SHADE LA

SHADE ZONES DESIGN COMPETITION 2026

PERMANENT SHADE

Shape the shade: designing cooler ways to walk, bike, and move along the L.A. River.

DESIGN BRIEF

ORGANIZED BY

public exchange | USC

USC School of Architecture

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZERS

L.A. County
Los Angeles County is one of the nation's largest local governments, serving approximately 10 million residents across 88 cities and numerous unincorporated communities. L.A. County Parks, Public Works, and Chief Sustainability Office are jointly supporting the ShadeLA 2026 Design Competition to advance the County's goals related to urban natureways and climate resilience, including commitments outlined in the L.A. County Heat Action Plan.

ShadeLA
ShadeLA is a people-powered campaign to cool Los Angeles, led by USC Dornsife Public Exchange in collaboration with UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation, and with participation by the city of Los Angeles, County of Los Angeles Chief Sustainability Office, L.A. Metro and the Los Angeles Organizing Committee for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games (LA28). The campaign combines research, planning, design, and public engagement to bring shade to the places that need it most.

USC Dornsife Public Exchange
Public Exchange connects academic expertise with public and private partners to solve real-world challenges through collaborative, evidence-based solutions. As one of the lead organizers of ShadeLA, Public Exchange brings together universities, public agencies, and community organizations to respond to extreme heat. Public Exchange helps bridge research and design, ensuring that bold ideas are grounded in science, shaped by community needs, and ready for real-world implementation. Through initiatives like the Shade Zones competition, Public Exchange empowers the next generation of designers and leaders to advance climate resilience and equity across Los Angeles.

USC School of Architecture
The USC School of Architecture shapes visionary architects and designers through a rigorous, interdisciplinary education. For more than 100 years, USC Architecture faculty and graduates have pushed beyond the traditional boundaries of the field to pioneer many paradigm shifting new practices of architecture. Deeply rooted in the City of Los Angeles and also intensely connected to global concerns, USC architects and scholars work shoulder to shoulder with our surrounding communities to develop, empower, and leverage local insight that enables them to become pioneering practitioners and forge creative solutions. The school empowers students to design for climate resilience, equity, and community wellbeing—at every scale.

NOTE: For avoidance of doubt, LA28 is not a sponsor or organizer of this competition in any way, and shall have no liability or responsibility for any claim arising in connection with this competition.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Los Angeles region stands at a transformative moment. With major sporting events like the 2027 Super Bowl and the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games on the horizon, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine our public spaces—not just for the global spotlight, but for the diverse communities who call this Los Angeles home. This series of megaevents will bring thousands of visitors from around the world to our streets, plazas, and neighborhoods, amplifying the urgency to ensure safe, comfortable, and climate-resilient environments for all.

At the same time, Los Angeles faces rising temperatures and intensifying heatwaves, particularly in communities that have long lacked access to adequate shade and green spaces. The need to move people efficiently and safely across a sprawling city during these major events must be matched by bold, beautiful, and sustainable solutions that offer relief from the heat.

ShadeLA is a people-powered movement to make L.A. cooler—one shaded space at a time. It's co-organized by USC Dornsife Public Exchange and UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation, with participation from the City of Los Angeles, County of Los Angeles Chief Sustainability Office, L.A. Metro, Southern California Association of Governments, the Los Angeles Organizing Committee for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games (LA28), and 30+ nonprofit, design, and other impact partners. Together, ShadeLA is dedicated to expanding access to both natural and built shade—like trees, canopies, and awnings—in the places Angelenos live, work, and gather.

ShadeLA is partnering with the USC School of Architecture to co-organize the annual Shade Zones Design Competition, which launched in the academic year of 2025/26, and will continue in 2026/27 and 2027/28. Rooted in Los Angeles' broader commitment to sustainability, community resilience and design excellence, the Shade Zones Design Competition series calls on the next generation of architects, artists, designers, engineers, landscape architects, urban planners, and more to help shape a cooler, more resilient Los Angeles—one that shines on the world stage in 2028 and beyond.

1. INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

The inaugural 2025/26 ShadeLA Shade Zones Design Competition, in partnership with L.A. Metro, showcased the creativity and technical ingenuity of Los Angeles' emerging designers. Over 130 students from a dozen L.A. colleges and universities developed bold proposals for modular, temporary shade systems capable of cooling sidewalks, transit stops, and public gathering spaces during major events. The competition drew strong participation, enthusiastic engagement from a multidisciplinary jury of architects, engineers, and public agency leaders, and more than 1,000 public votes from around the world. The winning design was ultimately developed, fabricated, and showcased between June and July 2026 at the Downtown Inglewood Metro Station[1] and in Expo Park (Figure 1), demonstrating how student ideas can translate into real-world shade for Los Angeles.



Figure 1. Shade Zones Build 2025/26 outside of the California African American Museum, Expo Park, Los Angeles, Photo Credit: Bhavna Sharma, USC.

In collaboration with the County of Los Angeles, the 2026/27 Shade Zones Design Competition will **design innovative shade solutions that support active mobility within the Lower Los Angeles River corridor.** The competition will focus on the experience of everyday recreational users, bicycle commuters, and others moving along the river corridor. Participants will design innovative shade solutions that provide meaningful relief from extreme heat while respecting the operational, environmental, and spatial constraints of L.A. River infrastructure and ecosystems. Designs should provide relief from the sun during the hottest part of the day, enhance comfort, encourage year-round use, and contribute to the visual and cultural identity of the river corridor as a welcoming public space.

The goal is to design adaptable approaches that can be applied across recurring site conditions along the Lower Los Angeles River and potentially inform similar investments across Los Angeles County's emerging network of Urban Natureways. In this way, the competition will use the urgency and visibility of the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games as a catalyst for lasting improvements that benefit Angelenos well beyond 2028.

1. Walker A. (2026). Hot or Not? World Cup edition, Torched, Retrieved August 4, 2026, from https://www.torched.la/hot-or-not-world-cup-shade-edition/?ref=torched-newsletter

1.1 COUNTY CONTEXT: URBAN NATUREWAYS

Los Angeles County's Urban Natureways initiative is a countywide framework for creating connected greenways that expand access to nature, recreation, and active transportation. In many communities with high park needs, limited land is available to create new traditional parks. Urban Natureways responds to this challenge by leveraging existing public infrastructure—including river corridors, flood control channels, utility corridors, and other linear spaces—to create new kinds of connected public landscapes.

Building on the County's work to address disparities in park access and equity, Urban Natureways focuses on opportunities to bring nature and recreation closer to communities that need them most while connecting neighborhoods through active transportation. The initiative currently focuses on four priority corridors: Pacoima Wash, the Emerald Necklace, Compton Creek, and the Lower Los Angeles River. County and community partners are already advancing planning, design, and construction projects across these corridors.

Shade is an important part of making these corridors comfortable and usable in a hotter Los Angeles. Urban Natureways projects seek to maximize tree planting and natural shade wherever feasible. However, river and flood control corridors also present physical and operational constraints that can limit where trees can be planted. Built shade can complement tree canopy in these locations, helping provide heat relief while supporting walking, biking, recreation, and other uses of the corridor.

The Lower Los Angeles River is one of the initiative's priority corridors and presents an important opportunity to explore this challenge. Flood control infrastructure, maintenance access requirements, utilities, levees, and limited planting opportunities create conditions where conventional tree canopy may not provide shade everywhere it is needed. At the same time, the corridor has significant potential to connect communities and support active mobility.

2. DESIGN BRIEF

In partnership with the County of Los Angeles (L.A.), including the Chief Sustainability Office, L.A. County Parks, and L.A. County Public Works, this competition responds to a growing need to expand shade coverage along the County's emerging network of Urban Natureways. The 2026/27 Shade Zones Design Competition will use recurring conditions along the Lower L.A. River as a testbed for innovative shade infrastructure. Rather than treating the competition locations as isolated sites, participants should consider how their designs respond to spatial typologies that occur throughout the river corridor and how the underlying approach could be adapted to similar site conditions elsewhere along the Lower L.A. River and, potentially, across other Urban Natureways in Los Angeles County.

2. DESIGN BRIEF (CONTINUED)

As extreme heat increasingly impacts daily life, the County is seeking scalable, permanent shade strategies that can be deployed in these challenging environments to improve thermal comfort and reduce exposure during peak heat conditions, particularly in the mid-afternoon. This includes approaches that can integrate with or attach to existing infrastructure, as well as solutions that incorporate both built and natural solutions.

Natural and built shade have been used for centuries around the world to protect humanity from the elements. Civilizations found shelter under tree canopies and caves, and as knowledge and technology advanced, built shade began to be used in forms such as fans, parasols, pergolas, colonnades, overhangs, and later in awnings and sails. Today, urban communities urgently need more shade to protect them from the sun. The challenge remains how to provide refuge in urban areas where space is at a premium.

> **refugium**[2] : from re- “back”, fugere “to escape”, and -ium “a place for”
> 1: an isolated area forming a natural refuge for plants and animals
> 2: a managed, artificial, or legally protected habitat of this type

Refugium was used in the early 20th century in botany to describe locations that were unaffected by changes in climate. The term is relevant to our urban city centers and the goal to protect our communities from extreme heat, while also creating infrastructure to strengthen climate resilience.

Design of adequate shade requires an interdisciplinary approach that includes understanding the surrounding context and how that will impact the amount of sunlight a site will experience. Starting broadly, information on existing shade, land use, pedestrian activity, and community vulnerability to heat can help identify locations where shade would provide the greatest benefit. Climate and solar analysis, using location-specific weather data and sun-path information, supports a detailed analysis of the shade provided by the design. Structural design and analysis ensures that the shade structure will be able to carry the expected loads and transfer these forces to the supports. Understanding of the construction and maintenance process will ensure that the design is feasible and the materials selected will perform under as expected and can be maintained over the life span.

ShadeLA is expanding the use of nature-based and constructed shade solutions to build resilience within our communities. Shade Zones 2026/27 expands on this program and invites creative, innovative permanent natural and built shade solutions that protect residents, workers, and visitors from extreme heat. Proposals should balance design excellence with constructability, durability, serviceability, and the potential for adaptation across multiple sites and corridor types throughout L.A. County.

2. Oxford University Press. (n.d.). Oxford English Dictionary. Retrieved June 15, 2026, from https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3786078485

2.1 DESIGN OBJECTIVES

The focus of the 2026/27 Shade Zones Design Competition is permanent shade in L.A. County's Urban Natureways. These locations are sites that do not allow for a typical shelter to be implemented, therefore an innovative design solution is required.

This year there will be two site contexts for participants to design for, which will translate to two distinct competition "tracks":

- L.A. River Multi-Use Trail Convergence Zone
- L.A. River Bikeway Access Point

Participants will be encouraged to incorporate both vegetation and built shade (e.g., sails, canopy, cantilever, etc.) and to explore designs that combine the two (e.g., vines that are rooted in a planter and climb a pergola to increase the pergola's shade coverage) for their design submission. The overall goal is to provide shade using the minimal amount of ground footprint and anchorage. Teams should reference the design guidelines for the L.A. River Master Plan Tier 1 Shade Structure (see resources in Section 9.1).

Designs will be assessed according to their ability to achieve the following objectives:

Quality Shade: Design permanent shade that can protect people, with a focus on pedestrians and bicyclists, from extreme heat by ensuring that designs produce quality shade during the most vulnerable times of the summer day (e.g., peak heat hours: 12pm-4pm[3]). This is assessed by no direct exposure to sunlight, or the lack of shadow in the area (3pm[4]). You may assume that the minimum amount of shade that must be provided is 20 square feet per person.

Structural Design and Constructability: The design should be self supporting and not require significant changes to the site or foundations. Construction materials that are readily available should be specified. The structure should be easily constructed with no large or specialized equipment required.

Durability: The design, both built and natural, should also require minimal or no maintenance, including cleaning, energy, and water requirements. This includes the construction materials and plants that are selected for the design proposal.

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3. California State Parks (nd). Protect Yourself and Your Family Year Round. Retrieved May 26, 2025 from https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=24287.
4. California State Department of Industrial Relations (nd). T8CCR 3395b: Shade and Other Cooling Measures. Retrieved May 26, 2025 from https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/etools/08-006/EWP_shade.htm

2.1 DESIGN OBJECTIVES (CONTINUED)

Lighting: An exterior lighting design must be included that guides users to the shade structure and provides light on faces for safety and security purposes, as well as on any signage and wayfinding. The lighting scheme must be solar photovoltaic (PV), or other lighting source that is not reliant on the grid for power. The design should aim to reduce artificial light pollution and reference the L.A. Biodiversity Design Guidelines Built Elements for more details (see resources in Section 9.1).

Landscape: The landscape design and plant selection must align with guidelines in the L.A. River Master Plan (see resources in Section 9.1).

Accessibility: Proposals should comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and reflect accessibility standards and universal design principles.

Sustainability: Materials should be readily available and selected mindfully, with consideration of the lifespan, environmental impacts, and durability.

Aesthetics: A flexible look and feel that can be updated to reflect the diversity of the communities across Los Angeles County, and could be adapted to accommodate branding, sponsorship, and/or wayfinding information.

Security and Resilience: Designs should consider the realities of publicly accessible outdoor environments, including exposure to weather, heavy use, vandalism, and theft. Proposed structures should incorporate durable materials, secure connections, and design strategies that minimize opportunities for damage while maintaining a welcoming and accessible environment for all users.

Replicability: Designs should be adaptable for implementation in a variety of linear public spaces, including river corridors, greenways, trails, and other Urban Natureways, recognizing that successful solutions may be deployed across multiple sites throughout Los Angeles County.

3. DESIGN REQUIREMENTS

The design should be detailed, with a shade analysis, structural design, assessment of the construction process and cost. Particular attention should be placed on the visual and contextual impact of the design as well as structural detailing, paying particular attention to the scalability of the design to multiple sites around the region. All structures should be accessible to people with disabilities, and accessibility should be centered in design decisions. Students should utilize *Universal Design Principles* and ADA Accessibility Standards to ensure that all infrastructure is accessible to people with a wide range of abilities and needs, including those with auditory, visual, intellectual, developmental, and mobility-related disabilities.

Design teams should also demonstrate an understanding of the site's environmental and operational context, including how the proposed solution complements existing or future landscape improvements and responds to locations where conventional tree planting may be constrained. Teams should reference the L.A. River Plant Palette (see resources in Section 9.1).

3.1 DESIGN

Shade analysis must be presented in the design submission, using computer or physical modeling. Resources will be made available on the Shade Zones Design Competition website[6] to support students to guide students on the analysis. The shade structure must be designed to support normal design loads (e.g., dead loads, live loads, wind and seismic loads). To maximize air-flow and pedestrian circulation, the shade structure must be open-sided. The shade structure design must also be modular and scalable to fit the various site constraints noted below in Section 3.3.

3.2 FOUNDATIONS AND SUPPORTS

The design proposal must clearly state how the shade structure will be self-supported. Structures must be designed to minimize drilling or digging at the site.

6. ShadeLA (n.d.) Shade Zones Design Competition. Retrieved June 15, 2026, from https://shade-la.com/design-competition/

3.3 DESIGN SCENARIOS

The Lower L.A. River presents a unique opportunity to demonstrate innovative shade solutions within a highly engineered public landscape. While L.A. County continues to expand urban tree canopy wherever feasible, portions of the river corridor include flood control infrastructure, maintenance access requirements, utilities, and limited planting opportunities that can constrain the establishment of mature tree canopy. These conditions should be viewed as part of the design challenge, encouraging solutions that complement future landscape improvements and have the potential to be replicated in similar Urban Natureways throughout the County. Designs must be adaptable for use across multiple sites throughout Los Angeles County.

Shade will need to be implemented in a number of different spatial configurations. This includes multi-use trails and bike pathways—site typologies that are common along the L.A. River. Teams will select at least one track to submit to and will be allowed to submit two separate tracks, one for each of the two use cases below. **If a team chooses to submit two designs, each design must correspond to one track. Two design proposals to the same track will not be accepted.** High resolution images of the various design scenarios will be provided on the competition website for use in submission entries. The site categories and related dimensions are provided below.

3.3.1 TRACK 1: L.A. RIVER MULTI-USE TRAIL CONVERGENCE ZONE



Source: L.A. County Department of Parks & Recreation[7]

According to the LA River Master Plan[8], existing trails along the L.A. River currently provide access to 32 out of 51 river miles. The trails are typically natural surface paths adjacent to the bikeway or with a grade separation. They are designed to accommodate multiple users, including pedestrians and equestrians. They may or may not have natural or built shade.

- Here is an example of an L.A. River Shade Design Pavilion: Link
- Convergence of access point, bikeway and multi-use trail: L.A. River Multi-Use Trail and Bikeway Convergence Zone
- Example of a project: Parque Dos Rios - Watershed Conservation Authority

7. L.A. County Department of Parks and Recreation (n.d.) Los Angeles River Trail, https://trails.lacounty.gov/Trail/178/los-angeles-river-trail

8. L.A. River Master Plan (n.d.) L.A. River Master Plan: Existing Conditions Summary - Existing Access, https://larivermasterplan.org/about/existing-conditions-summary/existing-access/

3.3.1 TRACK 1: L.A. RIVER MULTI-USE TRAIL CONVERGENCE ZONE (CONTINUED)



Figure 2. Screenshot of Track 1 Location via Google Maps.

The multi-use trail allows for pedestrian, cycling, and equestrian use. The convergence zone must be designed to consider all three user groups. The site is shown in Figure 2 and a street view is available here, which shows the convergence of the three trails. The surrounding context of the site includes the multi-use trails, an access road, a retail parking lot, and the L.A. River.

The programmatic scope is unlimited, however you must explain the rationale behind your proposal based on your understanding of the environmental, social/cultural, and economic needs for this part of the Urban Natureway. Services beyond shade that must be provided include: seating, water fountains, waste disposal bins, and emergency call boxes. Additional services that may be included are: wayfinding, restrooms, retail (e.g., cafe or other refreshments), and more.

The site is approximately 2100 square feet, outlined in red in Figure 2, which includes an 800 square foot area for development of built shade and other amenities, as well as a 1300 square foot area of sloped incline that designers can incorporate for vegetation or planting. The sloped area cannot support foundations or structural support for the other components of the design. The full area does not need to be shaded—but you may assume that the minimum amount of shade that must be provided is 20 square feet per person. The width of the access road must be maintained and unobstructed to allow for continued use. For equestrian trail users, the minimum clearance height is 12 feet, with a minimum trail width of 10 feet.[9]

9. City of Los Angeles (n.d.) Standard Plan S-465: Equestrian Trail Design Standard, https://recreation.parks.lacity.gov/sites/default/files/equine/pdf/2026/EQT%20Standard%20Plan.pdf

3.3.2 TRACK 2: L.A. RIVER BIKEWAY ACCESS POINT



Source: LA County Public Works, 2018 [8]

According to the L.A. River Master Plan[8], the longest continuous paths are between Imperial Highway (12 miles) and from the intersection of the mouth of the L.A. River at Long Beach along the Glendale Narrows (7 miles).

Students should model their design according to the site located at the Alondra Blvd Access Point (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Screenshot of Track 2 Location via Google Maps.

The L.A. River Bikeway Access Point at Alondra Boulevard must be designed to include pedestrian, cycling, and equestrian users. The site is shown in Figure 3 and a street view is available here, which shows the entrance to the access point. The surrounding context of the site includes a major roadway, Alondra Boulevard, the entrance to the access road, a small side street bordering a retail parking lot, and the L.A. River. The programmatic scope is unlimited, however you must explain the rationale behind your proposal based on your understanding of the environmental, social/cultural, and economic needs for this part of the Urban Natureway.

Services beyond shade that must be provided include: seating, water fountains, waste disposal bins, and emergency call boxes. Additional services that may be included are: wayfinding, restrooms, retail (e.g., cafe or other refreshments), and more.

3.3.2 TRACK 2: L.A. RIVER BIKEWAY ACCESS POINT (CONTINUED)

The site is approximately 2150 square feet, outlined in red in Figure 3. The 550 square foot area on the western side of the site is blocked from access by a 5 foot tall fence—the 550 square foot area is therefore only available for vegetation, planting, and structural supports, but not for other amenities or access. The remaining 1600 feet of the site is available for access and site development. The full area does not need to be shaded—but you may assume that the minimum amount of shade that must be provided is 20 square feet per person. The entrance and width of the access road must be maintained and unobstructed to allow for continued use. Consider vehicle height clearance of 14 feet. For equestrian trail users, the minimum clearance height is 12 feet, with a minimum trail width of 10 feet.[9]

4. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

4.1 ELIGIBILITY

The competition is open to undergraduate and graduate students from any school, college, or university within Los Angeles County. To enter the competition, students will need to form a team (maximum of 4 student members per team, solo participants also eligible) and identify an institutional mentor or supervisor (e.g., faculty, lecturer, supervisor, school administrator, etc.). All team members must be from the same institution. Teams can also participate through their courses (e.g., design studios, course, engineering, student club, etc.), if available at their institution. Teams must register by the registration deadline in October 2026. Teams may only submit a maximum of two design proposals, one for each track. Teams may also choose to submit only one design proposal to a selected track. Submission of two or more proposals to one track from the same team will not be accepted. Multiple submissions per institution are allowed.

4.2 REGISTRATION

Registration will be available on the ShadeLA competition website (https://shade-la.com/design-competition/) beginning in September 2026 and will close in October 2026.

4.3 SUBMISSION

Teams will produce a design proposal indicating which track was selected, an explanation of the design's shade strategy, material and construction, and a description. The designs must comply with the design objectives and design requirements listed in the brief. Teams can submit one design proposal to each track. Each design entry will be submitted digitally as a single, portrait poster, 36 inch x 48 inch poster, in .PDF format (max 10 MB), with 300 dpi resolution. The file name will be: "**26-27 SZ [Your Team Name and Track].PDF**".

The poster must include:

- Image of the design, including superimposed on a selected site (minimum of 2 images). See site images for superimposition on the competition website.
- Design, shade analysis, landscape plan, lighting design, material selection, structural design, and construction sequence.
- Diagrams, sketches, design development.

The submission must also include:

- A single "hero" image (5 in x 5 in) in .JPG format
- An individual and/or team photo in .JPG format
- A short 90 second introductory video in .MP4 format (instructions to follow)
- All team members must complete a post-submission feedback form for the entry to be considered.
- Submission and AI Attestation

Each entry will require a submission and AI attestation, acknowledging the entry is the original work of the team and providing a description of any AI generated images. The AI generated images must be watermarked and captioned "Rendering was generated by AI Program [insert AI software/browser name]," indicating what program was used. The team must provide a summary describing the prompt used to generate the image to reflect their creative input.

No names or other personal or school identifiers should be included on the submission, as the submissions will be judged anonymously. An identification number will be created for each submission to maintain anonymity. Acceptable file formats and file sizes are indicated above and will be provided on the competition website.

5. JUDGING CRITERIA

The entries will be judged based on the following criteria, in no particular order, and from the requirements set out in the brief:

- **Quality Shade:** Meets the shade requirements of 20 ft^2 per person at 3pm at selected site and demonstrates effective shade during peak summer heat hours. Shade analysis should demonstrate the quality, location, and usability of the shaded area while maintaining airflow and circulation.

- **Structural Design and Constructability:** Resists typical design loads, with structural and anchorage design appropriate for the site, and an achievable construction sequence. The structure should be self-supporting and minimize ground footprint, drilling, digging, foundations, and other modifications to the site.

- **Durability:** The design, both built and natural, should also require minimal or no maintenance, including cleaning, energy, and water requirements. Materials, components, and connections should be made from readily available materials and appropriate for long-term exposure to weather, heavy public use, vandalism, and other conditions associated with publicly accessible outdoor environments.

- **Accessibility:** Complies with ADA accessibility requirements and reflects Universal Design principles. The design should provide safe, intuitive, and inclusive access and circulation for people with a wide range of abilities and needs and accommodate the user groups associated with the selected site.

- **Architectural Design:** Overall design composition and alignment with the selected entry track(s). The design should provide a flexible look and feel that can respond to the diversity of communities across Los Angeles County and accommodate wayfinding, branding, and/or sponsorship information.

- **Modularity:** The proposal must reflect good principles of design to allow for adaptability and implementation at any site in Los Angeles County.

- **Sustainability and Landscape:** Demonstrates thoughtful material selection with consideration of lifespan, environmental impacts, and resource use. Where landscape or natural shade is incorporated, plant selection and landscape design should respond to the environmental context and align with applicable L.A. River guidelines.

5. JUDGING CRITERIA (CONTINUED)

- **Lighting, Safety, and Security:** Incorporates exterior lighting that supports safe navigation, visibility of faces, signage, and wayfinding without reliance on grid power, while minimizing artificial light pollution. The design should promote safety and security and minimize opportunities for vandalism, theft, and damage.

- **Site Responsiveness:** Demonstrates an understanding of the environmental, operational, social/cultural, and physical context of the selected site. The proposal should respond appropriately to existing infrastructure, circulation and maintenance requirements, landscape conditions, and constraints on conventional tree planting.

- **Innovation:** Demonstrates an innovative and integrated approach to providing permanent shade in locations where conventional shelters or mature tree canopy may be difficult to implement. The solution should thoughtfully integrate built and/or natural shade with the broader functional and experiential needs of the Urban Natureways.

These criteria mean that the design rationale, shade strategy, structural design, exploration of materials, and strategies for construction, should be clear in each entry.

6. AWARDS

Winners will be selected for each scenario based on the evaluation criteria above.
The competition offers financial awards for participating teams.

- Award of Excellence (1st Place, 2nd Place, 3rd Place)
- Award of Innovation
- Award of Sustainability
- Fan Favorite - Voted on by the Public (1st Place, 2nd Place, 3rd Place)
- Honorable Mention Award for L.A. River Multi-Use Trail Convergence Zone
- Honorable Mention Award for L.A. River Bikeway Access Point

The jury may also choose to award additional commendations. Winning submissions will be included in related media.

7. TIMELINE

August 2026	**Brief Released**
September 2026	**Registration Opens**
September 2026	**Informational Webinar**
October 2026	**Registration Closes**
January 8, 2027	**Submissions due by 11:59 PM PST**
January, 2027	**Jury Review**
February, 2027	**Fan Favorite Voting Period**
February, 2027	**Design Competition Winners Announced**

8. QUESTIONS

A webinar will be held in September 2026. All competition related questions should be emailed to: shadezones@usc.edu. A frequently asked question (FAQ) section, that will be updated throughout the competition, is available on the competition website: https://shade-la.com/design-competition/#frequently-asked-questions. To remain abreast of developments related to the Shade Zones design competition, sign up for updates on the website.

9. RESOURCES

To support students in developing thoughtful, technically sound, and site-appropriate designs, the ShadeLA Design Competition website will provide a curated set of resources. These materials will help guide participants through design, sustainability, community context, and deployment planning. These resources will be posted to shade-la.com/design-resources/.

9. RESOURCES (CONTINUED)

9.1 L.A. RIVER GUIDELINES & BEST PRACTICES

There are various guides available that describe best practices, including the following:

- **Los Angeles (L.A.) River Master Plan:** https://larivermasterplan.org/
  - PDF version available here
  - L.A. River Master Plan Appendix Design Guidelines PDF
  - L.A. River Master Plan Appendix Technical Document PDF
- L.A. River Plant Palette: https://www.sepulvedabasinwildlife.org/pdf/LA%20River%20Plant%20Palette%20and%20Landscaping%20Guidelines.pdf
- L.A. River Tier 1 Shade Pavilion: https://larivermasterplan.org/design/project-examples/site-based-project-examples/tier-i-shade-pavilion/
- L.A. Biodiversity Design Guidelines: https://sanitation.lacity.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/y250/mdky/~edisp/cnt092349.pdf
- Example of a spillover slope: Google Maps

9.2 VIDEOS AND BACKGROUND BRIEFINGS

Short recorded briefings will be available on the competition site to introduce:

- Key design considerations (modularity, accessibility, anchoring, and airflow)
- Interviews with L.A. County Public Works about shade deployment challenges and opportunities
- Orientation to the ShadeLA campaign and the broader legacy vision for community impact

9.3 TECHNICAL GUIDANCE AND EXTERNAL REFERENCES

To support environmentally responsible, buildable designs, this is a selection of recommended external resources. More resources will be provided via the competition website.

- Circular Design & Material Reuse
  - Ellen MacArthur Foundation – Circular Economy Design Principles
- Low-Carbon Construction & Embodied Carbon
  - Rocky Mountain Institute – Embodied Carbon 101
  - Carbon Leadership Forum – Embodied Carbon 101