Regeneron ISEF 2026
Scientific Integrity Report

Each year the Society for Science staff and our volunteers invest considerable time and resources verifying the scientific integrity of finalist research and documentation. The 2026 Scientific Integrity Report details that effort, including the resources committed to the effort as well as the multi-step processes used to review and approve projects at Regeneron ISEF.

The Society holds our Regeneron ISEF community to a high standard, and we are proud to report that the majority of our finalists met and exceeded those expectations. This result reflects the impact of our collective efforts – across the Society and our wider ISEF community – to uphold high ethical standards.

Overview
Throughout the Regeneron ISEF 2026 experience, Society for Science emphasized scientific integrity and worked diligently to ensure a fair judging process and the selection of deserving student winners.

Each year, the Scientific Review Committee (SRC) and the Display & Safety (D&S) Committee conduct stringent reviews of all projects. Beginning in 2025, the Society staff began taking additional steps to evaluate the scientific integrity of each project. Steps taken throughout the process included:

- Our Scientific Integrity Officer, Dr. Jenna DeLuca, reviewed projects and investigated any allegations that we received.
- We provided guidance to affiliated fairs, asking them to partner with us to verify the authenticity of the projects from their own delegations. This process included reviewing ISEF documentation and consulting with educators and mentors involved with each project.
- New in 2026, the Society staff developed proprietary integrity screenings that were then applied to abstracts and project materials throughout the competition cycle. Over 200 hours of staff time were dedicated to this effort.
- DeLuca sent a letter to all finalists, fair directors and adults-in-charge on the Tuesday afternoon prior to judging, emphasizing the importance of scientific integrity and the obligations that they have as young researchers. (Appendix 1) The letter, which was similar to a message sent in 2025, had a remarkable 81% open rate.

A total of 1,727 finalists submitted 1,383 projects from 365 fairs representing 67 countries, regions and territories to Regeneron ISEF 2026.

Scientific Integrity Review
Artificial intelligence

One area of concern for Society staff in 2026 involved non-disclosed use of artificial intelligence (AI) among finalists. Of the projects that included a bibliography, 93 finalists (7%) had two or more unverifiable citations, meaning that the citations included incorrect information, such as author, article title, journal name, and/or digital object identifier (DOI). In many cases citations listed journals that could not be verified as legitimate scientific publishing journals.

These finalists were required to fix their bibliography across all project materials, complete a course on academic integrity from the CITI training program, and were asked to optionally read a journal article on artificial intelligence in research (Resnik, D.B., Hosseini, M. The ethics of using artificial intelligence in scientific research: new guidance needed for a new tool. AI Ethics 5, 1499–1521 (2025). https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-024-00493-8). Upon review of re-submitted bibliographies, several finalists were still found to have unverifiable citations at which point they were asked to do the following:

- Correct any remaining incorrect citations
- Meet with the SRC onsite to discuss how these citations were generated or formatted

During this process, the Society discovered that many finalists used AI tools to simply format or collect citations for their bibliographies, and those tools made errors or hallucinated citation details. It is critical that students verify their citations across all of their materials before submission.

Continuation Projects

The Society also encountered many finalists who failed to properly disclose a project as a continuation. These finalists submitted projects that appeared similar to past projects submitted to regional fairs as well as past Regeneron ISEF competitions. It is important to note that implying a project was completed in a singular year, while research, data collection, or method development occurred over multiple years, is highly unethical.

Many finalists were unaware that if they built upon or learned something from a past project, their project would be considered a continuation, and they were under the incorrect impression that continuations have a negative connotation. On the contrary, showing a continued interest in a subject area demonstrates dedication and perseverance.

Scientific Review Committee (SRC) Review

SRC members and readers began reviewing ISEF documentation during the second week of February and concluded the process on Monday, May 11.

- The SRC sent over 500 emails to finalists, their adult sponsors and fair directors to gather information, request missing forms or seek clarification.
- There were 43 initial fail to qualify notifications sent based on the initially submitted documentation. Through a newly implemented formal appeal process, additional information was provided and/or interviews were held to attempt to resolve the

SRC's concerns. Ultimately, 15 projects failed to qualify for competition; 4 were given the opportunity to guest exhibit at Regeneron ISEF.

- At least 30 projects were identified as needing continuation paperwork after initial submission. The finalists were required to provide additional documentation and, in many cases, meet with the SRC to understand the differences between the prior year's work and the 2026 project.
- The SRC held over 65 zoom interviews during April. Twenty-four projects received red forms onsite, requiring the finalists to participate in onsite interviews on Sunday, May 10 and Monday May 11.
    - The key areas that required interviews included seeking clarity around biosafety conditions, the use of human participants, individual vs. team projects, adding research not on the original research plan and/or improper citations.
    - Many interviews were requested because a finalist overstated their contributions, failed to provide sufficient detail or failed to provide a project summary/addendum information in the research plan.

There were 1,338 projects approved for competition; 15 projects failed to qualify and 29 were "no show" projects that were not onsite for a variety of reasons.

Display & Safety Committee (D&S) Review

The Display & Safety Committee reviewed finalists' virtual booths on ProjectBoard from mid-March through May 1. As with 2025, D&S focused on confirming that the finalists properly cited every graphic provided in their project materials. D&S also worked closely with the SRC to ensure that continuation projects properly referenced their current year's work on-site and in their virtual project materials.

More than 1,000 infractions were given throughout the virtual project review process, with the majority going to finalists who failed to follow the D&S Graphic Credit Guidance. Committee members also catalogued any potential integrity issues that arose during virtual review.

Once onsite at Regeneron ISEF, finalists were required to go through a two-phase Display & Safety inspection that verified the information being presented – on the poster and at the booth – had been properly reviewed and met all requirements. This inspection also ensured that all graphics were properly cited.

Allegations and Investigations

To date, the Society for Science staff received allegations against 9 projects that competed at Regeneron ISEF 2026.

The Society staff, along with the SRC, reviewed the project information and materials and took several actions, as warranted:

- Requested additional documentation
- Consulted with the Affiliated Fair Director, their SRC and judging leadership
- Had subject-matter experts review the concerns
- Interviewed the students/project to address the concern

The majority of these allegations were made by fellow student competitors who were not privy to the full ISEF documentation.

Conclusion
While a small number of students violated Society policies, we are pleased that the vast majority upheld our expected standards of scientific integrity.

The Society staff will continue to refine and improve our rules and processes each year as technology and scientific practices evolve.

Appendix 1. Scientific Integrity Letter sent to Finalists, Fair Directors and Adults-in-Charge on Tuesday, May 12 prior to judging day at Regeneron ISEF 2026

Dear Regeneron ISEF Community,

My name is Jenna DeLuca, and I joined Society for Science last year as the first Scientific Integrity Officer. Over the course of the last year, I have interacted with several of you at Society related events and it has been a great pleasure to learn about your incredible research.

As I mentioned in a similar letter I sent out at Regeneron ISEF 2025, I competed in my regional science and engineering fairs and that's what inspired me to become a scientist. I went on to conduct scientific research in college, graduate school, and during my postdoctoral fellowship before taking on this role as the Scientific Integrity Officer. All of that has instilled in me the importance of scientific integrity.

Being at the top of your field requires a lot of hard work and maintaining the highest level of academic integrity is crucial to this. To ensure that projects comply with our standards for scientific integrity, the Society's staff works tirelessly behind the scenes reviewing project materials. The Society conducts a plagiarism check on all abstracts and reviews all finalist paperwork along with conducting other proprietary integrity screenings.

This year, the Society identified a significant increase in non-disclosed artificial intelligence (AI) use. While AI can be a powerful tool, it is also known to be highly susceptible to error and hallucinations. AI-generated, or even AI-formatted, citations in bibliographies frequently contain inaccuracies in authors, titles, and journal information, along with article digital object identifiers (DOIs).

Our staff worked diligently to manually verify all citations for their accuracy and legitimacy, and during project review, we discovered a high frequency of bibliographies that appeared to be AI-generated. Some citations included minor incorrect details, such as a wrong article title, however others cited scientific journals that were entirely non-existent. Non-verifiable citations were found in nearly 10% of projects submitted to Regeneron ISEF.

Finalists who had two or more non-verifiable citations were required to take a course with the CITI Training Program on Academic Integrity, amend all citations in project materials and optionally read a paper on AI in research (Resnik, D.B., Hosseini, M. The ethics of using artificial intelligence in scientific research: new guidance needed for a new tool. AI Ethics 5, 1499–1521 (2025). https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-024-00493-8).

For more information about the Society's commitment to scientific integrity, please visit www.societyforscience.org/scientific-integrity/.

We appreciate your hard work, and the amount of time you have dedicated to scientific research. I wish you best of luck at this year's fair.

Sincerely,

Jenna DeLuca, Ph.D.

Scientific Integrity Officer