

DARPA Lift Challenge 2026: Prizes



Categories: [Objective](#) | [Subjective](#)

To be eligible to receive prize money, the Lift Challenge requires registrants' Social Security Number (SSN) or Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN). See [Rules](#) for additional eligibility requirements.

Objective Categories

Overall Payload-to-Weight Ratio

This is the primary metric, with prizes awarded to first (\$2.5M), second (\$1.5M), and third (\$1M) place.

- **Measurement:** Payload and aircraft weight in pounds (lbs), as measured by a certified and calibrated scale. The scale must have a resolution of at least 0.1 lbs (0.045 kg).
- **Scoring:** The primary metric is the maximum payload weight divided by the aircraft weight. In the event of a tie, the team with the fastest time will be declared the winner. Each team will be evaluated based on its 'most successful' singular run across all of its attempts. Please note score signifies payload weight (lbs) / aircraft weight (lbs).
- **Verification:** DARPA representative will weigh the aircraft and payload right before flight.
- **Payload requirement:** Teams must meet a minimum of 110 lbs payload and follow the course rules for score consideration. The top three teams will receive the full prize award if they are above the 4:1 ratio. If they are below the 4:1 ratio, the team will receive 50% of the prize award. | [Read about the winners](#)

Subjective Categories

These categories will be judged by a panel of DARPA experts and will be based on a combination of technical merit, innovation, and potential impact.

- **Most Revolutionary Aerodynamic Design** (\$500,000)
Evaluation Criteria: Novelty of the design, potential for improved performance (e.g., lift, drag, stability), and feasibility of operation.

- **Most Revolutionary Powertrain Design (\$500,000)**

Evaluation Criteria: Novelty of the propulsion system, potential for improved efficiency, reliability, and scalability.

- **Most Promising (\$500,000)**

Evaluation Criteria: Overall potential of the design to meet the needs of customers, considering factors such as cost, performance, scalability, usability, and transition potential.

Eligibility

- **Intent to compete:** Individuals and teams must attempt to complete the course, high performance and completion of the course is desired but not required to be eligible for this prize category.

Example: You have a novel design, but crashed on takeoff.

- A team who wins an objective category can also be eligible for one or more subjective categories. | [Read about the winners](#)