



DataJam Community College Guidebook – 2025-2026

DataJam Guidebook

Welcome to The DataJam! We hope this will be a rewarding and enriching experience for you. This guidebook will help guide your journey through the process. The guidebook is laid out as follows:

	Page
Overview of The DataJam	2
DataJam Progression (Steps to take for your DataJam Project)	3-4
Proposal Guidelines	5
Proposal Template	6
Poster and Presentation Guidelines	7
Judging Rubric	8
Scoring Guidance	9-10

Overview of The DataJam

What is The DataJam?

The DataJam is a team-based data science learning experience and competition designed to guide Community College students through a complete project of their choosing. The DataJam provides ample resources to facilitate this journey including a trained mentor, a collection of data sources, and a library of guides for each step of The DataJam competition.

What do I need to start a team?

Teams are formed by a minimum of **two participants** (Community College level) and an **advisor** (teacher or parent). From there, all you need to do is fill out the [sign-up form](#) for the Community College level and we will pair you with a mentor to get started (See 2026 DataJam Progression for more information about the steps to take for a DataJam project – pages 4 & 5). Teams use Slack, a web based platform for teams to communicate with mentors and receive DataJam news. Teams then work with their mentor through three main steps, forming a proposal (page 6 & 7), performing analytics, and preparing a presentation for judging (page 9).

Who are the mentors?

Mentors are university students who volunteer to help DataJam Teams. They are required to attend a training class that prepares them to be a DataJam mentor. DataJam teams communicate with their mentor via (1) a Slack channel, and (2) scheduled video meetings at times that work for both parties. Mentors can help at each step of The DataJam competition, including creating a proposal, finding a dataset, data analysis, and preparation of presentations.

This year only – FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED!

The DataJam is growing faster than ever! Our long-term goal is to make The DataJam available to all interested students. Fundraising is ongoing so that we can provide adequate guidance to all teams participating in The DataJam. This year only DataJam Teams will be able to sign up on a **FIRST-COME FIRST-SERVED** basis. While we hope not to need to turn down any teams, we may not have the capacity to accommodate everyone who is interested in participating. Thank you for your understanding. **To ensure that your team will be able to compete in The DataJam 2026, please sign up to be a team as early as possible.**

2025-2026 DataJam Progression

The Community College DataJam is offered in both the **Fall 2025** and **Spring 2026** semesters.

There will be several important dates to keep track of, with the Sign-Up to be a team being the first step. If your team feels you can not meet a deadline, please contact us at datajam@thedatajam.org and we will try to accommodate your needs if possible. However, as time gets closer to The DataJam finale we have less flexibility to extend deadlines.

Sign-Up and submission of proposals, posters, presentations and 30 second videos for the Finale are all done by going to the DataJam website (datajam@thedatajam.org), and using the large **RED BUTTON** at the right top of the website that says **"SIGN-UP/SUBMISSIONS"**.

Step 1: Sign-up

Each team needs to fill out the [online sign-up form](#) on The DataJam website and student permission slips on page 7 & 8 to be sent to datajam@thedatajam.org.

The sign-up form will ask (1) advisor name and email, (2) team name, (3) student names and emails (4) availability to meet with a mentor. If you are signing up more than one team with the same advisor, please fill out one form for each team. DO NOT fill out all teams on one form.

Sign up for the College DataJam Slack workspace: an online workspace for all DataJam teams where they can easily communicate with each other and with DataJam mentors.

Fall – August/September 2025

Spring – January 2026

Step 2: Submit your proposal

The deadline for teams to turn in DataJam proposals. Use the proposal template on page 6 of this guidebook and submit it to the Community College [online proposal form](#) on The DataJam's website. Your team will receive feedback from The DataJam and further guidance on your proposed project within a week after your proposal is turned in.

Fall – Friday, Oct. 3, 2025

Spring – Friday, Feb. 6, 2026

Step 3: Projects Underway

Teams work on DataJam projects. DataJam mentors are available to meet with your team by Zoom or a videoconferencing service that works best for your team. The times submitted in [the sign-up form](#) will be used to match you with a mentor. Once you have a team mentor you can communicate with them regularly on The DataJam 2026 Slack workspace.

Fall – Sept. thru mid-Nov.

Spring – Feb. thru early Apr.

Step 4: Submit your Poster

DataJam posters are due. Follow the instructions on page 7 of this guidebook. Posters should be 24" x 36" in size and saved as a pdf file. They should be submitted to the Community College [posters form](#) on The DataJam website.

Fall – Friday, Nov. 28, 2025

Spring – Friday, Apr. 3, 2026

Step 5: Submit your Presentations and Attend a Judging Session

Final slide presentations will be scheduled for each team at a time that works for both the team and the 3-judge panel, who will be listening to each team. The DataJam will send a form to schedule your final presentation time. The final presentations will be held on Zoom. Teams are to submit their presentation slides to the [presentation form](#) on The DataJam's website at least 24 hours before their presentation is scheduled.

Fall – 12/8/25 – 12/10/25

Spring – 4/27/26 – 4/29/26

Step 6: Finale

Community College DataJam Finale will be held from 5:30-7:00 PM, EST (3:30-5:00 PM PST) on Zoom. DataJam teams, instructors, mentors, and all who are interested are invited to attend. DataJam team projects will be presented, and a variety of awards will be given!
Zoom link: <https://pitt.zoom.us/j/94389494426>.

Fall – Thursday, Dec. 11, 2024

Spring – Thursday, Apr 30, 2025

Proposal Guidelines

Create a one-page proposal describing the question your team is asking or the problem your team is addressing. The proposal should follow the proposal template on page 5 of this guide and should describe:

- A **problem or question** your team's project will address,
- A **statement of why the problem or question is interesting**,
- The team's **hypothesis**,
- What dataset(s) you will use to address your question (**provide links to datasets**),
- How you **plan to analyze the data** to address the problem. What types of **data visualizations** you expect to use.

Data: It is the responsibility of each team to find and download the dataset(s) needed for their project. The goal is not to have a really big dataset to work with (terabytes of data are not needed), but rather to have enough data to gain insights into the problem. Finding datasets can be difficult; DataJam mentors are available to help. Lots of help can be found on the ***Datasets page*** of The DataJam website datajam@thedatajam.org.

Visualization Tools: Simple visualizations can be made with programs such as Google Sheets and Excel. More complex visualizations can be made with Tableau Public, which is a freely available program. See videos for how to make visualizations on our ***Resources page*** of The DataJam website datajam@thedatajam.org.

Statistical Analysis: Each team will decide the appropriate statistical method to apply to their problem. We have lots of resources available to help. See the ***videos at the top of The DataJam page and many videos and tip sheets on the Resources page***. DataJam mentors are available to help think about what analyses to use and to teach teams how to do various analyses.

Judging Criteria for the Final Project: Participants are encouraged, but not required, to consider tackling a problem in their community. The following criteria will be used by judges in evaluating the final poster and presentation that each team prepares:

- Understanding the Problem: Each team should clearly present and show how they are solving a specific civic issue or challenge with their project.
- Feasibility: The project selected should demonstrate the clear possibility of solving the problem with data that is available.
- Critical Thinking: Teams should demonstrate the ability to ask insightful questions and relate different concepts to solve a problem. The approach the team takes is as important as being able to conduct a particular analysis.
- Artistic Merit: Final presentations should have a consistent art design and be aesthetically pleasing.
- Presentation Skills: Focus on making an interesting, concise and engaging presentation. Have each member of the team participate in the final presentation.
- Commitment & Engagement: Each member of the team should have played a role in the project.



DataJam Project Proposal Template

School Name (& Team Number if there is more than one team/school):

Project Title:

Team Member Names & Emails:

Problem:

IN THE FORM OF A QUESTION STATE WHAT PROBLEM YOUR DATAJAM PROJECT WILL ADDRESS?

Why is it Important?:

IN A PARAGRAPH EXPLAIN WHY THIS IS AN IMPORTANT QUESTION AND WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED IN THE ANSWER.

Hypothesis:

A STATEMENT SHOULD BE MADE ABOUT WHAT THE TEAM THINKS THE ANSWER TO THEIR QUESTION WILL BE.

Data Required:

PROVIDE A LIST OF DATASETS YOU HAVE FOUND THAT YOU WILL ANALYZE TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION. PLEASE INCLUDE THE FULL LINKS SO WE CAN LOOK AT THE DATASETS WHILE WE ARE LOOKING AT YOUR PROPOSAL.

Analysis Plan:

IN ONE OR TWO PARAGRAPHS DESCRIBE HOW YOU PLAN TO ANALYZE YOUR DATA, WHAT ANALYTICAL STRATEGIES YOU WILL USE AND WHAT DATA VISUALIZATIONS YOU THINK YOU WILL USE? (No work needs to have been done at the time the proposal is submitted)

Poster and Final Presentation Guidelines

Data analytics consists of two broad tasks: (a) extracting meaningful information from raw data and (b) explaining the impact and value of that information. Your poster and final presentation for the DataJam should show how your DataJam project accomplished these two tasks.

Poster Guidelines:

You should follow the guidelines below for the development of your poster. However, we encourage you to exercise your creativity in designing your poster and how you would like to communicate the details of your project.

These three guidelines are essential:

- Poster size: 24" x 36". The poster orientation can be vertical or horizontal.
- Your poster should clearly display: (1) Title of your project, (2) The full names of the all team members, (3) the name of your school.
- Submit your poster as a .pdf file to the [poster form](#) on the DataJam's website.

In your poster you will want to have information addressing the questions below. Remember, pictures, graphs, tables and diagrams are very helpful ways of presenting your results.

- What is your research question?
- What was your hypothesis when you started the project?
- What dataset(s) did you use?
- Briefly describe the analyses you did to answer your question. Show graphs and diagrams if relevant.
- What challenges did you face in finding or using the data?
- Summarize your results.
- Can you make a recommendation based on your results?
- Provide a list of how you used the Virtual AI DataJam Mentor or other AI tools in your DataJam Project.

Except for the essential guidelines, which each team must follow, you can tailor your poster according to your project. Remember judges will view your poster without you being there to explain it.

Presentation Guidelines:

Your team will be scheduled to give a 10-minute oral presentation, using slides to a panel of three judges. This presentation will be scheduled at a time that is mutually possible for both your team and the judges. The presentation will be conducted on Zoom.

The oral presentation should address the same questions listed above for the poster. Remember to not have too many slides; for a 10-minute talk, 10-13 slides is appropriate.

It is best if each member of your team can have some speaking role in the presentation and question answering. A 10-minute period will be allotted for questions.