OPEN POLL
FLASH COMPETITION BRIEF

About

As the nation prepares for an extraordinarily contested election season, the cornerstone of democracy—the act of voting—is poised for a dramatic reframing through design. This fast-paced, one-day design competition invites interdisciplinary teams to consider how the voter experience in cities can be reimagined to be more equitable, accessible, and engaging for all citizens.

Following a workshop period among finalist teams, community members are invited to attend the presentation of proposals and ask questions. A jury of planning and election experts will judge the entries and announce a winner at the conclusion of the event. The winning team will share a prize and work with Van Alen to refine their proposals. Visit vanalen.org to learn more about entering the competition and attending the public program.

Questions to get you started

- How can poll centers be more visible and welcoming in cities and neighborhoods, and incentivize voter turnout?
- How can the design experience of a poll center increase access for people of varying abilities?
- How can polling centers be repositioned as mobile or engaged with the outdoor streetscape?
- How can technology enhance transparency in the voting process (without taking the form of an app)?
- How can the voter experience be redesigned to bring neighbors together for unexpected conversations that enliven our democratic society?

How does the competition work?

Submit a maximum 200-word concept and names and affiliations of team members by midnight EDT on October 24. On October 26, a selection of five-seven finalist teams will be invited to participate in the competition on October 29th, 10:00am at Van Alen Institute.

10:00am - 4:00pm: Teams will work through a set of prompts, refining a proposal to be presented in a format that will be revealed at the beginning of the workshop. Lunch will be provided.

4:00pm - 5:30pm: Teams will present their proposals and answer questions before a jury and open audience.

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5:30pm – 6:15pm: As the jury privately determines the best proposal, attendees are invited to enjoy a drink and discuss ideas with the competition teams.

6:15pm: The winning team will be announced. The team will be awarded a $1,000 cash prize and work closely with Van Alen to further refine their proposal.

Evaluation Criteria

Jurors will evaluate proposals based on the following criteria:
- It proposes feasible, user-centered solutions grounded in a physical design (not simply an app) that resourcefully address the efficiency, equity, and transparency of voting polls in New York City, within a set budget.
- It clearly communicates key existing conditions of voting polls, the demographics the proposal addresses, today's political context, and how the proposal will achieve its stated goals.
- It has the potential to enrich a wide audience's understanding of cities, how the democratic process functions within them — and is compelling for official political agencies, such as the NYC Board of Elections.
- It aims to facilitate community-wide conversations on urban political processes.
- It demonstrates interdisciplinary thinking and collaboration among team members from different fields of expertise.

All information required can be found on vanalen.org. If you have questions, please contact Steven Thomson, Van Alen Institute at sthomson@vanalen.org.

Eligibility

To participate, you must be part of a multidisciplinary team of up to four members; individuals may not participate alone. Your team must include at least one professional from architecture or urban planning. This competition is open to both professionals and students. Members of the team must be available to be present at Van Alen Institute in New York City on October 29th.

Entering the Competition

Entry fee: There is no entry fee for entering "Open Poll" Flash Competition. Number of entries: Individuals may participate on only one team. Each team is permitted to enter only one submission.

Submission of concepts: Teams must submit a maximum 200-word concept by midnight EDT on October 24. Finalists will be notified on October 26.

Your entry must include a written concept description of your proposal. Clearly state your proposed solution(s), the name(s), contact information, title, and affiliation of the team members. Accompanying illustrations of your concept are accepted but not required. Team members have the option to upload an accompanying portfolio of past work.

All entries must be in English. Proposals must be uploaded using the submission link on vanalen.org by midnight EDT on October 24. Entrants will receive a confirmation that the files have been uploaded and should retain this confirmation for reference. Failure to comply with any of these submission requirements will result in immediate disqualification.

Legal

Further details on competition proposal requirements and presentation formats will be provided to the finalist teams.

Publication restrictions: Entrants may not refer to projects that have already been implemented or that have been designed on the basis of any agreement entered into by the entrant or entrants with a public, public/private or fully private body with the intention of actual development of the project in question. Similarly, entries may not refer to projects published before the last day of the deliberations of the judging panel.

Infringement of copyright and other intellectual property: All work submitted for the competition must be the entrant's original work. Finalist teams will retain ownership of all intellectual property rights over their work. It is the entrant's sole responsibility to ensure that the work submitted does not infringe upon the intellectual property rights of any third party, including, but not limited to copyright, trademark and design right. Van Alen shall not be responsible for entrant's infringement of any third party intellectual property rights, regardless of whether said infringement was known or should have been known by entrant.

Use of submitted works: Entrant agrees that Van Alen is granted the non-exclusive reproduction rights to all entries for Van Alen's advertising, promotion, exhibition, print publication, and internet purposes directly relating to the competition. Van Alen shall have no responsibility for any unauthorized use of the entrant's works by any third party, including but not limited to the sponsors.

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About Van Alen Institute

Van Alen Institute brings more than 120 years of experience organizing design competitions, as well as developing cross-disciplinary research and provocative public programs. Van Alen Institute collaborates with communities, scholars, policymakers, and professionals on local and global initiatives that rigorously investigate the most pressing social, cultural and ecological challenges of tomorrow.

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