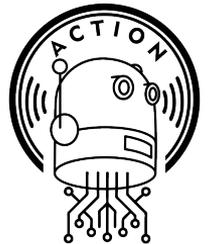


The 2026 iCTF Competition

Shellphish - NSF ACTION Institute



Capture The Flag Competitions

"Capture the Flag (CTF) is a special kind of information security competition. There are three common types of CTFs: Jeopardy, Attack-Defence and mixed."

<https://ctftime.org/ctf-wtf/>

Some CTFs

DEF CON CTF

DEF CON CTF Qualifier

PlaidCTF

picoCTF

CSAW CTF

HITCON CTF

SECCON CTF

0CTF

hxp CTF

Dragon CTF

Google CTF

... (<https://ctftime.org/>)

The iCTF (History)

<https://ictf.cs.ucsb.edu/>

Started in 2001 (internally), became multi-site in 2003

Historically attack-defense competition, open to the world

Historically based on the iCTF Framework

- <https://github.com/shellphish/ictf-framework>

The New iCTF

First edition: 2023

Jeopardy-style double competition over a week, focused on AI and cybersecurity

Organized by Shellphish and sponsored by the ACTION NSF AI Institute

Open to high-school (iCTFhi) and undergraduate (iCTFun) vetted teams

In 2023 and 2024 the challenges were AI-themed but traditional in structure

The 2025 edition was originally planned for December 2025 but was postponed to March 2026

The 2026 iCTF

Runs from March 9, 2026, at 10 am Pacific Time to March 13, 2026, at 4pm Pacific Time

Organized by Shellphish + ACTION NSF AI Institute

Challenge-based (based on CTFd)

Double track (high school and undergraduate teams)

Supported by educational materials and practice environments

The 2026 iCTF

For the first time, this competition will include agent-based challenges!

The participants will have to create AI agents that are uploaded in a challenge environment and have to solve the challenge autonomously

The agents are written using the Agentish framework, developed by ACTION/Shellphish

The challenges are developed by the researchers of the ACTION Institute and Shellphish

How to Participate

1. Create a team (only high school or only undergraduate – no mixing!) – Institutions can have multiple, non-colluding teams
2. Find an advisor (teacher/lecturer/professor: must have web page on institution website) who is willing to lead the team – we will manually vet the teams and their advisors!
3. Register and join the Discord channel by following the instructions at <http://ictf.cs.ucsb.edu/>
4. Learn using previous iCTF AI-based challenges and the Agentish examples
5. Check out <http://ictf.cs.ucsb.edu/> on March 8 for the instructions of how to access the CTF server
6. Play!

What to Expect

Data challenges: Find the flag in an artifact that you download from the iCTF server

Service challenges: Interact with a remote service and steal the flag

Agent challenges: Write an agent in Agentish and send it to the server so that it can solve the challenge

Once you solve the challenge, submit the flag!

It will look something like:

```
ictf{all_work_and_no_play_makes_AI_a_dull_bot}
```