

2026 Storyfest Award

Official Rules

NO ENTRY FEE NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN.

VOID WHERE PROHIBITED.

- 1) Description.** The George Washington University ("University") through Planet Forward (a project within the University's School of Media and Public Affairs) offers the 2026 Storyfest Award (the "Award") as an opportunity for current undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in an accredited university or college.
- 2) Eligibility.** The Award is open to any person who is (i) eighteen (18) years of age or older at the time of participation, and (ii) currently enrolled in an accredited undergraduate or graduate university or college program ("Entrants"). Entrants may compete either as individuals or in collaboration with one (1) additional person. The Award is void where prohibited or otherwise restricted by law, rule, or regulation. All applicable United States federal, state, and local laws and regulations apply to this Award and any Prize disbursement, including without limitation federal immigration or sanctions laws. By participating, Entrants agree to be bound by these Official Rules.
- 3) How to Enter and Qualify.** To enter and qualify for the Award, Entrants must complete and submit (i) an online Award entry form and (ii) produce an original story about inventions and/or innovations that can move the planet forward (the "Story").

All Story submissions must be original works produced by the Entrants that do not infringe the ownership rights of any other person or entity or use generative AI large language models other than for research purposes. All Story submissions must have either primary sources identified in the Story text or annotations that identify information sources.

Any Entrants with winning Story submissions made in any prior Storyfest competitions, who are Planet Forward student staff members, or whose Story has been previously published in a professional news outlet will be ineligible for Prize consideration. All data, facts, and claims must be cited through reliable sources in order to be eligible for the Award and Prize. Entrants are allowed a maximum of three (3) Story submissions. The period to submit a Story for the Award begins on Sunday, June 1, 2025, at 12:00 AM EDT and ends Tuesday, February 23, 2026, at 11:59 PM EST ("Submission Period"). Only Story submissions posted during the Submission Period will be considered for the Award.

4) Award Categories. The Story should fit into one of the following categories:

a) *Best Short Video*

All video submissions should be one to eight (1-8) minutes in length with HD-quality audio and visual, and include an article, which should be fifty to two hundred (50-200) words describing the video without transcription. All video submissions must be uploaded to Vimeo or YouTube. If the entry is a documentary or a longer podcast, a trailer must be submitted that satisfies the run time requirement.

b) *Best Social Video*

All social media videos should be thirty to ninety (30-90) seconds in length with HD quality audio and visual, and include an article, which should be fifty to two (50-200) words describing the video without transcription. All social video submission must be uploaded to Vimeo or Youtube. All videos must be vertically oriented (9:16 aspect ratio).

c) *Best Written Story*

All written submissions should be six hundred to one thousand (600-1,000) words and include a minimum of one (1) image, where the image is preferably taken by the Entrant, and features primary source material (e.g., a first-person interview, peer-reviewed surveys, scientific reports, government documents, etc.)

d) *Best Multimedia Story*

All multimedia submissions must be authored by the Entrant and should include a combination of visual and/or audio elements including but not limited to photography, illustrations, text, embedded audio snippets or longer audio content, and music.

All photography submissions should utilize digital images with a minimum of one hundred and fifty (150) dots per inch (dpi) and feature detailed captions, not to exceed two hundred (200) words for each photograph. All photography submissions must be accompanied by a written article between two hundred and four hundred (200-400) words and should summarize the submission. If a photography submission is prepared using Adobe Express or similar platform, then the submission must include an embed code and an additional written summary of one hundred to two hundred (100-200) words and one (1) photograph to be featured.

e) *Framing the Future Award*

All Entrants will be eligible for the "Framing the Future Award". The "Framing the Future Award" will be selected by University staff and awarded to the Entrant whose submission most clearly demonstrates (i) outstanding

originality, (ii) depth of subject matter research, (iii) compelling use of data, and (iv) engaging use of format & presentation.

f) *Fan Favorite Award*

All Finalists will be eligible for the "Fan Favorite Award." The "Fan Favorite Award" will be selected by a majority vote of 2026 Planet Forward Summit attendees and via public polling, advertised on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Voting for the "Fan Favorite Award" shall end on Thursday, April 16, 2026 at 5:00 PM EST. In the event the Entrant selected by majority vote was also selected as the Winner for another award category, the "Fan Favorite Award" shall be given to the Entrant with the next highest vote total that was not otherwise selected as a Winner for another award category.

5) Selection and Notification of Finalists. University staff will review all Entrants' Story submissions and select several to advance in the Award selection process ("Finalists"). Finalists for the Award will be announced on March 3, 2026 via email.

All Finalists will be required to draft a personal essay that is at least two hundred and fifty (250) words and explains the Finalist(s)' commitment to the planet, details what benefits the trip would have on their current or future education or career, and explains *why* they want to visit the Prize location (see Prize below). Finalists must submit personal essays by March 20, 2026, at 11:59 PM EST to editor@planetforward.org.

6) Selection and Notification of Finalists. University staff will review all Semi-Finalists' essay submissions and select several Semi-Finalists to advance in the Award selection process.

7) Selection of Winners. A panel of independent judges and University staff (the "Selectors") will award the Prize. The Selectors will determine the Award for categories 4a through 4d; University staff will determine the Award for category 4e. All judged categories (4a through 4d) will be reviewed in all stages of review using the following criteria:

- a) Creativity and effectiveness of chosen format/s;
- b) Excellence in written/verbal communication and/or technical and production skill;
- c) Variety and credibility of documentation and human sources;
- d) Factual accuracy, including attribution of facts, data and quotes, and

superior research that considers different perspectives;

e) Overall potential impact of the storytelling format and techniques.

There will be six (6) Winners from among the Entrants who compete for the Award. A Winner shall be selected for each of the categories noted in Section 4; and

e) Relevant personal details as outlined in the Finalist Essay.

8) Prize. The Winners will receive the Award and be selected by Planet Forward staff to receive the Prize ("Prize Winners").

a) The Prize shall consist of one (1) ten (10) day / nine (9) night National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions Southeast Greenland: Exploring at the Edge of the Ice Cap expedition from July 18, 2026 to July 27, 2026 aboard "National Geographic Endurance" (the "Trip"). The Trip is subject to restrictions and conditions, including those set forth below.

b) The Trip consists of nine (9) nights of accommodation for each Prize Winner including:

- One (1) double occupancy cabin (category cannot be selected by Prize Winners) aboard the Trip. Each Prize Winner will share a double-occupancy cabin with another Prize Winner of the same gender.
- Participation in a guided group travel experience;
- Services of local experts;
- Services of Expedition Staff;
- On-tour luggage handling;
- Crew gratuities;
- Scheduled meals;
- Alcoholic beverages (excluding certain premium brands); and
- Basic wi-fi.

The Trip is pre-scheduled for July 18, 2026 to July 27, 2026. The approximate retail value ("ARV") of the prize Trip is US \$20,069.00. The actual value of the Trip may vary depending on a variety of factors, including fluctuations of room rates. Any difference between the ARV and the actual cost of the Trip will not be awarded.

c) The Trip includes certain restrictions as follows:

- Trip components are subject to change without notice.
- The Trip is not a private tour and may be attended by other travelers.
- The Trip operator reserves the right to delay, postpone or otherwise reschedule the Trip for different dates, even if already booked, as necessary for any reason, including based on (i) the Trip operator's health and safety protocols, which take into consideration guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, local and international health authorities, the U.S. Travel Association, and Lindblad Expeditions' team of health experts, and (ii) the rules,

regulations, and travel guidance in place for each country visited during the Trip.

- Expenses not specifically included as part of the Trip are solely the responsibility of the Prize Winner, including, without limitation, the following: roundtrip airfare between the Prize Winner's residence and the originating and ending point of the Trip; roundtrip ground transportation between the Prize Winner's residence and the Airport of Origin; voyage tax; travel insurance or trip cancellation insurance; activities and ground transportation not expressly included in the Trip; meals not served as part of the Trip; airline baggage fees; customs and immigration fees; passport costs; laundry service, merchandise and souvenirs; parking; room service; service charges; spa services and other optional activities; telephone calls; and income and other taxes not expressly included in the Trip; and all other costs and expenses not expressly included in the Trip.
- Certain terms and restrictions shall apply to the Trip, as determined by the operator of the Trip in its sole discretion. If Prize Winner does not agree with these restrictions, the Trip will be forfeited in its entirety.
- Prize Winner shall be required to execute and return an agreement for the Trip, which includes a release of liability, assumption of risk, waiver of claims, indemnification and publicity (i.e., photo/video) release (where allowed by law) prior to participation, the ship's ticket, if applicable, and any other documentation required by Company and/or the operator of the Trip. Failure to return any required documentation within the specified time periods will result in forfeiture of the Trip. Prize Winner acknowledges sole responsibility for any actions, claims or liabilities related to any use or misuse of the Trip or any related activity or travel.

d) For Winners who are part of a team, the entire team will be recognized in any University Award presentation (e.g., certificate or plaque). For the avoidance of doubt, the Winners from a team must designate only one (1) team member to receive the entire Prize.

e) The Prize expedition must be completed at the designated dates and location for the Trip, or the offered Prize will be forfeited. If forfeited, the Entrant is still considered a Winner and maintains the accolade associated with the Award.

f) All federal, state, and local taxes (including income and withholding taxes) arising from or relating to acceptance or use of the prize are the sole responsibility of the Prize Winner. The University makes no representation regarding tax obligations and will not provide reimbursement or additional compensation for any tax liability incurred. Prize Winner is advised to consult with their own tax professional.

g) There are no Prize substitutions or options available. The Winners shall not be permitted to replace the Prize with another item or cash equivalent. The Prize is non-transferable. If the Prize becomes unavailable, the University reserves the right, exercisable at any time and in its sole

discretion, to either substitute a prize of comparable value or not award any prize to the Winners. All Prize awards are at the University's sole discretion. Winners should consult with Kim Ossi (kim@planetforward.org) if they have additional Prize questions.

9) Winner Notification. The Winners will be notified at the Planet Forward Summit on Friday, April 17, 2026. Additionally, if a potential Winner is found to be ineligible or if the potential Winner does not comply with these Official Rules, such potential Winner will be disqualified and, at the University's discretion, an applicable runner-up will be notified. All Entrants agree to comply fully with each provision in these Official Rules. Any Entrants attempting to defraud or in any way tamper with this Award, and any Entrants who do not comply with these Official Rules, will be ineligible for the Prize. If during the Submission Period, for reasons beyond the University's control, the Award is not capable of running as originally planned, the University, at its sole discretion, reserves the right to cancel or modify the Award without liability, and to the extent feasible, will determine the Winners and award the Prize among Story submissions received prior to cancellation or modification.

10) License. All Entrants, and specifically each Winner as a condition of receiving the Prize, hereby grants the University a transferable, irrevocable, perpetual, non-exclusive, fully paid-up, and royalty-free license to copy, distribute, publish, and display their individual Story on the Planet Forward website (as applicable), at the Planet Forward Summit, and in other Planet Forward marketing materials.

11) Representations and Warranties: All Entrants represent and warrant that:

- a) Entrant owns all rights, title and interest in and to the Story and has the full right, power, and authority to grant the License herein.
- b) The Story contains no libelous or otherwise unlawful material and does not infringe any proprietary right at common law or any statutory copyright.
- c) If any Story material is subject to the copyright or other intellectual property rights of a third party, Entrant shall acquire all necessary permissions prior to the Story's submission and share them with the University upon request.

12) Use of Name and Likeness. The Winners agree to allow the University to use their names and images on future Award promotional materials, with regards to the Planet Forward Summit and on the Planet Forward website for promotional purposes.

13) Release of Liability and Indemnification. By participating, all Entrants release and indemnify the University, the Prize sponsor, and each of their respective officers, directors, employees, and agents (collectively, "Released Parties") from any and all liability with respect to and in any way

arising from participating in an Award submission, based upon the Representations and Warranties, and/or acceptance or use of the Prize. Released Parties are not responsible for lost, late, incomplete, inconsistent, damaged, inaccurate, stolen, delayed, undelivered, or garbled Story submissions; or for lost, interrupted, or unavailable network, server, internet service provider, website; or for other errors or difficulties of any kind whether human, mechanical, electronic, computer, network, typographical or otherwise relating to or in connection with the Award, including, without limitation, errors or difficulties which may occur in connection with the administration of the Award, the Story submission, or the announcement of the Winners. Released Parties also are not responsible for any incorrect or inaccurate information, whether caused by other Entrants, tampering, hacking, or by any equipment or programming associated with or utilized in an Award submission. Released Parties are not responsible for injury or damage to any Entrants' computer or tracking device related to or resulting from participating in an Award submission. Entrants who tamper with or abuse any aspect of the Award submission process, who act in an unprofessional or disruptive manner or who are in violation of these Official Rules, as solely determined by the University, will be disqualified. Should any portion of an Award submission be, in the University's sole opinion, compromised by virus, worms, bugs, non-authorized human intervention, or other causes which, in the sole opinion of the University, corrupt or impair the administration, security, fairness, or proper play, the University reserves the right at its sole discretion to suspend, modify, or terminate the Award selection process and, if terminated, at its discretion and to the extent possible, determine Winners from all eligible Story submissions received prior to action.

14) Governing Law; Parties in Interest. These Official Rules are governed by all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations. The local and federal courts of the District of Columbia shall have sole jurisdiction of any controversies regarding the Official Rules and laws of the District of Columbia shall govern the Official Rules. All Entrants waive any and all objections to jurisdiction and venue in those courts and hereby submit to the jurisdiction of those courts.

15) Communications. Any Entrants with questions or comments regarding the Official Rules should contact storyfest@planetforward.org.