

Lake Forest College presents the 2025-2026

PUBLIC POLICY Analysis Challenge:



Governing the Environment

2025–2026 Public Policy Analysis Challenge Guidelines

The [Public Policy Analysis Challenge](#) at Lake Forest College welcomes all students into the public policy arena by challenging them to develop an effective, practicable, and convincing policy recommendation on an important issue. The topic for the 2025–2026 academic year is [Governing the Environment](#).

Public policy concerns the laws, regulations, and policies set by governments at all levels, and it affects all aspects of society. Bringing about constructive change in the world and governing well require an ability to analyze issues and policy options rigorously and objectively. At Lake Forest College, analysis is therefore at the core of our public policy programming. We do not approach public policy from a partisan point of view. We recognize that human affairs are extremely complex, that there are no easy answers, and that information, circumstances, and priorities are always subject to change. The foundation of our approach is evidence-based, pragmatic analysis of all identifiable costs, benefits, and risks. We seek an in-depth understanding of the issues, including their interrelationships, and our policy options, including their tradeoffs.

Overview

The Public Policy Analysis Challenge welcomes entries from current Lake Forest College students working in teams of two or three people, with each team mentored by a faculty or staff member. Teams compete for significant cash prizes by researching and analyzing that year's topic, evaluating policy options for the particular problem or opportunity the team has chosen to address, and making a specific policy recommendation. Entry requirements include a white paper, executive summary, and a formal presentation by the team to a panel of judges.

Eligibility

All Lake Forest College students who are studying on campus or In The Loop in Spring 2026 are eligible to enter the Public Policy Analysis Challenge. Students must be available to compete on campus on Thursday, April 16 and Sunday, April 26.

All students enrolled in PPCY 200: Public Policy Incubator must enter the Public Policy Analysis Challenge. Other students may enroll by filling out this [form](#). If you need help finding a team, please sign up as an individual and Prof. Cohen will help you form a group.

Important Dates

Please pay close attention to the deadlines as timely completion of each step is necessary to compete in the Challenge.

- *January 20*: Sign up with your team (or as an individual if you would like to be matched with a group)
- *January 27*: Deadline for students *not* enrolled in PPCY 200 to choose their topic (students enrolled in PPCY 200 will choose their topic as part of the course)
- *February 2*: Mentor pairings announced
- *February–March*: Work with your team and mentor to develop your policy proposal
- *April 5*: White papers and executive summaries due
- *April 15*: Slides due for preliminary round of competition
- *April 16*: Preliminary competition
- *April 26*: Final round

Entries

An entry for each team comes in three parts: white paper, executive summary, and presentation. All work must comply with the AI policy described on pp. 5-6 of this document.

White Paper Guidelines

A white paper includes a formal statement of either a problem and its root causes, or of an opportunity and its potential benefits; an analysis of the tradeoffs involved with different options to address the issue (which will usually include the option of doing nothing); and a formal recommendation. In particular:

1. White papers cannot be fewer than 8 pages nor more than 25 pages, including all tables and graphs, but not including the title page, executive summary, references, or the required AI statement. The main body of the white paper should typically be 10–15 pages in length. The white paper should be double-spaced with one-inch margins, use 12-point font, and have numbered pages.
2. The white paper includes an unnumbered title page that identifies your issue, the names of all team members, and the name of the team's faculty mentor.
3. Although the white paper's structure is left to each team's discretion, white papers typically have the following content, in whatever order is most logical.
 - a. Clearly explain the problem/opportunity you address and how it falls within the scope of this year's topic.
 - b. Describe the nature and dimensions of the problem/opportunity. It is not necessary to identify a problem or opportunity with global or even national reach. Local problems deserve good policy too. Data, tables, and graphs are likely key tools to convey importance and urgency.
 - c. Using research and analysis, identify the root causes of the problem or the opportunity's untapped potential. The aim is to convince the reader that you have identified the root causes or opportunity and connected them to the expected effects of the proposed policy.
 - d. Identify plausible options for addressing the problem/opportunity, including the implications of maintaining the status quo. For each, be clear about what the option calls for, provide an analysis of the likely outcomes with emphasis on the tradeoffs involved, and clearly describe any key assumptions and risks, including any sources of uncertainty and their impact on the likely range of outcomes.
 - e. Compare the tradeoffs across the range of options you identify.
 - f. Clearly state and defend a specific policy recommendation and demonstrate that it is a practicable option.
 - i. Clearly explain how the recommendation will achieve the desired result at an acceptable social cost.
 - ii. Demonstrate that you have considered potential challenges and barriers to adoption and implementation, and that you have

developed a strategy to promote adoption and effective implementation of your recommended policy.

- iii. Identify key performance indicators against which you will measure success.
- iv. Make clear how the effects of the recommended policy and any key assumptions, key risks, and key success factors should be monitored over time and who will do this monitoring.
- g. The white paper contains a references section that does not count toward the page limit.
- h. **The white paper must contain an AI statement** which provides a detailed explanation of how you used AI in the preparation of the white paper and/or executive summary. If you did not use AI, your AI statement will say: “We did not use AI to prepare this white paper or executive summary.” See pp. 5-6 for further explanation of the AI policy for the Challenge.

Executive Summary

The executive summary comes immediately after the title page of the white paper. The executive summary is a “talking points memo” meant to bring the reader quickly up to speed on the most important facts, arguments, and recommendations. In particular:

- 1. The executive summary should be 1–2 pages; one is preferable and three is not allowed. Bullet points are acceptable. The executive summary should be double-spaced with one-inch margins, use 12-point font, and have numbered pages.
- 2. Whereas the white paper is written for any interested party, the executive summary is written specifically for a decision maker. The objectives are to provide the key points about the problem/opportunity, to describe the recommended policy and review the tradeoffs associated with this policy, to explain the feasibility of adopting and implementing the proposed policy, and to identify how the effectiveness of the proposed policy will be evaluated. The executive summary should include arguments and evidence at a high level.
- 3. The structure of the executive summary should lead the reader through the problem and recommendation in a logical way. The executive summary should be detailed enough to allow the reader to understand the key points of the white paper and should anticipate questions from an audience.

Presentation

All teams will formally present their white paper to a panel of judges during the preliminary round. In particular:

1. All team members must participate in the presentation. Teams should deliver their prepared presentation professionally and demonstrate command of the issues and their analysis during the question-and-answer session with the judges.
2. Each team will have a strict limit of 10 minutes for their prepared presentation. Accordingly, the team likely cannot present the entire content of the white paper and will have to decide what to include. Teams should keep in mind that the judges will have received their executive summary and white paper prior to the presentation.
3. The purpose of the presentation is to summarize the team's analysis of the issue, the policy options considered, the tradeoffs associated with each, and the reasoning behind the specific recommendation.
4. The presentation should include a brief review of a strategy for adoption and a practicable implementation process should the policy be adopted.
5. Teams should prepare a slide deck that makes effective use of visual aids (e.g., graphs, tables, diagrams, visual points). The slides should not include an overabundance of words. **The slides must be prepared in PowerPoint** to avoid compatibility issues should the team advance to the final round of the competition. PowerPoint is available for download free of charge to all members of the Lake Forest College community.
6. Immediately following the prepared presentation, the judges will ask questions about the executive summary, the white paper, and the presentation. Judges can also ask questions on any topic they feel is appropriate regarding the issue at hand. The question-and-answer period will be 5 minutes for the preliminary round and 10 minutes for the final round.

AI Policy

You are responsible for the accuracy and originality of the ideas, language, and content of the work you submit. At Lake Forest College, we foster the development of creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills that often extend beyond the capabilities of AI. Relying on AI technology may impede your capacity for intellectual engagement and

innovative thought. Furthermore, AI-generated content may be inaccurate, incomplete, or pose other challenges.

Consequently, the written work you submit and the text of your presentation should express your own ideas in your own words, with proper citation for any language or ideas that are not your own. In no case should you ask an AI to write x words on y topic and submit that work, or a revised version of that work, as your own. Work which appears to be AI-generated will result in disqualification from the Challenge and, for students in PPCY 200, a referral to the Academic Honesty Judicial Board.

Although AI cannot substitute for your own critical thinking or writing, you may use it as a *tool* to brainstorm, find sources, analyze data, summarize sources to help you learn about an issue, or check the accuracy of grammar and spelling. *In all cases, you must clearly state when and how you used AI tools and cite any language or ideas that are not your own.* **See p. 4 for more information on the required AI Statement.**

If you have any questions about whether a particular use of AI is permitted, please contact the coordinator of the Public Policy Analysis Challenge.

Judging Criteria

The judges will focus on the quality of the team's analysis and presentation, how well the team supports its recommendation, and the team's overall command of the subject it has chosen to address.

Teams should familiarize themselves with the scoring rubrics for the preliminary and final rounds and the AI policy.

Progressing to the Finals

Based on the scoring rubric, the judges of the preliminary round will select three teams that will advance to the final round of the competition. After scoring the executive summaries and presentations, the preliminary round judges will conduct a quality check of the white papers for the teams with the top three combined scores to ensure that these three teams' white papers substantially satisfy the white paper guidelines as laid out in the final round scoring rubric and do not appear to be AI-generated. If the preliminary judging panel agrees that the white paper for any team does not meet these requirements, that team will be disqualified, and the preliminary judges will evaluate the white paper for the next highest scoring team.

The coordinator of the Public Policy Analysis Challenge will forward the white papers and executive summaries of the three teams selected by the preliminary round judges to the judges for the final round. These three teams will then present their white papers to the final round judges.

Margin of Error/Tie Rule for the Final Round

If the total of the scores awarded by the panel of judges to any of the teams in the final round are within 2% of each other, it will trigger a discussion of whether there should be a tie between those teams. The judges have full discretion to determine whether to issue a tie.

Prize Pool

The prize pool is \$10,000. Typically, when there are no ties, the prizes are distributed as follows:

- First place team: \$5000 (split evenly among all team members)
- Second place team: \$3000 (split evenly among all team members)
- Third place team: \$2000 (split evenly among all team members)

Permission to Share Submitted Materials

Participants in the Public Policy Analysis Challenge agree that their submitted materials can be shared with judges and with current and future Lake Forest College students, staff, and faculty, unless otherwise prohibited by Lake Forest College policy. If you have any concerns about sharing your materials, please reach out to the coordinator of the Challenge.

Photographs and Recordings

The preliminary and final rounds of the competition may be recorded or photographed and made available to members of the Lake Forest College community or the immediate family members of student participants. They will not be shared on the Lake Forest College website without prior consultation with students. If you have any concerns about sharing your photograph or recordings of your presentation, please reach out to the coordinator of the Challenge.

Contact Information

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The coordinator of the 2025–2026 Public Policy Analysis Challenge is Prof. Danielle Cohen (dcohen@lakeforest.edu).