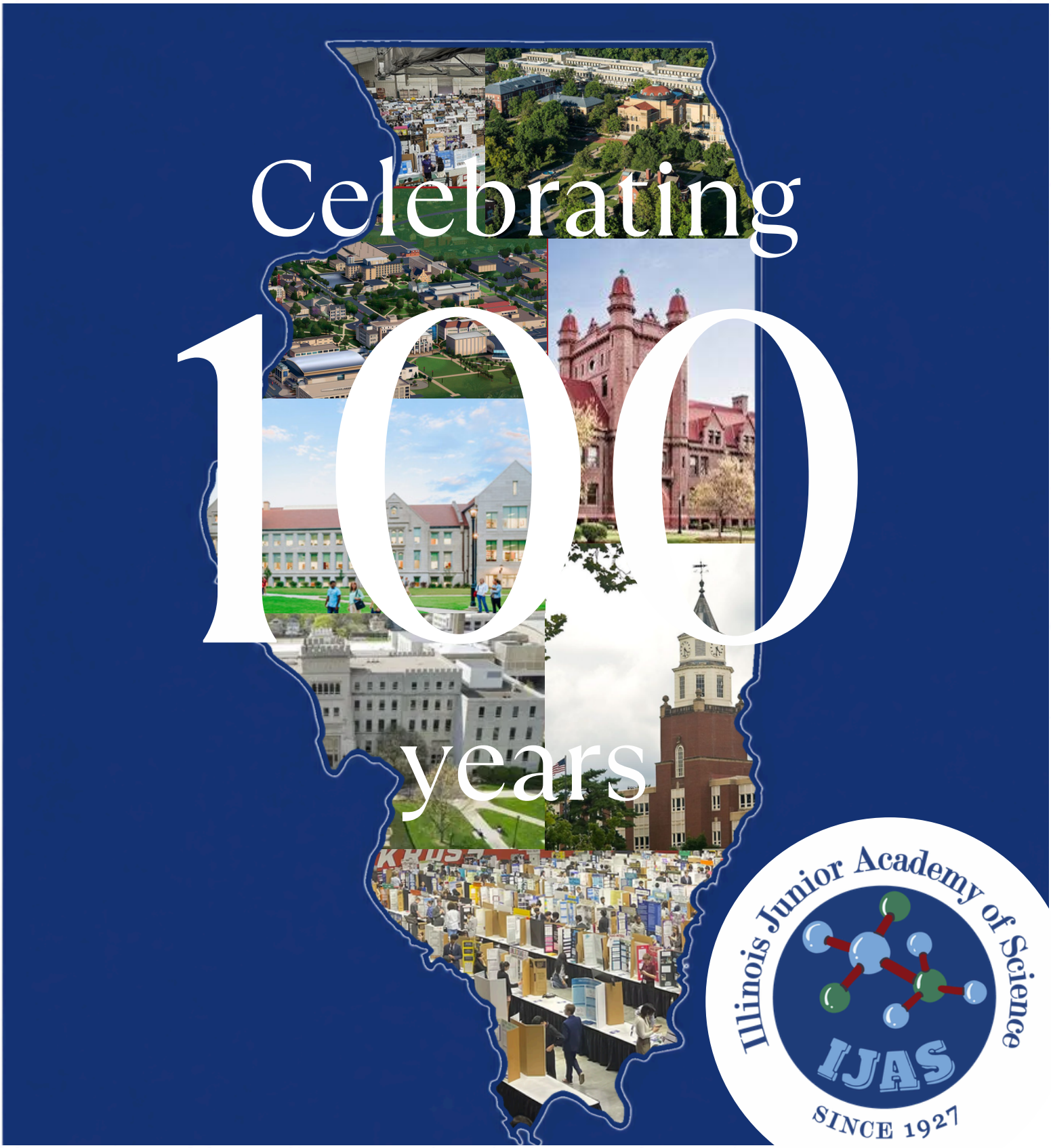
IJAS NEWSLETTER

October

2026



CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

Regional Chairs, Sponsors, Parents, and Students,

Welcome back to another exciting research competition season and to a year celebrating the Illinois Junior Academy of Science's 100th anniversary. For a century, IJAS has empowered young scientists across Illinois to explore, question, discover, and innovate. This year celebrates not only our students, but also the educators, sponsors, volunteers, and regional leaders whose dedication has shaped generations of students. Our anniversary is especially meaningful as we return to Bradley University in Peoria for the 2027 IJAS State Science Exposition, honoring our roots while looking ahead to the next century of student achievement.

Please continue to review and share the monthly newsletters with your schools, clubs, and students. These newsletters highlight important information about the IJAS, the regional fairs, and the state exposition. Below are several key dates, with additional details throughout this mailing. As always, the IJAS website and our social media pages have the most current information.

New Rubrics - Revised P&P Manual - New Forms - Team Caps

The updated IJAS Rubric and the revised Policy and Procedure Manual are now available. Both the PDF and searchable web-based versions are now available. Please take time to review these documents and familiarize yourself with the changes. All high school students will use the ISEF Forms, and middle school students will use the IJAS forms. Another notable change is that TEAMS will be restricted to only TWO students this year. Thank you to everyone who helped this summer to improve these essential resources.

Regional Fairs

Regional fairs will take place in late February and throughout March. We will post dates on the IJAS website as they are finalized. Follow IJAS.org for registration deadlines through the IJAS ZFairs portal.

100th Anniversary State Exposition

The 2027 IJAS State Exposition will be held April 30 and May 1, 2027, at Bradley University Renaissance Coliseum in Peoria. We are finalizing schedules, but we anticipate following last year's structure and a nearly identical time schedule.

Membership

New/Renewal memberships for schools and individuals are now open on IJAS.org.
The deadline to join IJAS is December 31, 2026, with late fees beginning January 1, 2027.
Schools that were members last year should have already received an invoice. All individuals must reapply and recertify eligibility.
Membership is required to participate in any IJAS-affiliated regional, state, or national competition affiliated with IJAS.



Thank you for being part of this historic year for IJAS.
If you have any questions, please contact us at info@ijas.org.

Sincerely,
Brian Lewandowski, IJAS President

IJAS MISSION

The Illinois Junior Academy of Science exists for the benefit of students in the State of Illinois. The process students follow for IJAS gives them some insight into the problems and methods of thinking that are particular to the scientist. This process encourages these students to find information concerning new investigations and discoveries in science. It allows students a chance to use and gain an understanding of scientific equipment. Science fair gives reason for students with a special interest in science to go beyond the classroom curriculum and develop their own investigation(s). IJAS encourages students in their progress toward a career in science, technology, and engineering.

Letter from the Student Board President



Dear IJAS students,

My name is Amritha Praveen, and I'm looking forward to serving as your IJAS Student Board president for IJAS's 100th year! As new and returning students pursue a year of science research, I want to share a few thoughts to guide you along this journey. Be ready to face some challenges! Research rarely follows a linear path, so if you ever need support throughout this process, please check out the How-To videos page on our website or stop by any of our monthly IJAS Office Hours.

The first step to research is to observe the world around you. Once you have an idea, the IJAS Policy and Procedure manual is an excellent starting point. Please be sure to read the manual thoroughly before starting your research and experimentation.

I encourage you to explore other avenues to demonstrate the research you've completed, such as the ThermoFisher Junior Innovators Challenge (JIC) for middle schoolers, as well as the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) for high schoolers.

We continuously update the IJAS website, newsletters, and our social media with new information about the regional fairs and state exposition, so please be sure to check them out frequently. We'd also love to see and hear from you through social media. I'm excited to see your topics, scientific questions and the hard work you put into researching at the 100th IJAS State Exposition this year at Bradley University!

Sincerely,
Amritha Praveen

In This Issue:

Upcoming Events 4

IJAS Membership 6

Announcments Rules Changes 7

Society for Science Advocates 8

2026 ISEF Highlights 9

2026 Stockholm Junior Water Prize 10

Research 101 12

Tips for Science Project Success 13

Thank you Southern Ilinois University 15

Editor-in-Chief: Anda Wattanakit
Managing Editor: Samarth Donapti
Writers: Akanksha Narayan; Caleb Gao
Designers: Anda Wattanakit; Kanishka Bharathimohan

Upcoming Events

October

October 24 ~ 9- 11 a.m.
IJAS Adult Board/Regional Chairs Meeting

October 29 ~ 5 - 9 p..m
ILIPA IP Month Celebration
Northwestern University, Chicago

November

November 5
Society for Science Regeneron Talent Search Deadline

November 15 ~ 6 - 7 p.m.
IJAS Office Hours
Research 101: Getting Started

November 15 ~ 7 - 9 p.m.
IJAS Student Board Meeting

IJAS Office Hours

October 18
6 - 7 pm

November 15
6 - 7 pm

December 13
6 - 7 pm

January 17
6 - 7 pm

Zoom Link
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89773120675?pwd=w6tCz9sFulkJMAhvb50nwopK4uFrY8.1

CONTACT LIST

IJAS President	IJAS Past-President	IJAS President-Elect
Brian Lewandowski	Emily Dawson	Ryan Friel
brian.lewandowski@ijas.org	emily.dawson@ijas.org	ryan.friel@ijas.org

SAVE THE DATE

Illinois Junior Academy of Science
IJAS
SINCE 1927

2027 IJAS State Exposition

April 30 - May 1

Renaissance Coliseum

BRADLEY University



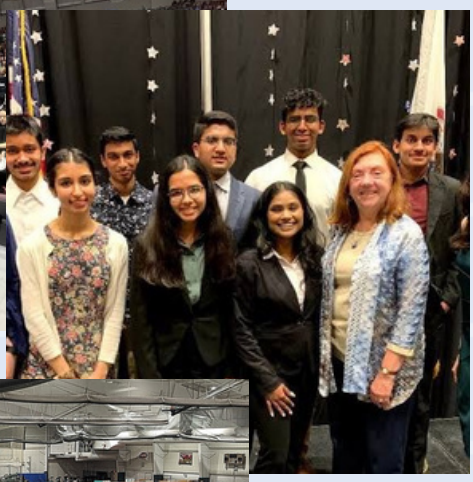
IJAS Membership

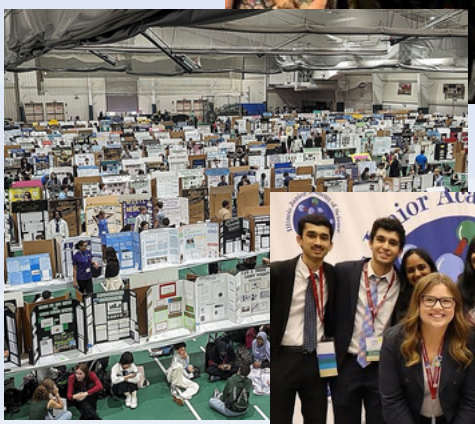
Anda Wattanakit

Membership for 2026-2027 is OPEN.
Due by December 31, 2026.

All IJAS memberships are valid from September to August. Late fees will apply after January 1, 2027.









IJAS membership is **required** for schools/students who wish to compete in IJAS regional fairs, the state exposition, and be considered for ISEF.

Alumni membership is available to former students or participants who want to continue supporting IJAS, its students, and its mission.

School/Club Membership - $100

Classrooms/School Programs or After School Clubs

Individual Membership - $100

Individuals NOT enrolled in an IJAS member school

IJAS Alumni - $15

Supporters who graduated from high school and who competed in at least one IJAS regional or state exposition event in the past.

Please visit the IJAS website https://www.ijas.org/pricing-plans/list for more information. Apply or renew your membership today!

Important Announcement

2027 FORMS

REQUIRED

Akanksha Narayan

The IJAS Policy & Procedure Manual has been revised. This manual is in effect for 2026-2028; these changes may affect your project.

Starting this year, all **high school students** who participate in the IJAS competitions, including the regional fairs, the State Exposition, and ISEF consideration, MUST use the ISEF forms. Students, mentors, and sponsors should familiarize themselves with ISEF forms and requirements well before the IJAS submission deadlines.

Some students **may need prior IJAS/ISEF SRC (Scientific Review Committee) approval BEFORE collecting data**, and some may need approval after the project is complete. Be sure to check the ISEF Forms and the IJAS Policy & Procedure Manual to determine whether your project falls under the prior approval need. Email isef@ijas.org for high school SRC prior approval. Be sure to include a copy of the completed Form 1A and any questions.

All **middle school students** will still be using the IJAS forms (abstract, safety, and endorsements), which can be found on the IJAS website. If you haven't already done so, please familiarize yourself with these forms and guidelines before the submissions. If you have questions, EMAIL YOUR SPONSOR first!! If the sponsor has a question or to submit IJAS Forms for prior safety approval, they will email the Regional Chairperson. ONLY Regional Chairpersons should be emailing the IJAS Safety Chairperson.

Check IJAS.org FIRST and READ the IJAS P&P!!!

ISEF FORMS

- [x] ABSTRACT
- [x] FORM 1
- [x] FORM 1A
- [x] FORM 1B
- [x] FORM 2A
- [ ] FORM 2B*
- [ ] FORM 2C*
- [x] FORM 3
- [ ] FORM 4*
- [ ] FORM 5A*
- [ ] FORM 5B*
- [ ] FORM 6A*
- [ ] FORM 6B*
- [ ] FORM 7*

X REQUIRED
*Not ALL Forms are required for every project

TEAMS

LIMITED TO 2 PARTICIPANTS

2027 RULE CHANGE

Four Illinois Educators Named Society for Science Advocates

Anda Wattanakit

IJAS is proud to announce that four Illinois educators have been selected to participate in the Society for Science Advocate Program.

- Emily Dawson - Lead Advocate
  IJAS Past President
  Elise Ford Allen Academy
- Caitlin Bonham
  Mosaic School of Fine Arts
- Eman Sarhan
  Amundsen High School
- Corinne Zimmerman
  Homewood-Flossmoor High School

The four advocates are among 100 educators selected nationwide for the Society for Science Advocate Program. Each lead advocate and advocate will receive $5,000 and $3,000, respectively, plus an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, DC, in recognition of their outstanding work helping students pursue research and participate in science competitions.

Recognizing the crucial role educators play in supporting students in independent research, the Advocate program provides hands-on workshops and interactive sessions. Educators will meet monthly in their assigned cohorts and will then bring their new knowledge back to their schools and communities.

Thank you for all you do for the students of Illinois, your schools, and your classroom! IJAS is grateful for your commitment to IJAS, to the Society for Science, and to furthering authentic student research. Congratulations!

2026 ISEF HIGHLIGHTS

Caleb Gao

The International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) is a highly prestigious international competition, with competitors representing some of the brightest young minds from over 60 countries, regions, and territories. Nine Illinois students were selected to represent IJAS (USIL50) in Phoenix, Arizona, placing as high as 3rd the Grand Awards within their categories and wining over $450,000 in cash and scholarships.

Arnav Chaphalkar competed in Computational Biology and Bioinformatics, using stable-diffusion image generation models and spatial transcriptomics to generate images of cancer cells. *Award - 3rd Place Grand Award*

Meher Garg competed in Translational Medical Science investigating the use of retinoic acid to treat cancer stem cells. *Award - Full 4 year scholarship to Florida Institute of Technology*

Jaelyn Hammersley competed in the Biomedical and Health Sciences category, exploring a hypothetical treatment for Parkinson's disease using Gedunin as a potential cure to improve the condition of patients. *Award - 4th place Grand Award*

Amritha Praveen also competed in Computational Biology and Bioinformatics, creating a framework to create subgroups of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). *Award - 3rd Place Grand Award & New American Scholarship Special Award from Arizona State University*

Zainab Nathani competed in materials science focusing on clean, drinkable water. 4th Place Grand Award & $10,000 *Special Award Scholarship to Missouri University of Science & Technology*

Max Wang also competed in Biomedical & Health Sciences focusing on improving immunotherapy as a form of treatment. *Award - 4th Place Grand Award & New American Scholarship Special Award from Arizona State University.*



2026 Stockholm Junior Water Prize

State Winner & National Finalest



Anda Wattanakit

The U.S. Stockholm Junior Water Prize (SJWP) is the world's most prestigious award for a high school water-research projects. SJWP is open to all high school students (grades 9-12). Students may self nominate via their website or be considered at the IJAS regional fairs and at the state exposition. IJAS regional nominees compete at the IJAS State Science Exposition for the SJWP - Illinois Grand Prize. This year, **Muhammed Mubarak Ali** from Dunlap High School, received a regional award/nomination sponsored by the Illinois Water Environmental Association at the IJAS Region 1 Regional Fair at Western Illinois University (WIU) in March and the top Illinois award at the IJAS State Exposition in May. He advanced to the SJWP USA National Virtual Competition in late May. After an initial virtual judging round, Muhammed secured his top 20 spots as a National Finalist from the field of 43 state winners. He competed in person for the U.S. National Stockholm Junior Water Prize Finals in Chicago in June being named a top National Finalest.

Muhammed's project, titled "Comparative Analysis of Field Methods for Detecting Cyanobacteria in Freshwater," evaluates the use of UV-visual spectrometry analysis to verify results from field ready detection devices. He completed his work under the mentorship of Dr. Brian Bellot and the Bellot Research Group at Western Illinois University under Mrs. Dawson's Science Coach Team. Muhammed is looking forward to continuing his project this year, sharping his laboratory skills while working in the WIU Chemistry labs, and learning to utilize the HPLC and GD-FID.

STOCKHOLM JUNIOR WATER PRIZE USA

Illinois Water Environment Association (IWEA) has been an IJAS partner since 1986. As a silver level partner, IWEA presents the Clean Water Awards, and the Stockholm Junior Water Prize - Illinois Grand Prize at the IJAS State Science Exposition each year.

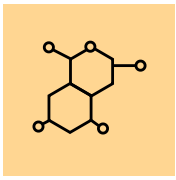
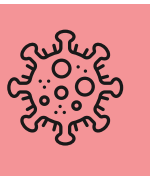
ILLINOIS Water Environment Association

TOP 300

Anda Wattanakit

On September 2, 2026, Society for Science announced the Top 300 Junior Innovators in the Thermo Fisher Scientific Junior Innovators Challenge (Thermo Fisher JIC). Thousands of students were nominated as the top 10% of their affiliated fairs nationwide, and 300 were selected from approximately 2,000 applicants. Nine IJAS students received that honor. Each of the following students will receive a $125 cash award from the US Department of War (DoW) STEM program.

- Veerg Garg
- Nanami Tamura Geiger
- Macy Liu. Parv Patel,
- Varna Prakash
- Shrikari Punjala
- Catherine Renee
- Vimal Raj
- Oscar Virla



Thermo Fisher Scientific
Junior Innovators Challenge
A program of Society for Science

On September 16, 2026, Society for Science announced the top 30 finalists in the Thermo Fisher JIC. The finalists will participate in the Thermo Fisher JIC Finals week during October 23-28 in Washington D.C, where they will compete for more than $100,000 in awards including the $10,000 Broadcom Coding with Commitment Award, $10,000 DoW STEM Talent Award, $10,000 The Lemelson Foundation Award for Invention.

One IJAS student, Shrikari Punjala has been named a Top 30 JIC finalists. Shrikari, a seventh grader from Quest Academy, investigated the effect of calcium carbonate on bacterial growth. After growing four types of bacteria and adding calcium carbonate crystals, Shrikari found that calcium carbonate could inhibit the growth of bacteria. In addition to the Thermo Fisher JIC, Shrikari has also competed in the Invention Convention, where students develop solutions to real-world problems.

As Shrikari competes in the Thermo Fisher JIC Finals week, IJAS would like to congratulate her and wish her the best of luck!

Anda Wattanakit

TOP 30 FINALIST

2026 ThermoFisher Scientific Junior Innovators Challenge



RESEARCH 101

Starting a science fair project can feel daunting... but broken down month by month might make it doable... Here is our recommendation of a month-wise timeline, to make sure you stay on task!

Akanksha Narayan

September

Membership opens! Make sure your school is registered. If a school does not plan to become a member of IJAS, students can still sign up as Individual Members. Start brainstorming topic ideas: What question won't leave you alone? Is your proposed theoretical design feasible? Begin some background research online to learn more about topics and find methods that will help you conduct your proposed research in a safe manner? Start your own background research.

October

Make final decisions about your topic. In order to make decisions, be sure to ask teachers, study the IJAS Category Guide, and talk to other students who have competed in IJAS competitions. Draft research questions and determine experiment design or project plan. Finalize methodology and get approval for the research methods. Fill out appropriate safety forms and endorsements and get final approval BEFORE conducting the actual experiment.

November

esearch and write! Study many sources and consult experts. Write the first draft of the Background Research Section. Remember to internally cite sources in the Background Research section following APA format. After the experiment or engineering design project is approved by your sponsor and IJAS SRC (if needed), begin conducting the experiment, measure & collect data.

December

By this time, lock in your registration and membership dues. Registration for schools and individuals is due by December 31. Troubleshoot any problems. Write the second draft of the Background Research section. Finish collecting data for an experiment or finish building and testing prototypes if the project is a design. Begin constructing tables and graphs. Write the first draft of the Results Discussion section. By this time, the abstract, safety sheet, any needed endorsements, and description of methodology are written.

January

Write the final versions of the Results and Conclusion section of the report. Finalize the report. Add acknowledgements and give credit to the teachers, mentors, and other adults who assisted. Construct a draft of the Table of Contents. Work on the References section of the report following APA format. Be sure that all references are cited in the Background Research and Conclusion sections of the report. Also, start working on the poster board/presentation.

February

Register your project online with IJAS by the date listed on the website if the project qualifies to compete at Regionals. Make final corrections and changes to the project report. Plan and design the posterboard for Poster Session. For students competing in Paper Session, plan the slide presentation if using one. Write notes or a script for the oral presentation portion of the regional showcase! Practice! Print three copies of the final report. Be sure your signature and your sponsor's signature are on the Safety Sheet and any related Endorsements.

March - May

Regional presentations, and state-send-offs. Work on oral presentation, and explaining/answering any questions related to your project/experiment that judges may have.
Optional: Conduct additional research and revise if feasible. Congratulations on a job well done!
IJAS hopes to see you at the State Exposition at Bradley University April 30 - May 1, 2027!

Tips for Science Project Success

Samarth Donapati

Choosing something that interests you

A science fair project can take months to complete, so by picking a topic that you are genuinely curious about, you can continue to stay motivated throughout the project. You will have to spend time researching, experimenting, and analyzing data, and choosing something you want to learn about will make this process all the more enjoyable.

Plan for the year

Think about when you will actually be conducting your project. Most people complete their research during the fall or winter, meaning projects that take place outside can be difficult to complete. For example, a project on growing plants outdoors or observing a summer insect might not work the best if you collect data in December or January.

Create a reasonable timeline

There are some projects that can be completed in the matter of a few days, while some can require weeks, if not months, of data collection. Before choosing your project, think about the time you might need to research and collect data. Always make sure to leave yourself extra time in case something doesn't work the first time.

Consider materials you might need

Before you commit to a project or idea, make sure you can get the supplies needed to complete it. Some projects might require special equipment, lab space, software, or other materials that can be expensive or hard to find. If your project depends on something you don't have, consider approaching your question using a different method.

Choose a project you can complete

It can often seem like you need the most complicated experiment to compete at science fairs. However, judges really want to see that you can understand your question, the experimental or design process, and your results. So, make sure to pick a project that you can grow into while challenging yourself. One of the greatest benefits of participating in a science fair is learning about new science topics, methods, and becoming an expert on something new!

Sponsor Spotlight

Anda Wattanakit & Samarth Donapati

IJAS would like to take a moment to thank the **American Water Works Association Illinois Section, and Illinois EPA** for supporting IJAS and the students of Illinois year after year.

As a Bronze partner, the Illinois EPA presents the Environmental Excellence Award annually to four exceptional posters at the IJAS State Exposition.

As an IJAS Bronze Partner, the American Water Works Association Illinois Section is committed to promoting middle school and high school students pursuing research centered around water issues participatice competitions.

