



PHOTO BY SUZI ALTMAN

SLINGSHOT CHALLENGE

Educator Toolkit

**SUBMISSION
DEADLINE**
FEBRUARY 6, 2026
AT 11:59 PM EST

INTRODUCTION

The Slingshot Challenge is an innovative youth challenge from the National Geographic Society and Allen Family Philanthropies. The challenge aims to identify and support the next generation of problem-solvers, advocates, and stewards of the planet. Designed for young people ages 13-18, the challenge will help them use their voice and ingenuity to tackle environmental issues.

WHAT IS THE SLINGSHOT CHALLENGE?

In the Slingshot Challenge, students identify and research an environmental challenge in their local community, create a solution to address the issue, and then share their idea with the world using a **one-minute video**. Students can use the Slingshot Challenge Participant Toolkit to support their work and join live support sessions with National Geographic Explorers. Student submissions will be considered for funding and may be shared with global audiences at events and on social media.

WHY USE SLINGSHOT CHALLENGE WITH YOUR STUDENTS?

Competing curriculum priorities and limits on time and resources are challenging. That's why the Slingshot Challenge is flexible. Students can engage online or in person, in teams or individually, across a variety of traditional school disciplines or as part of a club or after-school activity. Students can participate using basic equipment, such as a single smartphone and free video editing app. It can be curriculum-aligned and delivered as a unit of work or as a stand-alone activity. This Educator Toolkit provides some background on the challenge and contains suggestions for using the challenge in your classroom. It's designed to be used your way!

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Questions?

*Visit our Support Center:
bit.ly/3dy0q0g or email us at
Slingshot@ngs.org.*

What is Videos for Change? To implement the Slingshot Challenge, the National Geographic Society has collaborated with Videos for Change, a worldwide community of young people creating short-form video content on issues that matter most to them. Through Videos for Change, young filmmakers can also have their Slingshot Challenge videos screened at film festivals and connect with broadcast and social media partners. Find all of the latest details at videosforchange.org.

**videos
for
change**



INTRODUCTION

ILLUMINATE AND PROTECT THE WONDER OF OUR WORLD

National Geographic Explorers are exceptional individuals in their fields who receive funding and support from the Society to illuminate and protect our world through their work in science, exploration, education, and storytelling. Your students are the next generation of problem-solvers, risktakers, and decision-makers. They will shape the future of the planet. In their Slingshot Challenge videos, your students will propose their ideas to address at least one of the following five topic areas:



CLEAN THE AIR



RESTORE THE OCEAN



PROTECT NATURE



REDUCE WASTE



ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

HOW TO JOIN

Educators and students should sign up to receive challenge updates at SlingshotChallenge.org.

To be sure that every student has a chance to participate and be eligible for awards, please have each student register for an individual account for the Slingshot Challenge at Videos for Change.

Students will be prompted to provide a parent email address so that parent consent can be obtained. Educators can also request access to a Dashboard to track student progress throughout the challenge. Email us at slingshot@ngs.org to register.

REGISTER HERE: SLINGSHOT.VIDEOSFORCHANGE.ORG

GET SUPPORT

- **Guidance & Resources:** This Supporter Toolkit provides tips for best supporting learners. While the Participant Toolkit contains guides and resources like worksheets and graphic organizers that will take your students all phases of the challenge.
- **Virtual Events with Experts:** Supporters and students can join our virtual events featuring Explorers and previous Slingshot Awardees. Educator Info Sessions offer space to learn more and ask questions about challenge implementation, and Solution Design Labs provide brainstorming sessions where students can generate new ideas and connect with peers. Sign up for these events here: bit.ly/45Eei1u
- **1-1 Help:** Office Hours provide for more individualized support for both supporters and students. Register here: bit.ly/45Vqmsm



SUBMIT YOUR VIDEO AT SLINGSHOT.VIDEOSFORCHANGE.ORG

INTRODUCTION | REQUIREMENTS

A **Slingshot Challenge video** addresses one or more of the topic areas on the previous page and meets the following requirements:

STUDENT TEAMS AND PROJECTS:



Students can work alone or in a team of up to six members. The project can be an extension of the work students did in a previous Slingshot Challenge.



Everyone in each team must be 13-18 years old at the time of submission, and must have parent consent at Videos for Change.



The project needs to focus on an environmental issue in your community related to the Slingshot Challenge topic areas.

REQUIREMENTS FOR SUBMITTED VIDEOS:



Each video must be no longer than one minute, must be in either English or Spanish, and files must be no larger than 200MB.



Students can film on any equipment, including their phones, and videos can be filmed in either horizontal (landscape) or vertical (portrait) format.



All content must be original or copyright-free and we recommend avoiding the use of AI-generated content such as images, video, or script writing. If your video is selected for final consideration, you may be asked to supply information about the source of your content, including AI generators and common use websites.

WHY ARE THESE ELEMENTS IMPORTANT?

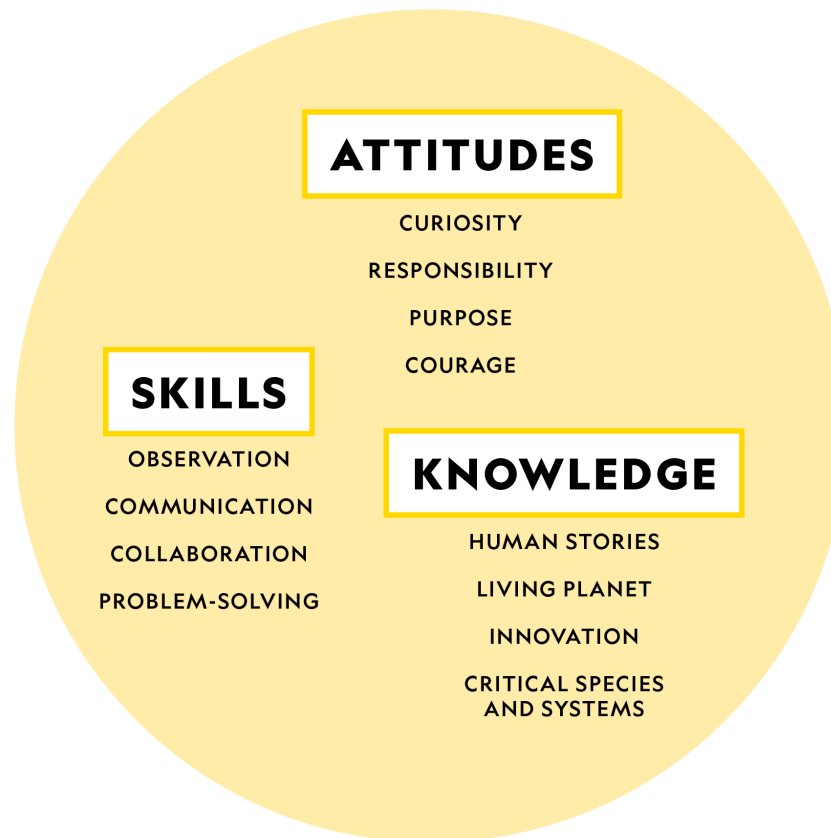
- **Why a one-minute video?** It encourages a clear focus and one key message to maximize audience engagement, shareability, and impact.
- **Why no more than six team members?** This ensures that everyone has a role to play and can take the lead on specific responsibilities to enhance engagement and learning outcomes.
- **Why only 13-18 year olds?** The learning experience is designed to engage, stimulate, and develop critical competencies within this target age bracket. However, it is OK to have people outside of a team and age requirements act or feature in a video as “talent”.
- **Why does it have to be original or copyright-free?** Copyright is a legal right given to people who have created content to protect their intellectual property. All content must be sourced from legitimate copyright-free suppliers (see the Participant Toolkit for resources) or be original material. Any breaches will preclude sharing and eligibility for awards and opportunities.



THE LEARNING JOURNEY | THE EXPLORER MINDSET

National Geographic Explorers come from all professions and disciplines, but they share a set of attitudes, skills, and types of knowledge that help make them powerful changemakers. National Geographic calls this the **Explorer Mindset**, a mindset that can apply to any age-group and transcends academic disciplines. The Slingshot Challenge can help you develop this Explorer Mindset with your students.

EXPLORER MINDSET LEARNING FRAMEWORK



The Explorer Mindset was developed from globally benchmarked academic standards and competencies, including frameworks developed by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).



SUBMIT YOUR VIDEO AT [SLINGSHOT.VIDEOSFORCHANGE.ORG](https://slingshot.videosforchange.org)

THE LEARNING JOURNEY | DRAW INSPIRATION FROM EXPLORERS AND AWARDEES

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORERS

National Geographic Explorers are changemakers from around the globe who are passionate about our planet and making it a better place. Explorers are addressing the world's most pressing problems. Explorers can serve as role models and inspiration for your students as they identify the problems they want to solve and brainstorm solutions. **There are special awards in the Slingshot Challenge for videos that draw connections to Explorers.**

Students can draw inspiration from Explorers like...

Young Explorer **Sruthi Gurudev**, who created an online magazine to engage other young people in Ocean Conservation.

Conservationist **Marina Rivero**, who is committed to educating her community about an unusual and endangered animal in their backyards.

Marine Ecologist **Angelo Brenardino** who protects mangrove forests to preserve unique habitats and combat global climate change.

Have students view more stories of National Geographic Explorers at nationalgeographic.com/impact/explorers or search for Explorers from your community in the directory: explorer-directory.nationalgeographic.org

SLINGSHOT CHALLENGE AWARD RECIPIENTS

Students should also draw inspiration from previous Slingshot Challenge award recipients. *Can they...*

Prevent electronic waste at their school like **Let's Talk E-Waste** in Bahrain?

Encourage cycling and sustainable transportation around your school and neighborhood like the **Resolving the Plight of Smog** team in Lahore, Pakistan?

Fight to protect nature from pollution threats like **Lila y su sueño de la cuna azul** in Tena, Ecuador?

Prototype an invention that can help our planet like **Reforest AI**?



PHOTO: ROLF SJOGREN/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



See videos from all of the 2025 award recipients at bit.ly/3P5YyuH



SUBMIT YOUR VIDEO AT [SLINGSHOT.VIDEOSFORCHANGE.ORG](https://slingshot.videosforchange.org)

THE LEARNING JOURNEY | SLINGSHOT CHALLENGE CRITERIA

These criteria will be used to select submissions for awards. Read the overview below then check out our resource, [Selection Criteria Explained](#) for more information.

ISSUE COMMUNICATED EFFECTIVELY

- Does the video and solution address an environmental issue related to one of the five topic areas?
- Does the video make a compelling, evidence-based case for why the issue matters?

EMOTIONAL IMPACT

- Does the video build empathy, giving the audience a reason to care and take action?
- Does the participant(s) demonstrate a sincere personal connection to the topic?

UNIQUE/CREATIVE

- Does the solution present a creative and/or original approach to address the issue?

EFFECTIVE USE OF VIDEO-MAKING TECHNIQUES

- Does the video meet the technical entry requirements: one minute, created from original or copyright-free material?
- Can the video and audio be clearly understood by the audience?
- Does the video use unique storytelling techniques (i.e., styles, shot types) that provide a compelling message?

CLEAR, ACHIEVABLE CALL TO ACTION

- Is the solution clear, achievable, and realistic?
- Would the solution result in a relevant and measurable impact?

EXPLORER CONNECTION

- Does the video reference inspiration or ideas from a National Geographic Explorer?

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

- Does the solution clearly address a specific issue in the community and involve community members as collaborators?

The selection committee will give out specific awards for videos that have a strong Explorer Connection, so you may want to draw your students' attention to National Geographic Explorers who can serve as inspiration for their projects. See stories of National Geographic Explorers here: nationalgeographic.com/impact/explorers

PHOTO: DANIEL HOZ/SHUTTERSTOCK



PARTICIPANT TOOLKIT OVERVIEW AND EDUCATOR TIPS

The Participant Toolkit provides key resources needed to guide the end-to-end learning journey: identify, create, and share. It can be used flexibly based on each participant's individual needs or incorporated into curriculum-aligned programs and used to support assessment. The kit features information, instructions, and activities to empower students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to craft a compelling Slingshot Challenge video. The ideas and tips for educators below align to and supplement the Participant Toolkit resources.

IDENTIFY

The “Identify” section of the kit provides the tools to support the following learning outcomes:

- Students identify an environmental issue in a community that they are passionate about.
- They dig deeper into the issue and consider creative solutions.
- If working in a team, they use collective decision-making techniques to ensure group consensus on their focus topic.
- They consider strategies for inspiring a sense of hope and optimism to motivate action that will fulfill their vision for positive change on their chosen issue.

EDUCATOR TIPS

Introduce your students to National Geographic Explorers and past Slingshot Challenge awardees seeking solutions to problems, particularly problems in specific communities around the world, with the videos on the Slingshot Challenge page.

www.slingshotchallenge.org

- Sharing the Global Showcase of student-created videos is a great way to introduce the experience and inspire creativity! **slingshot.videosforchange.org/showcase**
- You may want to highlight certain issues that align to your units of study. Encourage students to look closely at issues in their community and compare them to issues you may be learning about in other parts of the world. Encourage students to consider issues with empathy and nuance, talking to diverse community members if possible.
- You may wish to use **citizen science** tools or apps like **iNaturalist** or **Debris Tracker** to collect and share data about environmental issues in your community.
- It may also help to pre-allocate teams with a complementary mix of skill sets, or for students to work independently.
- Ensure that all team members are actively involved in the decision-making process and that they feel comfortable with the chosen issue.
- The three planning activities in the Identify portion of the Participant Toolkit are useful to ensure students have considered their issue from multiple perspectives and have sharpened their focus on a solution. Younger students may need suggestions and scaffolding. For example, in the Impact Template, suggest types of people who may be impacted, such as local businesses, farmers, or tourists.



PARTICIPANT TOOLKIT OVERVIEW AND EDUCATOR TIPS

CREATE

The “Create” section of the kit provides the tools to support the following learning outcomes:

- Students consider strategies to create an emotional impact and inspire action.
- They determine the desired audience response to their video (think, feel, and do).
- They decide on a creative approach they want to take for the construction of their narrative; choosing a style of video that reflects their needs, resources, and skills, before engaging in storyboarding processes to map their production.
- They consider the key responsibilities to help them engage in the creative process, which may involve shooting a live-action video, making an animation, or employing alternative methods of visual storytelling.
- They apply creative and critical thinking skills to guide their approach to the editing processes. They select and implement an editing program to piece together their final content and may incorporate copyright-free materials (images, music, and sound) to enhance their story and impact.

EDUCATOR TIPS

- Sharing the **Focus Sheet** worksheet, **Storyboard** worksheet, and **Selection Criteria** checklist as early as possible will help set students up for success. This may involve encouraging them to check they have the time and resources needed and redirecting stylistic options to make sure their vision is feasible.
- The most powerful videos are the ones that capture the authentic experiences of youth. The more young people can show themselves, their environment and their community in their own words and images, the more it will resonate with viewers.
- Video storytelling tips are available online from **National Geographic Explorer Sandesh Kadur** and from the **Videos for Change Resources Library**. Share these resources with your students.
- Wired and wireless earbud headphones make very effective microphones for recording audio in interviews and voice-overs. Recording in a quiet, indoor space will improve sound quality.
- If live-action filming is challenging, encourage students to try a simple animation or stop-motion program. Students can even create a digital slideshow or **ESRI StoryMap** (**see great examples here**) using their own photos, maps, illustrations, or copyright-free images. They can add voice-over and backing tracks.
- If possible, encourage students to allocate editing to team members with experience. They should use the program they’re most comfortable navigating.
- Students must use original or copyright-free material and get all of the appropriate consent from anyone appearing in their videos. You can provide the guides linked here to show **legal** and **ethical** implications of video storytelling. These guides also contain a release form students can use to record consent from people appearing in their video.
- Motivate them from the start by explaining that it will enable them to be eligible for opportunities to be shared globally!
- Remind students not to put anything critical in the bottom quarter of the screen in case captions/translations are added.



PARTICIPANT TOOLKIT OVERVIEW AND EDUCATOR TIPS

SHARE

The “Share” section of the kit provides the tools to support students in having their work seen both inside and outside of the Slingshot Challenge and Videos for Change platform:

- They are encouraged to implement strategies that harness the power of social media to maximize the reach and impact of their videos beyond their local communities. They should use **#SlingshotChallenge** to connect with other challenge participants.
- They reflect on their learning experience, consider their motivations, recognize their achievements, and analyze the challenges they faced. They are encouraged to share insights to inspire others to act.

EDUCATOR TIPS

- Provide opportunities for students to share and receive feedback on their videos before they are submitted to the Slingshot Challenge. Students can use the selection criteria to provide feedback or create their own rubric. This will help students hone their final video and provides a chance for students to practice giving and receiving considerate and constructive feedback.
- Any opportunity to share is a valuable one! Sharing drives a successful learning experience and will equip students with the confidence that their voice matters and their actions can make a difference. Create a “film festival” for students’ families and the community.
- The backstory can be even more powerful than the video! Engaging students in reflection provides an opportunity to gain valuable insights into their motivations and aspirations. Sharing the “vox pop” recordings is another powerful way for students to build confidence, inspire action, and lead change.

PHOTOS (L-R): RACHNA REDDY/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC; REBECCA HALE/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC; PROSTOCK-STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK



IDENTIFY



CREATE



SHARE

ADAPTING THE SLINGSHOT CHALLENGE

The Slingshot Challenge competition on the Videos for Change platform is open to young people ages 13-18. However, the Slingshot Challenge is an engaging, flexible, and authentic learning activity that can be modified for young people in a variety of contexts.

USING THE SLINGSHOT CHALLENGE WITH YOUR CLUB OR ACTIVITY

- After-school programs, clubs, libraries, and scouting groups can form Slingshot Challenge teams to create and submit videos for the competition or for their own film festival. Students do not need to be in the same class to submit videos.
- Focus on local issues and use the challenge as an opportunity to get young people out into the community. Encourage them to interview local leaders and community members they might not normally speak with.
- Urge students to collect their own data inside the community through surveys or through citizen science tools such as iNaturalist. Learn more about some of these tools here:
education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/bioblitz/
- Integrate arts such as drawing, photography, sculpture, or dance to connect to the proposed problem and solution. Use these visual arts to illustrate a voice-over.

USING SLINGSHOT CHALLENGE WITH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

- Because videos can mix prepared voice-overs with carefully chosen visuals, they are an excellent vehicle for language learners to practice communicating in their new language.
- In preparation for the challenge, utilize activities in your classroom that help boost students' confidence in their ability to effectively summarize and convey information in an emotionally impactful way.
- For English Language learners, supporters can choose a focus issue and "pre-teach" much of the vocabulary related to the cause to ensure that students have a solid language foundation.
- Use National Geographic Explorers as examples of globally minded changemakers who can often communicate in multiple languages and work across multiple cultures to find solutions.

USING THE SLINGSHOT CHALLENGE WITH YOUNGER LEARNERS

- For younger learners, teachers can choose a focus issue and "pre-teach" many of the causes to ensure that students have a solid background.
- Encourage younger learners to be "hyperlocal" in their problem identification and solution brainstorming. By focusing on their family, the classroom, or their immediate surroundings, even the youngest learners can provide concrete and feasible solutions that show real outcomes.
- Provide sentence starters and templates for young students to frame their arguments so that they can clearly articulate how their solution will address one of the root causes and lead to a positive outcome. For example: "In order to stop _____, we recommend _____. We think this will work because _____."
- Celebrate young learners' achievements! Even if they cannot enter the Slingshot Challenge competition through Videos for Change, they can have a private film festival for their school or community to showcase their work.



SLINGSHOT

CHALLENGE • 2025-2026 DETAILS

TIMELINE 2025-2026

The **2025-2026 Slingshot Challenge** will celebrate and spotlight the creativity and capacity of youth to become the next generation of global stewards.

- › **9 SEPTEMBER 2025** CHALLENGE OPENS
- › **6 FEBRUARY 2026** SUBMISSION DEADLINE
- › **MAY 2026** AWARD RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED; PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD VOTING OPENS

AWARDS

- › Slingshot Challenge Award Recipients may receive up to **\$10,000** in funding. Teams will split the award funding.
- › Award recipients will join a global community of alumni who are engaging with the Society and its Explorers to continue learning and building their leadership skills as they take action on behalf of the planet.
- › All submitters will receive a **digital award** and be invited to a virtual celebration



PHOTO: CADY HERRING



SUBMIT YOUR VIDEO AT [SLINGSHOT.VIDEOSFORCHANGE.ORG](https://slingshot.videosforchange.org)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can teams of youth submit? If so, what is the maximum number of participants in a team? What are the steps youth must take to submit as a team?

Youth may choose to work individually or as a team of up to six participants. All solutions will be expected to involve collaboration with peers, stakeholders, and/or marginalized communities.

When submitting in teams, note that all team members must individually join the team via the Videos for Change site. In addition, all team members must receive individual parent/guardian or educator permission, and all team members must accept the final video submission to ensure every team member is properly credited and recognized. These consents will be sent to the email address you utilize when creating your Slingshot Challenge Videos for Change account.

Can students participate again if they submitted a video last year?

Yes, students can submit a video that elaborates on a project from last year or introduces a new project. Please remember that reviewers change from year-to-year, so students should introduce their project as if it is brand new.

Is parental permission required for submissions?

Parental permission is required for submission for youth under 18. When registering, youth are prompted to enter a parent email address. The parent must click the "I Consent" button in the email before the video project can be submitted. If you are in a team, all team members' parents must provide consent before the video project can be submitted.

Educators who have registered with us by email at slingshot@ngs.org can also provide consent on behalf of a student, after receiving consent from their parent outside of Videos for Change.

Should an educator or nonprofit leader sign up as a member of a team?

No. Due to age restrictions for the challenge, educators and nonprofit leaders should not join a submission as an official member of the team as this will disallow the video from being submitted. Instead, the youth should list the educator or nonprofit leader's name in the relevant demographic field of the video submission profile if they wish for them to be associated with submission.

How will the youth and educators know if their video submission went through successfully?

Youth can confirm their submission was successfully submitted by checking their Videos for Change account. In addition, they will receive an email confirmation.

Educators can check their dashboard within Videos for Change to confirm their student's submission was successful, as well.

More questions?
Visit our Support Center:
bit.ly/3dy0q0g
or email us at
Slingshot@ngs.org.

