



# PCI BIG BEAM COMPETITION

## Official Rules for the PCI Engineering Design Competition Academic Year 2026-2027

### PROGRAM

The PCI Student Education Committee is inviting entries from students to participate in the Engineering Student Design (Big Beam) Competition for the 2026–2027 academic year. Each student team must work with a PCI producer member to build a precast and prestressed concrete beam. The beams will be tested and prizes awarded for best performance in the stated areas. **Students must discuss both the structural design and the concrete mixture proportions for the beam.**

### CONTEST PERIOD

The contest begins August 10, 2026 and ends June 20, 2027. All beams must be fabricated and tested within this time frame. Completed entries must be **submitted digitally to PCI by June 20, 2027**. The winning team will be recognized at the 2028 PCI Convention.

### APPLICATIONS

All teams are required to submit an online application by June 6, 2027. Please visit [pci.org/bigbeam](https://pci.org/bigbeam) to complete the application. Applications must identify all members of the student team and supply permanent email and mailing addresses for each team member. **Applications must be submitted by June 6, 2027, no later than two weeks prior to the deadline.**

### ELIGIBILITY

Any student enrolled in an associate, baccalaureate, or graduate degree program in any of the following areas is eligible:

- Civil engineering (including all subdisciplines) or civil engineering technology
- Construction engineering or construction technology, construction management
- Architecture, architectural engineering, or architectural technology
- Building sciences or building technology

Students enrolled any time during the contest period are eligible.

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# PCI BIG BEAM COMPETITION 2026-2027

## STUDENT TEAMS

A student team of three or four members is optimal, but teams of any size may participate. Only one entry per team is permitted. Schools may have multiple teams. Graduate and undergraduate students and/or students from different degree programs within a university/college may be on the same team. Joint teams between one or more schools are permitted.

## FACULTY ADVISOR

Each team must have a faculty advisor. A single advisor may work with multiple teams. The advisor provides advice and assistance to the student teams. Advisors are expected to provide for supervision of the beam test. Advisors are responsible for ensuring that students wear proper safety equipment. Advisors are also responsible for the safe operation of the test.

## PRODUCER MEMBER PARTICIPATION

Each team must work with a PCI producer member. A producer member may work with more than one team and may work with teams from different schools. There is no limit to the number of teams that a given producer member may support. Producers who are members of PCI chapters, partners, affiliates, or allied organizations are eligible to participate.

A producer member is expected to provide advice and expertise to aid the student teams, all materials, beam fabrication, beam transportation to the testing facility (or provide for testing at the plant), and disposal. The actual design must be done by the students, but the faculty advisor and the producer member are encouraged to assist in this phase. Students are expected to participate in the fabrication of the beam to the extent deemed safe and practical by the producer member. If a team cannot find a producer member who will work with them or if there is no producer member within a reasonable driving distance, a team may obtain a waiver of this requirement from the chair of the Student Education Committee or the PCI staff liaison to the Student Education Committee.

**GENERAL RULES** All entries must be submitted digitally and must include a PDF version of the team's report. Entries submitted with an insufficient report may be disqualified by the judges.

Each entry must contain all of the following elements in the order listed.

1. A cover page with the names of the school, the team members, the sponsoring PCI producer member, the faculty advisor, and the PCI regional director, as applicable. If a school submits more than one entry, the teams shall be numbered.
2. A **completed summary/judging** form and the total load/midspan deflection graph.
3. Certification that the calculations were performed before testing the beam. The calculations may be certified by the PCI producer member, PCI regional director, or a neutral third party.
4. Drawings of the cross section(s) and elevation of the beam, showing the reinforcement and cost calculation.
5. A one- to two-page narrative about the concrete mixture used, including proportions, measured unit weight, slump or spread, air content, and expected 28-day compressive and tensile strengths. A discussion of the reasoning for choosing the mixture, any modifications to the mixture, and a discussion of how the chosen mixture performed with respect to the team's design requirements is required. Students are not required to design a new concrete mixture, but may use a mixture from the PCI producer member.
6. A one- to two-page discussion of the structural design, plus an appendix documenting the design calculations along with predictions of the cracking load, maximum applied load, and a prediction of the midspan deflection (due to applied load only) at the load cited in the rules which is 1.25 times the unfactored LL load.
7. A narrative (eight pages or less, including any pictures) describing the beam fabrication and testing. This narrative must include the load/midspan deflection graph showing peak load and cracking load (from the bend-over point).
8. A statement by the team members explaining what they learned from the contest.
9. A video file of the test showing at least the highlights of the test and the failure for verification purposes. The video must include a visible scale showing the beam deflection.
10. Digital photos of the team.
11. Graphic file(s) of the college/university logo(s).
12. A permanent mailing address for each team member.

# PCI BIG BEAM COMPETITION 2026-2027

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student Team (school name) \_\_\_\_\_

Team Number \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Casting \_\_\_\_\_

## Basic Information

1. Age of beam at testing (days) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Compressive cylinder tests\*

Number tested \_\_\_\_\_

Size of cylinders \_\_\_\_\_

Average (psi) \_\_\_\_\_

3. Concrete properties \_\_\_\_\_

Unit weight of concrete (lb/ft<sup>3</sup>) \_\_\_\_\_

Slump or spread (in.) \_\_\_\_\_

Air content (%) \_\_\_\_\_

Tensile strength (psi) \_\_\_\_\_

Circle one: Split cylinder MOR beam

4. Pretest calculations

a. Applied load (total) to cause cracking (kip) \_\_\_\_\_

b. Applied load (total) at ultimate strength (kip) \_\_\_\_\_

c. Anticipated midspan deflection due to total live load application of 27.5 kips \_\_\_\_\_

**Pretest calculations MUST be completed before testing.**

\* International entries may substitute the appropriate compressive strength test for their country.

## Judging Criteria

Teams **MUST** fill in these values.

1. Center to center span (ft) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Actual maximum applied load (kip) \_\_\_\_\_

3. Measured cracking load (kip)<sup>†</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

4. Cost (dollars) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Weight (lb) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Measured deflection at an applied load of 27.5 kips (in.). \_\_\_\_\_

7. Most accurate calculations:

a. Absolute value of (maximum applied load – calculated applied load)/calculated applied load \_\_\_\_\_

b. Absolute value of (Measured midspan deflection at 27.5 kips - calculated deflection) / (calculated deflection) \_\_\_\_\_

c. Absolute value of (measured cracking load – calculated cracking load)/calculated cracking load \_\_\_\_\_

**Total of three absolute values (a + b + c) = \_\_\_\_\_**

<sup>†</sup> Measured cracking load is found from the “bend-over” point in the load/deflection curve. Provide load/deflection curve in report.

**Test summary forms must be included with the final digital report, due June 20, 2027.**

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# PCI BIG BEAM COMPETITION 2026-2027

## DEFINITIONS, SPECIFICATIONS, AND INTERPRETATIONS FOR THE BIG BEAM CONTEST

For the standards listed below, contestants may use either the inch-pound version or the equivalent metric version. Equivalent AASHTO specifications may be used. International entries use the equivalent national specification.

### Aggregates

Shall meet ASTM C33 or ASTM C330 (Lightweight Aggregates).

### Chemical Admixtures

Shall meet ASTM specifications D98, C494, C260, or C1017.

### Compressive Strength of Concrete

Shall be determined according to ASTM C39.

### Concrete

Concrete is a mixture of portland cement, water, and aggregate. Mineral and chemical admixtures may be included. The material must have both coarse and fine aggregate. Fiber-reinforced concrete is permitted as is ultra high performance concrete (UHPC).

### Concrete Beam

A concrete beam resists load through flexure and the primary load-resisting system is made of concrete and reinforcing steel. Composite systems, trusses, and arches do not qualify under this definition.

### Enclosed Reinforcement

The reinforcement must be completely enclosed within the concrete-with adequate cover as stated by ACI/PCI 319-25.

### Mineral Admixtures

Shall meet indicated ASTM specifications and be silica fume (C1240), class C or F fly ash (C618), class N metakaolin (C618), or Grade 100 or 120 ground granulated blast-furnace slag (C989).

### Portland Cement

Conforms to ASTM C150.

### Proprietary Materials

Proprietary materials are materials whose list of contents is not available publicly. These are generally banned as the judges cannot verify compliance with the rules. This includes experimental materials not generally available to the public. The exception is that proprietary UHPC mixes may be used but the brand must be specified.

### Reinforcing Steel

All reinforcing steel must meet one of the following ASTM specifications: A615, A616, A617, A706, A775, A934, A185, A497, A184, A884, A416, A886, A910, A722, or A1035. Structural steel plates or shapes are not allowed as primary or confining reinforcement. Fiber-reinforced plastics are not allowed.

### Steel Plates

Steel plates are permitted as bearing plates or as anchorage plates for mild reinforcement or prestressing steel.

### Tensile Strength of Concrete

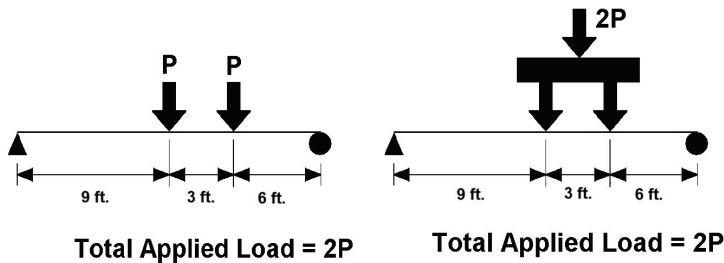
Determined using either ASTM C78 or C496.



# PCI BIG BEAM COMPETITION 2026-2027

## THE BIG BEAM

1. The beam must be tested as a simply supported 18 ft. span, center of bearing to center of bearing. It may have any cross-sectional shape but the top surface must be flat and horizontal along the entire span.
2. The beam shall be designed for dead load plus TWO applied (unfactored) live loads (LL) of 11 kips each. When factored, the factored load at each load point is approximately 17.5 kips. The beam must not crack under the service live load of 11 kips at each point (22 kips total) and must hold at least the factored load of 17.5 kips at each point (35 kips total) without failure.
3. The beam shall be loaded by applying two equal point load, placed as shown. The loads are 3 feet apart, with one load applied 6 feet from one support. The loading mechanism must apply the loads equally at both points. Use of a single jack and a spreader beam to create two loads is permitted.



4. Bearing pads and/or bearing plates, not exceeding 6-in. in length (along the span), may be used at supports and/or under the load.
5. The load may be measured at each point or, if a spreader beam is used, the total load applied to the spreader beam may be measured. Report load as the TOTAL applied load (sum of two point loads). Midspan deflection must be measured.
6. The beam must resist load primarily through flexure. Trusses, arches, and other nonflexural members are prohibited.
7. The beam must be made primarily of concrete: cement, coarse aggregates, fine aggregates, and water. Pozzolans, fibers, lightweight aggregates, and admixtures are permitted. UHPC is permitted.
8. Longitudinal tension reinforcing shall be pretensioned and/or post-tensioned. Nonprestressed or prestressed top steel is allowed. Embedded or partially embedded steel sections are not allowed. Bar or mesh may be used for shear reinforcement. Reinforcement must be completely embedded in the beam and meet applicable spacing and cover requirements.
9. All materials must be commercially available. No experimental materials are allowed. Proprietary UHPC is allowed if the brand is identified. Steel plates may only be used as bearing plates and/or as anchor- age plates for post-tensioning steel. Steel plate may not be used as any type of reinforcement or for confinement.
10. All entries from US schools must meet the provisions of the ACI/PCI 319-25, *PCI Design Handbook*, 9th Ed. for a precast/prestressed concrete beam, interior exposure. International entries must meet the equivalent specifications for their respective country and must state which specification was used.
11. Entries which, in the opinion of the judges, are impractical, attempt to circumvent the rules, or are of very poor quality may be disqualified.
12. If an entry fails to meet some aspect of the rules, the judges may award "0" points in the categories where the violation occurred in lieu of disqualification.
13. All entries must include a PDF version of the final report with images, and other required digital files. Submissions must be made online using the upload link provided by PCI.

## JUDGING CRITERIA

The Big Beam Competition is a competition where entries are judged in relationship to the other entries, regardless of the country. All entries must contain sufficient information for the judges to verify the design and accompanying calculations for each category.

The judging categories shall be:

1. **Design accuracy.** The beam must carry at least a total factored live load of 35 kips and must not have a total peak applied load of more than 43 kips. The beam shall not crack under the total applied service load of 22 kips. Total applied load is defined as the sum of the two applied point loads. Beams meeting these criteria receive 20 points.
  - a. Beams which do NOT hold a total applied load of 35 kip shall be penalized 2 points for each kip, or part of a kip, below 35 kip.
  - b. Beams which hold a total applied load of more than 43 kip shall be penalized 1 point for each kip, or part of a kip, above 43 kip.
  - c. Beams which crack before a total applied load of 22 kip receive a 5 point penalty.
  - d. The load/midspan deflection graph must show a peak load either by post-peak softening or by collapse of the beam. Stopping the test to avoid the overstrength penalty will result in a score of 0 for this category.
2. Lowest cost (calculation must be provided).
3. Lowest weight.
4. Largest measured deflection at mid span at maximum total applied load.
5. **Most accurate prediction** of the maximum **total applied load, total applied cracking load**, and midspan deflection at **total applied load of 27.5 kips**. Total applied load is the sum of the two applied point loads.
6. **Report quality.** Reports MUST contain a discussion of the concrete mix design and the beam structural design.
7. Practicality, innovation, and conformance with code.

For judging categories 2–4, the values of the best and worst performance in each category will be identified. Points, rounded down, are awarded based on the following equation:

$$\text{Points} = 10 \times (\text{value in entry} - \text{worst value}) / (\text{best value} - \text{worst value})$$

Example: A submission with a beam weight of 108 lb would receive 9 points if the lightest beam submitted weighs 100 lb and the heaviest beam submitted weighs 200 lb ( $= \text{INT}(10 \times (108 - 200) / (100 - 200))$ ). Judges may eliminate clear outliers for maximum value.

In category 5 (most accurate calculations), entries receive points based on the following scale:

<10% = 10 points; deduct 1 point for each 10% increment above 10% rounded UP to the nearest 10% (e.g., 25% is rounded to 30% and receives 8 points). Above 110% receives 0 points.

In category 6, the judges will award 0–5 points for the quality of the report. In category 7, the judges will award 0–5 points for practicality, innovation, compliance with the applicable code, and demonstration of good engineering judgment. For any category, no entry can receive less than 0 points.

Prizes shall be awarded based on total points. In the event of a tie in total score, the value of the load closest to, but exceeding, the target total factored load shall be used to break the tie. If the tie is not broken by this method, the prizes for the tied positions shall be combined and split equally.

# PCI BIG BEAM COMPETITION 2026-2027

## CERTIFICATION

As a representative of (name of PCI producer member or sponsoring organization)

Sponsoring (name of school and team number)

I certify that:

- The beam submitted by this team was fabricated and tested within the contest period.
- The calculations of predicted cracking load, maximum load, and deflection were done prior to testing of the beam.
- The students were chiefly responsible for the design.
- The students participated in the fabrication to the extent that was prudent and safe.
- The submitted test results are, to the best of my knowledge, correct, and the video submitted is of the actual test.

Certified by:

Signature

Name (please print)

Date

Predicted maximum load

Predicted cracking load

Predicted deflection load at 27.5 kips

**THIS CERTIFICATION MUST BE PART OF THE FINAL REPORT.**

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S U P P L Y

# PCI BIG BEAM COMPETITION 2026-2027

## MATERIAL COSTS AND BEAM WEIGHT

The following unit cost shall be used to determine the beam cost. Concrete cost is based on design strength, not actual strength.

| Material                                    | Cost                                                                    | Notes/Instructions                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Concrete Cost (yd <sup>3</sup> ):           | \$160/yd<br>\$160/yd + \$10 ( $f'_c$ - 6 ksi)                           | Round concrete strength down to nearest ksi<br>(when the design strength, $f'_c$ is greater than 6 ksi) |
| Ultra-High-Performance Concrete             | \$1000/yd                                                               |                                                                                                         |
| Prestressing Strand:                        |                                                                         | Use estimated lengths used in the beam, including<br>dead and live end waste of 5' at each end.         |
| $\frac{3}{8}$ in. diameter                  | \$0.27/ft                                                               |                                                                                                         |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter                  | \$0.30/ft                                                               |                                                                                                         |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ in. special                   | \$0.33/ft                                                               |                                                                                                         |
| 0.6 in. diameter                            | \$0.42/ft                                                               |                                                                                                         |
| 0.7 in. diameter                            | \$0.55/ft                                                               |                                                                                                         |
| Steel:                                      |                                                                         |                                                                                                         |
| A615/A706                                   | \$0.45/lb                                                               |                                                                                                         |
| Welded Wire (deformed or smooth; for shear) | \$0.60/lb                                                               |                                                                                                         |
| Epoxy Coated                                | \$0.50/lb                                                               |                                                                                                         |
| A1035                                       | \$0.70/lb                                                               |                                                                                                         |
| Plate Steel                                 | \$3.00/ft <sup>2</sup>                                                  |                                                                                                         |
| Forming                                     | \$1.25/ft <sup>2</sup> form fabrication, (include all contact surfaces) |                                                                                                         |

- There is no need to include cost of steel fabrication, concrete fabrication, curing, inserts, etc. Concrete cost is based on design strength.
- The beam weight shall be estimated by using the measured unit weight of the concrete or by actually weighing the beam. If the beam weight is estimated, it is estimated based on the gross concrete cross section only, ignoring reinforcement, bearing plates, etc. \* Special circumstances or special materials not addressed in these rules must be reviewed by the chair of the committee and/or PCI staff.

## KEITH KAUFMAN AWARD (BEST REPORT)

The judges shall select a "Best Report" winner for the report that best demonstrates student learning, application of sound engineering judgment, and excellence in presentation. The judges may elect not to award a prize if there are no suitable entries or to award multiple prizes if there is more than one worthy report.

## BEST VIDEO

Students are encouraged to submit a video (in addition to the test video required in item 9 of the General Rules) that details the design, fabrication, and testing of the beam, along with statements of what the students learned. A prize will be awarded for the most creative and entertaining video. The judges may elect not to award a prize if there are no suitable entries or to award multiple prizes if there is more than one worthy entry. The winning video may be presented at the 2028 PCI Convention.

Submitted videos must not exceed five (5) minutes. Creativity and entertainment are encouraged, but entries must clearly demonstrate the beam test, including a visible scale of deflection, key test highlights, and the failure for verification. Videos will be reviewed by the judging panel and may also be shared on social media to determine a "popular vote" winner based on public engagement.

## PRIZES

Sponsors make prizes possible. The winning team will receive free travel, accommodations, and registration for the 2028 PCI Convention. (Permanent mailing addresses are required with the application). Prizes will be awarded to the top 20 submissions. The value of the prize awarded is based on the entry's placement in the competition. Prizes may be offered for the best report and best video.

## DISCLAIMER:

This contest is sponsored by the Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute (PCI). The PCI Student Education Committee shall be the final judge of the contest and all decisions/interpretations made by that committee and/or the panel of judges shall be final. Entries received by PCI by June 20, 2027, will be accepted; entries received after this date but before the contest is judged may be accepted at the discretion of the judges and PCI.

All entries become property of PCI and will not be returned. PCI reserves the right to publish any entry, in whole or in part, without compensation. By entering, contestants agree to allow their photographs/videos to be used by PCI without compensation.

PCI reserves the right to disqualify an entry if any part of it does not meet these rules. PCI and/or the judges may revise submitted calculations or quantities to correct errors or inconsistencies. If there are not enough acceptable entries, not all prizes will be awarded. PCI reserves the right to award additional prizes.



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