3) or more occasions, whether consecutively or otherwise, are not eligible to participate.



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## THEME AND PRESENTATION

Welcome Young Innovators!

***Future Ready: Designing Solutions for the World of Tomorrow***

The world is changing at an unprecedented pace. Advances in science and technology, environmental challenges, shifting economies, evolving workplaces, and changing community needs are creating new opportunities while presenting complex challenges for future generations. The theme **Future Ready: Designing Solutions for the World of Tomorrow** celebrates the creativity, curiosity, and problem-solving abilities of young people as they imagine and design solutions for a rapidly changing world.

Being future ready is more than simply understanding new technologies. It requires young people to think critically, ask meaningful questions, adapt to change, work collaboratively, and apply knowledge in creative ways. This theme invites students to explore how Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), together with creativity and innovation, can be used to anticipate emerging challenges, discover opportunities and develop solutions that improve the way we live, learn, work, and interact with our environment.

As students look towards the future, they are encouraged to consider the challenges and opportunities that may affect their communities, their country, and the wider world. From environmental sustainability and climate resilience to healthcare, education, agriculture, transportation, food security, community development, and the future of work, there are countless possibilities for innovation. Students may also explore emerging areas such as artificial intelligence, robotics, automation, biotechnology, smart technologies, renewable energy, and digital innovation where these can contribute meaningfully to their proposed solutions.

### Designing for the Future

Designing solutions for tomorrow begins with understanding the world around us. Young innovators are encouraged to identify a **real-world problem or opportunity**, investigate its context, and consider the needs, possibilities and potential of the people or communities



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involved. Through research, observation, questioning, and experimentation, students can develop a deeper understanding of the problem or opportunity they have identified and explore possibilities for meaningful innovation.

The competition challenges participants to move beyond simply identifying a problem or opportunity and to develop solutions that are creative, practical, and responsive to real-world needs or possibilities. Students may design a product, process, system, application, model, device, or other innovative solution. Their projects should demonstrate how STEM knowledge and skills can be applied to transform an idea into a solution with the potential to create positive impact.

Students are encouraged to consider not only whether their solutions work, but also how they could be improved, adapted, or expanded to meet future needs or opportunities. This cycle of designing, testing, evaluating, and refining solutions shows students that real innovation is a process of constant improvement. It encourages them to view setbacks and new discoveries not as failures, but as opportunities to learn and create.

**The Role of Emerging Technologies**

Emerging technologies are transforming the way people solve problems, explore opportunities, and interact with the world. Artificial intelligence, robotics, data analytics, the Internet of Things, automation, digital platforms, biotechnology, and other technological developments are opening new possibilities for innovation. However, technology is most powerful when it is applied purposefully to create value, respond to real-world needs, or explore new possibilities.

For young innovators, these technologies can provide tools to explore ideas, analyse information, develop prototypes, automate processes, and create new ways of responding to real-world challenges or opportunities. Students may consider how emerging technologies could enhance solutions in areas such as education, healthcare, agriculture, environmental protection, disaster preparedness, transportation, energy, and community development.



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The focus, however, should not be on using technology simply because it is new or innovative. Instead, students should consider **why** a particular technology is useful or suitable, **how** it improves their proposed solution, and **what impact** its use may have. Responsible and thoughtful use of technology, including consideration of its ethical, social, environmental, and practical implications, is an important part of preparing for the world of tomorrow.

**The Power of 21st-Century Skills**

Preparing for the future requires more than technical knowledge. The challenges and opportunities of tomorrow will demand individuals who can think critically, communicate effectively, collaborate with others, adapt to change, and approach challenges and opportunities with creativity and confidence.

The competition therefore encourages students to strengthen and demonstrate key 21st-century skills throughout the innovation process. Participants will have opportunities to conduct research, analyse information, generate and evaluate ideas, collaborate with peers, communicate their findings, and make informed decisions. They will also be encouraged to demonstrate resilience by testing ideas, learning from setbacks, and refining their solutions.

Innovation is not simply about creating something new. It is about understanding challenges, recognising opportunities, seeing possibilities where others may not, and developing solutions that can make a meaningful difference. By combining STEM knowledge with creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving, young people can become active contributors to the future rather than simply observers of change.

**Youth Innovation for a Changing World**

Young people bring fresh perspectives, curiosity, creativity, and a willingness to question established ways of doing things. Their experiences of school, community, technology, and the world around them provide valuable insights into the challenges and possibilities that may shape the future.



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Through this competition, students are encouraged to think beyond conventional solutions and explore ideas that could improve the lives of individuals and communities. Projects may respond to local challenges, explore emerging opportunities, or address broader global concerns, provided that they demonstrate a clear understanding of the problem or opportunity and a thoughtful approach to developing a solution.

Students are also encouraged to consider the potential impact of their innovations. A successful solution should respond meaningfully to the problem or opportunity identified and, where possible, be inclusive, sustainable, practical, and responsive to the people it is intended to serve. Participants should consider how their ideas might contribute to a safer, healthier, more sustainable, equitable, and resilient future.

**An Integrated Approach**

*Future Ready: Designing Solutions for the World of Tomorrow* reflects an integrated approach to innovation and learning. Students will be challenged to bring together knowledge and skills from different areas of STEM while drawing on creativity, research, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking.

The innovation process provides an opportunity for students to connect what they learn in the classroom with challenges or possibilities they encounter in the real world. Teachers and mentors play an important role in guiding students as they investigate problems or opportunities, explore possibilities, develop prototypes, test their ideas, and reflect on how their solutions can be improved.

Ultimately, being future ready means being prepared to learn, adapt, create, and contribute in a world that will continue to change. Through this year's competition, Teach ME seeks to nurture a generation of thinkers, problem-solvers, innovators, and changemakers who are equipped not only to respond to challenges and explore opportunities, but to help shape the future they want to see.



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## PROTOTYPE SUBMISSION

### Submission Guidelines

A panel of distinguished professionals will be appointed to evaluate all entries.

**Stage 1: Registration and Prototype Proposal**

i. Complete and submit all registration forms **no later** than **November 6, 2026**.

ii. Complete and submit the **Prototype Proposal Document no later** than **November 6, 2026.** This document will be reviewed by the judges and must include a brief description of the problem or opportunity identified and the proposed solution that the virtual prototype will provide. Students can submit multiple entries; however, a team can only have a maximum of five (5) students.

iii. Judges will conduct an initial review of the Prototype Proposals and provide recommendations to participants. Feedback from the first review will be provided by **November 11, 2026**.

iv. After receiving feedback, participants may refine and further develop their ideas before beginning the development of their virtual prototype.

v. Following the registration period, participants will receive a **Project Design Packet** to document their progress throughout the competition. **One (1) Project Design Packet is required per team.** The packet will be used to record the project concept, design and development process, testing and improvements, and weekly progress. Teams may also include photographs, videos and other supporting materials. Students are encouraged to be creative in documenting their innovation journey.



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**Stage 2: Round 1 of Judging**

i. All entrants must submit a **Draft Design of the Virtual Prototype** (e.g. a picture, sketch or small model) **or a video demonstrating the prototype from start to finish, along with their Prototype Proposal, no later** than **December 4, 2026**.

ii. Judges will assess the submissions based on the criteria outlined in the *Judging and Evaluation* section on pages 12–13.

iii. Following the accumulation of judges' scores, finalists in each category will be selected on **December 16, 2026**.

iv. Finalists will receive preliminary scores and feedback from the judges. These should be used as a guide to identify areas for improvement and further development.

v. Participants may then make the necessary changes and continue developing their virtual prototype for the next stage of judging.

**Stage 3: Round 2 of Judging**

i. Participants must submit their **Final Prototype, Final Prototype Proposal Document and Final Project Design Packet no later** than **January 8, 2027**.

ii. Participants must provide a **short video presentation** on their virtual prototype for the judges' assessment. Presentations must be **five (5) to fifteen (15) minutes in length**. Participants may choose a creative format that best showcases their innovation. See the *Verbal Presentation of Prototypes* section on page 11 for further guidance.



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iii. Winners will be announced on **January 20, 2027**. Details of the Prize Giving Ceremony will be announced following the selection of the competition winners.

## Building Your Prototype

For the 2026 competition, primary and secondary school participants will develop their projects using designated virtual platforms: **MakeCode Arcade** for primary school participants and **Unity** for secondary school participants.

**Microsoft MakeCode Arcade** is a block-based and text-based programming platform designed to make coding accessible and engaging for learners. **Unity** is a real-time development platform that enables users to create interactive 2D and 3D experiences, including games, simulations, and immersive applications. Participants will use *MakeCode Arcade* (primary category) and *Unity* (second category) to develop interactive projects, games, simulations, and programmable solutions while demonstrating computational thinking and creativity.

Tutorial resources for *MakeCode Arcade* and *Unity* will be provided to guide students in navigating and effectively using the designated platforms for project development.

## Verbal Presentation of Prototypes

Participants (individuals or teams) must:

- Explain their innovation, clearly describing the problem or opportunity that their virtual prototype seeks to address.
- Describe how their virtual prototype is intended to work and how it responds to the identified problem or opportunity.
- Detail how coding was used in the development and functionality of their virtual prototype.
- Include a brief plan or business proposal outlining how their innovation could be developed, implemented, marketed, scaled, or otherwise brought into practical use, identifying potential partners, users, investors, or stakeholders, where applicable.



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# JUDGING AND EVALUATION

## Judging Criteria

Prototypes will be judged on the following criteria:

- Originality (15%)
- Functionality (15%)
- Ingenuity (10%)
- Sustainability (10%)
- Methodology (10%)
- Creativity (5%)
- Usefulness (10%)
- Presentation (10%)
- Simplicity (5%)
- Commercial Potential (10%)

## Definitions

A brief definition of each criterion is given below:

**Originality (of the idea):**

– The extent to which the idea is new, different or demonstrates appreciable novelty.

**Functionality:**

– The extent to which the innovation works as intended and effectively serves its proposed purpose.

**Ingenuity:**

– The skill, resourcefulness and clever thinking demonstrated in developing the innovation or solution.

**Sustainability:**

– The potential for the innovation to be maintained and remain viable over time, while considering its economic, social and environmental impact.

**Methodology:**

– The methods, processes and principles used to research, develop and create the innovation.

**Creativity (of the idea's development):**

– The level of imagination and creative thinking demonstrated in developing the idea or innovation.



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**Usefulness:**

- The potential benefits and positive impact of the innovation on individuals, communities, society or the environment.

**Presentation:**

- The clarity, organisation and effectiveness with which the innovation is communicated and demonstrated to the judges.

**Simplicity:**

- The ease with which the innovation can be understood, developed or used, including the simplicity of its mechanisms, materials and development process.

**Commercial Potential**

- The potential for the innovation to be developed, adopted or brought to market successfully. This includes consideration of market needs, potential users or customers, competition, and opportunities for financial sustainability or growth.

*Judges' discussions and deliberations will remain confidential. Preliminary scores will be shared with participants during the competition; however, the judges' final decisions are final.*



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## SUBMISSION OF ENTRIES

Competition documents must be submitted **on or before** the stipulated deadlines as follows:

You must e-mail your submissions to teachme@niherst.gov.tt **on or before** the stipulated deadline dates.



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## PRIZES

**Up to fifty thousand dollars ($50,000)**
**in Gift of Units from the Unit Trust Corporation**
**to be won!**

Prizes for winners in the Primary and Secondary categories will be awarded as follows:

- 1st place winners
- 2nd place winners
- 3rd place winners

| Place | Primary Category | Secondary Category |
|---|---|---|
| 1st | Individual – $2,500.00<br>Group – $2,500.00 for each group member | Individual – $2,500.00<br>Group – $2,500.00 for each group member |
| 2nd | Individual – $1,500.00<br>Group – $1,500.00 for each group member | Individual – $1,500.00<br>Group – $1,500.00 for each group member |
| 3rd | Individual – $1,150.00<br>Group – $1,150.00 for each group member | Individual – $1,150.00<br>Group – $1,150.00 for each group member |

Additional prizes may also be awarded at the discretion of the organisers. NIHERST and the organising committee reserve the right to refuse awarding of prizes where the required standards are not met and will not be liable to any entrant for the loss of opportunity, or under any other grounds.

**Prizes will be distributed via the courtesies of NIHERST**. Recipients must have an existing Unit Trust Corporation account, **only** TT$ Money Market Funds or TT$ Growth & Income Funds are accepted. The account may be in the name of the student, parent or guardian.



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