

# PRELIMINARY ROUND

## RULE BOOK

**ISRO ROBOTIC CHALLENGE-URSC  
2026**

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# 1 Background:

ISRO Robotics Challenge-URSC 2024 & 2025 (IRoC-U 2024 & 2025) provided an opportunity to the student community to showcase their engineering problem solving capabilities for space missions. The student community responded with great enthusiasm and its unprecedented success served as an inspiration for the next challenge IRoC-U 2026.

## 2 Challenge

One of ISRO's future goal is the exploration of Martian surface and as a part of the red planet surface exploration, an Autonomous Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) will carry out scientific activities. ISRO solicits from the youth of India innovative ideas and designs in the area of Navigation and Dynamics for future missions through the conduct of Robotics Challenge.

The IRoC-U 2026 challenges the students to develop “Towards Swarm Expedition: Autonomous Surveyor Challenge for Exploration, Navigation and Dynamics (ASCEND)” without any external navigation aids like GNSS, pseudolite or reflector arrays.

IRoC-U 2025 challenge consisted of demonstration of autonomous, aerial capability without GPS aid. IRoC-U 2026 challenge will involve autonomous navigation, landing, power transfer and image data validation. As a result, this year's challenge advances and refines the goals defined in the previous year.

Autonomous aerial swarms are the future of planetary exploration: they can deploy, survey, recharge, share data without direct human control and involvement. The “Towards Swarm Expedition: Autonomous Surveyor Challenge for Exploration, Navigation and Dynamics (ASCEND)” takes the first step toward this vision. In this challenge, teams will build a micro-UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) and a base station. The UAV departs from its base station, acquires the target characteristics it needs to identify, searches a designated area for those features, then returns to base station, transfer its data, and recharge - all without GPS, telemetry or remote piloting.

Hence, the current challenge focuses on developing and demonstrating new techniques in navigation, guidance, mechanisms for docking and power transfer with base-station rather than building aerial vehicles. Students can use/develop any available (off-the-shelf) aerial vehicle complying with existing DGCA rules.

The student community needs to develop and demonstrate the autonomous capabilities of ASCEND:

1. for navigation and guidance without any external navigation aid
2. to deploy, survey, recharge and share data without direct human control and involvement
3. to reconnaissance/search a pre-defined arena for target features, return and land at base station, transfer data and recharge its power system

4. design a base-station to support data transfer and charging through wired and/or wireless interfaces. If wired operation is used, the interface should have ports for i) image data transfer and ii) charging. The images (target features) captured by ASCEND during survey need to be transferred to base station and compared with the reference feature database for validation

Note: Manual/human intervention or manual alignment during the task is not permitted.

### 3 Tasks during the challenge

ASCEND has to perform the following tasks during the various rounds of the challenge:

- **Seeding Task:** While within the arena, the UAV must autonomously capture the provided seed images (3-5 sample feature images) supplied through the interface of the base station.
- **Search Task:** The UAV departs from the base station and autonomously searches the arena to locate unknown instances of the seeded feature types (for example: layered rock formations, red-oxide patches, reflective ice-like patches etc.) - each feature type is likely to have 2 to 3 instances in the arena (exact number will be announced during respective rounds).
- **Detection & Logging Task:** On detecting a feature instance, the UAV records its local estimated coordinates (relative to the base station frame) and captures a verification image of the feature.
- **Return Task:** The UAV returns to the base station, lands and interfaces without human intervention and initiates data transfer (images and coordinate log) via wired or wireless mode. At the same time, the bay charges the UAV for the next sortie.
- **Validation Task:** The base station computer validates the transferred images against the seed images (automatic image-matching). If valid, that detection counts towards the successful sortie.
- **Repeat sorties:** The teams can attempt multiple sorties for completing the task during the stipulated time. The merit is considered based on the number of sorties, minimal time and demonstration of all tasks.

Rule book will be updated from time to time as the challenge rounds progress. The participants are requested to follow the latest version of the rulebook available in the web portal.

## 4 Schedule of the events

#	Description	Date
1	Announcement of the challenge	12.12.2025
2	Registration opens	17.12.2025
3	Last date for submission of complete proposal for Preliminary round	12.01.2026
4	Announcement of teams selected for Preliminary round	02.02.2026
5	Commencement of Qualification round	03.02.2026
6	Last date for submission of detailed design report and videos for Qualification round	02.04.2026
7	Evaluation of Qualification round	03.04.2026 To 19.04.2026
8	Announcement of Qualification round results	20.04.2026
9	Commencement of Elimination round	21.04.2026
10	Evaluation of Elimination round	22.06.2026 To 30.06.2026
11	Announcement of Elimination round results	01.07.2026
12	Commencement of Final round	02.07.2026
13	Final field round and evaluation at the venue	20.07.2026 To 25.07.2026
14	<b>Announcement of results</b>	23.08.2026
15	Awards Ceremony on National Space Day	

Note:

1. The details of the challenge will be available after the registration.
2. Only one proposal per college will be entertained.
3. Organisers reserve the right to change the dates depending on exigency of situation /to refine the task details of the challenge.
4. All deadlines are at 23:59 hrs (IST) on the respective dates.

## 5 Venue

The final onsite competition to perform the required tasks is planned to be conducted in U R Rao Satellite Centre (URSC), Bengaluru-560017, in the month of July, 2026. For information about the IRoC-U 2026 competition venue, please follow our updates on website given in 5.1.1.

### 5.1 Contact Information

5.1.1 Website address: <https://www.ursc.gov.in/IRoC-U2026>

5.1.2 Email address for Teams: [irocu2026@ursc.gov.in](mailto:irocu2026@ursc.gov.in)

### 5.2 Awards and Recognitions

The first three teams will be awarded based on the evaluation by jury and fair play attitude of the teams. Additionally, two consolation prizes and a special prize for innovative and non-intuitive thinking will also be awarded. The awards in the form of cash are planned as follows:

1 <sup>st</sup> place	Rs 10 Lakh
2 <sup>nd</sup> place	Rs 7 Lakh
3 <sup>rd</sup> place	Rs 5 Lakh
Consolation prize-1	Rs 2 Lakh
Consolation prize-2	Rs 2 Lakh
Prize for innovative and non-intuitive thinking	Rs 1 Lakh

### 5.3 Intellectual Property Rights

Intellectual properties (IPs) generated by the team qualifying for the Field Round during the IRoC-U 2026 challenge shall be the sole property of ISRO/DOS. These teams shall enter into a non-disclosure agreement with ISRO/DOS.

The ASCEND design arrived by the teams qualifying for the Field round shall not be used by the teams in any other competition without the written consent of the ISRO/DOS.

### 5.4 Rules and regulations by Department of Civil Aviation:

The rules and regulations issued by Department of Civil Aviation shall be strictly followed. For more details on rules issued by Ministry of Civil Aviation, please visit and follow <https://www.civilaviation.gov.in/ministry-documents/rules>.

IRoC-U 2026 organizing team is not responsible for any violation of the rules issued by DGCA that are committed by the individual teams during any stage of the challenge.

## 6 PARTICIPATING TEAMS

Important Note: Winners and Runners-up of IRoC-U2024 & 2025 are not eligible for participation in IRoC-U2026.

## 6.1 Registration

All teams must complete the registration process on the website. The registration procedure includes:

- 1) Team login account creation.
- 2) Filling out the team details and download auto-generated registration form.
- 3) Get downloaded registration form duly certified by the Head of the institution.
- 4) Upload the softcopy of the proposal and the certified registration form in .pdf format (Proposal shall not exceed 20 pages with the file size limited to 15 MB).

**NOTE:** Registration shall deem to be completed only after uploading as per the above steps 3 and 4.

## 6.2 Team formation

1. The competition is open to students of Indian origin studying in educational institutions located in India.
2. The team is to consist of bona-fide students pursuing (full time and non-sponsored) under graduation/post-graduation/research. Sponsored/External students are not eligible for participating in the IRoC-U 2026.
3. The team should consist of minimum of 3 members and maximum of 10 members excluding mentors.
4. Team can have at most two mentors, one of whom must be a faculty from the parent institute and other may be from the Parent Institution/ Industry.
5. Each team should identify one member as team lead.
6. If multiple colleges or institutes are affiliated to the same university and have the same name but are located at different places, each institutes distinct registration id along with its complete address must be clearly mentioned. Failure to do so may lead to disqualification.
7. Any communication from the organisers will be sent to only the team lead and any query/clarification should also be raised only using the team lead's registered email-id. No response will be provided to the email addresses other than that of the registered email id.

## 6.3 Selection Process

The selection process is detailed below:

- 6.3.1 The number of teams selected for the Preliminary round will be based on the evaluation of the registered entries.
- 6.3.2 The number of teams selected for all the rounds is at discretion of the IRoC-U 2026 organizing committee. The decision of the organisers in this regard will be final and binding.
- 6.3.3 Requirements of IRoC-U 2026 rounds:
  - Preliminary Round requirement: Registration and Submission of Proposal Report and Presentation.
  - Qualification Round requirement: Submission of Detailed Design Report and demonstration of laboratory Prototype (Details shall be provided).



- Elimination Round requirement: Demonstration of ASCEND in the simulated arena at the respective parent institution premises (Details shall be provided).
- Field Round requirement: The final onsite competition to perform the required tasks is planned to be conducted at URSC Bengaluru (Details shall be provided)

The present document outlines rules for the Preliminary round (the rules of subsequent rounds shall be uploaded).

## 7 Requirements of Preliminary Round

### 7.1 Preliminary Round Report submission

Each registered team must submit a proposal. The proposal should introduce the team and provide explanation for the salient features/innovations of their proposal. It should confirm that the team has read, analysed and understood the task requirements.

The team needs to download the proposal report format and follow the guidelines. The proposal report shall be uploaded on the website.

The details and rules of the subsequent rounds will be provided ONE (01) day prior to the commencement of the respective rounds.

Note: Only one team from each institute is permitted to participate in the contest. It is the responsibility of the institute to select the team based on their established criteria. Furthermore, the chosen team must secure an endorsement from the head of the institution, confirming that they are the sole representatives for their institute in the competition. If more than one entry is found from any institute, the first submitted proposal shall be entertained for the further rounds and the remaining proposals shall be rejected.

### 7.2 ASCEND Specification and Requirements

The features of ASCEND are as given below:

- a) Hardware: Teams can develop or use readily available hardware platform. (Aerial vehicle)
- b) Mass of ASCEND: < 2 kg.
- c) Compliances:
  - The teams need to specify in the proposal report, the compliance of the proposed ASCEND with respect to the specifications as per Table-1.
  - To meet the challenge as proposed, the use of satellite-based navigation systems, external markers or local positioning systems is strictly prohibited. The underlying idea is to mirror the challenges faced by an actual planetary ASCEND on a distant celestial body where traditional earth-based navigation aids are unavailable.
  - ASCEND shall have an emergency call off mode, in case of exigencies.

Table-1: Typical Specifications of Autonomous Surveyor Challenge for Exploration, Navigation and Dynamics (ASCEND)

Sl. No.	Type	Description
1	Aerial Vehicle	Rotor Craft (Micro Drone, Mass < 2 kg) (As per Drone rules-2021, issued by Ministry of Civil Aviation as per the Gazette of India CG-DL-E-26082021-229221 or the latest version)
2	Software capabilities	Indigenously developed software's/algorithms
3	Interface	For data and power transfer with base station
4	Power Source	Battery operated only
5	Communication	RF radiation mode only
6	Base-station	With ports for data transfer and power transfer

## 8 General Rules and Regulations

The ISRO Robotics Challenge, URSC-2026, referred to as 'IRoC-U 2026' is owned, coordinated, operated and judged by IRoC-U 2026 organizing committee constituted by URSC with experts across ISRO Centres.

### 8.1 Organisers' Disclaimer

Teams shall take full responsibility for any damages, accidents or unsettling events caused by their hardware/software as well as for the members of the participating team. Teams are obliged to follow all safety and conduct rules specified by the organisers. Any breach of safety rules and requirements will result in the disqualification of the team from the entire competition.

### 8.2 Changes to the Competition Rules

The organisers retain the right to effect any essential / inevitable changes to the competition rules. However, any changes introduced shall not impact the overall design of ASCEND. All changes will be announced in advance and updated on the website.

### 8.3 Deadline Extension

The organisers retain the right to extend the deadline for any round. All deadline extensions will be announced in advance and details will be updated on the website.

### 8.4 FAQ

The queries related to the challenge raised by the teams will be updated on FAQ section of the website. Queries to any challenge related questions that arise should be mailed to contact mail ID from team lead's email ID with subject line FAQ. **Teams are requested to check FAQ section before raising the query.**

### 8.5 Challenge Scoring Issues

The independent jury is the body constituted by the IRoC-U 2026 organizing committee – which consists of experts across the ISRO community – to judge the competition. The Jury serves as the sole authority to resolve all issues with scoring during the challenge. The decisions of the jury are binding and final. The teams cannot appeal to any other authority.

### 8.6 Organisational Issues

Organisational issues, including team eligibility, conduct of challenge and execution of jury decisions will be resolved by the organisers.

## 8.7 General Challenge Issues

In case any conflict related to the challenge is encountered, the organiser's decision will be considered as final and binding.

## 8.8 Disqualification

The organisers may disqualify a team in the event of a serious breach of the rules, safety regulations or fair play. The organiser's decision shall be considered as final and binding. Teams cannot appeal to any other party including social media platforms.

## 8.9 Cancellation of Event

The organisers reserve the right to cancel the IRoC-U 2026 finals in the event of unforeseen circumstances preventing its safe conduct. In case of event cancellation, the organisers will inform the participating teams directly or through web portal.

## 8.10 Organiser's Responsibility

The organiser's civil liability is limited solely to the responsibility for organising the event in accordance with the local law and local regulations.

## 8.11 Copyright of the challenge

The organisers retain all copyright to the competition rules, logo, tagline and the description of the tasks. No alterations or additions to the competition rules can be made and their sale is forbidden. The rules can only be used or copied for the IRoC-U 2026 connected activities (e.g., registration process).

## 8.12 Personal Data Storage

Team members agree to their personal data (registration data), the documentation delivered as well as other promotional materials and visuals being stored and processed in the organiser's computer systems for the purpose of the IRoC-U 2026 programme.

The organiser shall keep all technical documentation confidential and shall not publish or disclose it to third parties without prior approval from the respective team representatives. The sole exception to this is the challenge's jury team – technical documentation will be disclosed to the judges for scoring and mentoring purposes only.

The team members also give the organiser, parties designated by the organiser and the audience the right to disclose and publish any photos, videos or other visuals, their names and surnames, identifiable pictures of themselves and any other persons, as well as pictures of machines, devices and equipment in any and all of the available formats, by any and every known method, in any and every known medium.

Teams grant permission to the organiser to use promotional materials and visuals (e.g., photos and videos), as well as any additional photos, videos, portraits, documents, interviews and other materials resulting from participation in the challenge (using the name of the participant or not) on all media, in any language, anywhere in the world, in any manner, for advertising and promotional purposes.

## 8.13 Miscellaneous

- Individuals or teams may be excluded from participation at the discretion of IRoC-U 2026 for unauthorized behaviour, including but not limited to (i) impersonating a ISRO/DOS official whether intentionally or in a manner that results in confusion,

(ii) misuse of the logos or identifiers of ISRO/DOS, any sponsoring organisation, or any infringement of a commercial logo or trademark, (iii) failure to abide by competition rules, directives or instructions from the competition host or organisers, and (iv) asserting or implying a ISRO/DOS affiliation or sponsorship where none exists.

- ISRO/DOS does not host pre-competitions or competitions conducted by any organisation other than organizers of IRoC-U committee constituted by URSC. This IRoC-U 2026 competition is neither affiliated with nor sponsors or endorses any ASCEND Challenge competition other than the IRoC-U 2026. Outside competitions have no bearing on the IRoC-U 2026 qualification or registration process, and representation to the contrary is strictly prohibited. No competition may imply any affiliation with ISRO/DOS or use the ISRO/DOS logo without permission of ISRO/DOS. Any assertions made by organisations that represent themselves as “ISRO/DOS”, “Official ISRO/DOS ASCEND Ambassador”, “ISRO/DOS Judge”, or any similar titles suggesting a tie to ISRO/DOS are unauthorized. Representations or suggestions that any organisation or individual can assure teams of being accepted for registration or participation in the challenge are unauthorized. All requirements for participation in the IRoC-U 2026 are outlined in this rules book.
- Participant hereby waives any claims against ISRO/DOS, its employees, its related entities, (including, but not limited to, contractors and subcontractors at any tier, grantees, investigators, volunteers, customers, users, and their contractors and subcontractors, at any tier) and employees of ISRO/DOS’s related entities for any injury, death, or property damage/loss arising from or related to the IRoC-U 2026, whether such injury, death, or property damage/loss arises through negligence or otherwise, except in the case of wilful misconduct. Any team member or advisor found to be exhibiting unsportsmanlike conduct may be disqualified from the challenge individually or as a team. All scoring decisions are final.
- Teams not meeting any requirement listed above may be disqualified.

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