



# HOSPITALITY SUSTAINABILITY INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Hospitality Sustainability Innovation Challenge

Sponsored by EHL Hospitality Business School



Behind the scenes, hotels and resorts are working hard to reduce their environmental footprint. In this challenge, your task is to select a hospitality brand and design a digital or experiential idea in a manner which encapsulates the hospitality brand's DNA that immerses guests and encourages them to participate in the hotel/resort's sustainability efforts. Participants can choose to focus on any aspect of sustainability and any digital medium.

## Driving Question or Challenge:

How can you design a digital or experiential guest engagement concept that immerses hotel or resort guests in a hospitality brand's sustainability efforts, in a way that stays true to that brand's identity?

## Real-World Context:

Hotels and resorts around the world are under growing pressure to reduce their environmental footprint, from cutting food waste and single-use plastics to lowering energy use and carbon emissions. Turning those efforts into guest experiences that people notice, understand, and want to be part of takes creativity, brand fluency, and human-centered design. This challenge asks DECA members to engage with the realities of hospitality innovation, where sustainability, guest experience design, and brand storytelling intersect.

By selecting a hospitality brand, identifying a sustainability effort to highlight, and designing an innovative guest experience concept that reflects that brand's DNA, DECA members will explore how global hospitality companies bring sustainability commitments to life for their guests. This experience mirrors real-world work done by guest experience designers, brand strategists, and sustainability teams across the hospitality industry.

## CHALLENGE OVERVIEW

- This event consists of **one** major part: the video presentation that is a minimum of **three minutes** and maximum of **five minutes** in length.
- Each event entry will be composed of **one to four members** of a DECA chapter. Chapters may submit multiple entries for consideration.
- The participants will design a digital or experiential concept based on a selected hospitality brand, sustainability focus, target guest audience and guest engagement strategy.
- The participants will then present their findings and sustainability concept in a video that is a minimum of three minutes and a maximum of five minutes in length. Videos longer than five minutes in length will not be evaluated and will not be eligible for awards.
- The participants must fully complete and submit the online registration form at [www.deca.org/challenges](http://www.deca.org/challenges) no later than **December 11, 2026, 11:59 p.m. ET** to be eligible for awards. Late entries and entries over five minutes will not be accepted.
- DECA Inc., and EHL Hospitality Business School are not responsible for lost, damaged, mislabeled or misdirected entries.

## RESOURCES

### Reading Materials:

[Hospitality Outlook Report 2026 Sustainability](#)  
[Innovation](#)  
[Hotel Management](#)  
[Service Design](#)  
[Branding & Marketing](#)

### Video Resources:

[Crafting a Business Case Decision Makers Won't Ignore](#)  
[From Ideas to Execution](#)  
[Masterclass: How to Design a Winning Hospitality Concept](#)

## KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS DEVELOPED

Participants will demonstrate knowledge and skills needed to address the components of the project as described in the content outline and evaluation forms.

Participants will also develop Career Competencies, in the following categories, desired by today's employers:

- **Critical Thinking** - Thinks critically to understand and solve problems.
- **Communication** - Communicates clearly, effectively, and with reason.
- **Decision Making** - Considers the impacts of decisions.
- **Collaboration** - Participates and advocates in groups of all sizes to achieve common goals.
- **Innovation** - Demonstrates a creative and innovative mindset.

## PRESENTATION GUIDELINES

The participants will present their concept to EHL Hospitality Business School judges in a video that is a maximum of five minutes in length. All videos must include the following components:

### I. Introduction

- Description of the selected hospitality brand and its brand identity
- Description of the sustainability effort selected to highlight (e.g., food waste, energy use, marine conservation, community impact)
- Description of the target guest audience
- Description of the concept
- Description of how the concept reflects the brand's identity and DNA, and brings it to life through storytelling and brand communication

### II. Proposed Concept of Experience or Engagement

- Objectives and rationale of the proposed concept, including its underlying goal (e.g., raise awareness, involve guests in the activity, change perception or behavior)
- Description of the guest experience or journey (be specific about how guests engage with the concept)
- Explanation of how the concept is innovative, whether through use of technology, a new way of delivering the experience, creative use of resources, or another approach and how it stays relevant to the brand's DNA
- Proposed metrics to measure guest engagement and impact

### III. Video Presentation

- Research into hospitality sustainability practices and the selected brand clearly demonstrated
- Presentation demonstrates a creative and guest-centric experience concept
- Provided supporting items such as images, item descriptions, promotional materials
- Engaging, with a clear verbal message

## PRESENTATION JUDGING

Judges will select the top three overall teams. From the final three teams, the overall winning team will be selected.

## AWARDS

In partnership with EHL Hospitality Business School the following awards will be provided:

- 1st Place Team - \$1,500
- 2nd Place Team - \$1,000
- 3rd Place Team - \$500

The top three teams will be recognized on stage during DECA's International Career Development Conference in Anaheim, California. Eligibility to attend DECA ICDC is determined by the chartered association advisor based on their policies. Finalists should consult with their chartered association advisor for eligibility guidelines and gain approval from their school advisor to attend the conference.

## TIMELINE

|                                            |                   |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Challenge announced                        | September 2026    |
| Challenge submission/video posted deadline | December 11, 2026 |
| Top 3 teams announced                      | February 2, 2027  |
| Top 3 teams travel to ICDC (Anaheim, CA)   | April 17-20, 2027 |



1-4 PARTICIPANTS



3-5 MINUTES  
PRESENTATION TIME



1 VIDEO  
ENTRY



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## PRESENTATION EVALUATION FORM

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Team Member Names: \_\_\_\_\_

| Did the participating team... |                                                                                                                                                          | Novice      | Developing | Proficient  | Exemplary | Judged Score |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|
| CONTENT CRITERIA              |                                                                                                                                                          |             |            |             |           |              |
| 1.                            | Identify the selected hospitality brand and their guests' profile.                                                                                       | 0-1-2-3-4-5 | 6-7-8-9-10 | 11-12-13-14 | 15        |              |
| 2.                            | Identify environmental sustainability issues in hospitality and tourism.                                                                                 | 0-1-2-3-4-5 | 6-7-8-9-10 | 11-12-13-14 | 15        |              |
| 3.                            | Describe current issues and trends in the hotel/lodging industry.                                                                                        | 0-1-2-3-4-5 | 6-7-8-9-10 | 11-12-13-14 | 15        |              |
| 4.                            | Describe the proposed experience/engagement concept and its underlying objective (e.g., raise awareness, involve guests, change perception or behavior). | 0-1-2-3-4-5 | 6-7-8-9-10 | 11-12-13-14 | 15        |              |
| 5.                            | Describe the impact of the proposed experience/engagement amongst various stakeholders (guests, hotel employees, wider community).                       | 0-1-2-3-4-5 | 6-7-8-9-10 | 11-12-13-14 | 15        |              |
| VIDEO PRESENTATION            |                                                                                                                                                          |             |            |             |           |              |
| 6.                            | Research into hospitality sustainability practices and the selected brand clearly demonstrated.                                                          | 0-1         | 2-3        | 4           | 5         |              |
| 7.                            | Concept demonstrates a creative and innovative approach to guest engagement.                                                                             | 0-1         | 2-3        | 4           | 5         |              |
| 8.                            | Concept authentically reflects the selected hospitality brand's identity and encourages guest participation.                                             | 0-1         | 2-3        | 4           | 5         |              |
| 9.                            | Concept demonstrates thoughtful design of the guest experience delivery and its feasibility.                                                             | 0-1         | 2-3        | 4           | 5         |              |
| 10.                           | Overall impression of the video.                                                                                                                         | 0-1         | 2-3        | 4           | 5         |              |
| TOTAL SCORE (100 points)      |                                                                                                                                                          |             |            |             |           |              |