

COMMON REASONS PROJECTS FAIL TO QUALIFY

The list below includes reasons students failed to qualify in 2026; however, the reasons entrants may fail to qualify are not limited to only these examples. After applications are submitted each year, a team of PhD scientists reviews each entry and performs an extensive rules check. When a Regeneron STS entry “fails to qualify,” the student is not eligible for awards. Entrants should also explore Task 7 of the application and can email any questions to sts@societyforscience.org.

Human Research

- Student fails to obtain IRB approval before testing an invention, software or product, or conducting a survey of their design, or collecting feedback from other humans.
- Human data was not properly deidentified before being shared with student, OR mentor or paperwork fail to corroborate student claims of deidentification.
- Student fails to upload a blank copy of survey used on human participants (if survey used in project).
- Student fails to upload a blank copy of informed consent document used on human participants, or does not share evidence of collecting informed consent (if informed consent required by IRB).
- Student fails to upload IRB documentation or proof of publication from mentor’s originating study.
- IRB is improperly constituted (school IRBs are permitted, but teachers who oversee a project must not be part of the school IRB as this is a conflict of interest. Parents/guardians must not be members of IRBs governing their own students’ projects.)
- IRB paperwork not signed or checkboxes of IRB decision not checked.
- Dates on paperwork do not align with dates of student data collection.
- Student project diagnoses or treats medical conditions.

Non-Human Vertebrate Animal Research

- The source of vertebrate animal/human cell lines or tissues are not properly documented.
- Vertebrate animal/human established cell lines or tissue cultures were obtained from a commercial source and neither student nor project recommender provided a catalog number; or if obtained from a non-commercial source there is no documentation from supplier.
- Vertebrate animal sacrificed solely for student study.
- Student study involved pain or stress to vertebrate animals.
- Student performed surgery on vertebrate animal — this is beyond basic husbandry and care.
- Vertebrate animal’s habitat and/or food was altered without IACUC approvals (in order for a study to be considered observational, no factors can be altered in animal’s habitat).
- Student fails to upload IACUC documentation or proof of publication from mentor’s originating study.
- Student performs vertebrate animal research in a home environment.
- IACUC paperwork not provided.
- Dates on paperwork do not align with dates of student data collection.

PHBAs and Hazardous Materials

- Student performs PHBA research in a home setting after June 2020.
- Student cultures microorganisms in a home environment.
- Student performs BSL-2 level research in a BSL-1 setting.
- Use of dangerous chemicals in an improper setting.
- Unsupervised use of high-level radiation.

Other

- Student’s research report fails plagiarism screening.
- Student and mentor discrepancy in paid program sum.
- Student fails to disclose personal relationships in the mentorship of their project, or other conflict of interest.
- Student or mentor fails to disclose payment for services.
- Student is not in their final year of high school.
- Student submits high school team project as individual work.
- Student does not meet residence or citizenship eligibility requirements.
- Student adheres to University requirements that are less strict than Regeneron STS requirements.
- Research Report exceeds 20-page limit, or attempts to deceive the spirit of the page limit.
- Research Report contains false references, fraudulent data, etc.
- Any aspect of the application is refuted with evidence.
- Unrefuted AI use in application responses.

Top 3 Reasons Projects Failed to Qualify in 2026:

- 1 Fake references and/or citations in Research Report
- 2 Failure to disclose a conflict of interest
- 3 Vertebrate animal research conducted in a home environment