



**SPIRIT OF
SERVICE AWARDS**

2026 SPIRIT OF SERVICE AWARDS NOMINATION GUIDELINES

CLOSING DATE FOR STAGE 1 NOMINATIONS

5:00pm Tuesday 2 June 2026

<https://www.act.ipaa.org.au/spiritofserviceawards>

All enquiries about the nomination process or the Awards portal should be directed to awards@act.ipaa.org.au or by calling 02 5137 4347.

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INTRODUCTION

IPAA ACT is proud to announce the launch of the 2026 *Spirit of Service Awards* (the Awards) program. Established in 2021, the awards recognise and celebrate public sector initiatives that drive positive change for the Australian community. They are a platform to highlight outstanding efforts, share learnings from major initiatives, and raise the profile of nominating agencies.

Agencies may choose to submit a nomination in any of the below four (4) core award categories: Collaboration, Community Engagement, Breakthrough, and Learning.

Core Award Categories

The award categories below describe the areas of achievement that will be recognised in any given year.

COLLABORATION AWARD—Recognising cross-agency and/or cross-jurisdiction initiatives where organisations (government, non-government, or both) have collaborated to deliver superior results and outcomes.

This Award is about acknowledging that the complexity of contemporary challenges within Australia will be addressed in a more comprehensive way when solutions are not limited by the pragmatic structures and hierarchies. Sustained outcomes are achieved through meaningful and ongoing collaboration within and across organisations and jurisdictions.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AWARD—Recognising initiatives where communities have played a key role in the design of superior services and supports that impact positively on the quality of community life.

This Award acknowledges that competing stakeholder views and needs must be considered when designing or changing a policy, program, or project. The extent to which the needs and expectations of different stakeholders will be satisfied may vary, but it is important that they are clearly defined in order to ensure excellent and innovative outcomes.

BREAKTHROUGH AWARD—Recognising initiatives that develop and/or apply novel and ingenious products, processes, services, technologies and/or management practices to create better outcomes for beneficiaries.

This Award acknowledges the importance of high-quality thinking when defining a challenge and designing and implementing a response. It is also about the ability to apply an open and constructive mindset and a readiness to explore new ideas and accept new ways of working within the framework that applies to public sector activities.

LEARNING AWARD— Recognising initiatives that embrace adaptation and continual improvement to address complex challenges.

This Award celebrates programs, initiatives and approaches that go beyond traditional learning and development training, focusing instead on iterative development and

adaptive response. It acknowledges efforts that deliberately test and refine practices through cycles of experimentation, reflection, and modification.

These initiatives demonstrate a commitment to future-proofing by engaging with ambiguity, learning from setbacks, and using insights from calculated trials and risks to drive improvement. They exemplify the mindset that progress emerges from curiosity, resilience and the courage to adapt in the face of change.

The Judges will select one winner in each of the above four core award categories. Winning entries should show practical application and measurable success.

Discretionary Award Categories

In addition to the four core award categories, the Spirit of Service Awards also recognise the following two awards.

KERRY KENNEDY AWARD - The judges panel will select the recipient from among the finalist cohort, regardless of which category the agency initially submitted to. This award recognises organisations that are “punching above their weight” and demonstrating excellence and innovation. This award was established to honour the late Mr. Kerry Kennedy for his contributions to IPAA ACT and its past award programs.

CSC PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD – launched in 2025, this award is selected from among the finalist cohort by peer and community voting, providing an opportunity for public sector colleagues to celebrate each other's achievements. Finalist agencies are encouraged to share the voting link with their networks.

Assessment Model

Assessment for the Awards is a two-stage approach. For the Stage 1 Assessment, nominating agencies will submit an online nomination application which includes relevant evidence for the core award category(ies) against which they wish to be assessed. Assessment and scoring will be done by trained volunteer award assessors who are drawn from the Commonwealth and ACT public services. The scoring criteria are provided below.

Stage 1 is rounded out by a moderation phase in which the scored nominations are reviewed by a subset of the judges panel to ensure consistency across the reviews.

At the end of Stage 1 Assessment, a shortlist of finalists in each of the four core award categories (Learning, Breakthrough, Community Engagement, and Collaboration) will be asked to progress to Stage 2 Assessment.

In Stage 2, finalist teams will be invited to participate in a pitch training session to learn how to craft a compelling and impactful pitch. They will then have a few weeks to produce a 3-minute pitch video. Stage 2 culminates in the “Pitch Event” where finalist agencies present their pitch video to the judges panel and participate in a short Q&A with the judges about their initiative.

The judges panel will convene immediately after and choose the winner for each of the four core award categories, as well as select which finalist nomination will receive the Kerry Kennedy Award. The judges will review the pitch presentations and the assessor reports to make their final decision. Winning entries should show practical application and measurable success.

The judges panel will comprise eminent people drawn from the ranks of senior and retired public servants, academia, industry, and the community. Judges volunteer their time to assess the Pitches and determine the Award winners each year.

The CSC People's Choice Award will be chosen by peer and community voting, with one vote counted per person. Voting will be open for a specified amount of time, and each finalist team will receive information on how to vote and promote their initiative to their community for voting.

Award nomination Scoring System (20 Points Total)

1. Relevance to Category (0-5 points)

How well does the nomination fit the specific category?

5 = Perfect fit, 0 = Not relevant at all

2. Impact & Significance (0-5 points)

How meaningful or influential is the nomination in its field?

5 = Major impact, 0 = Minimal or no impact

3. Creativity & Originality (0-5 points)

How innovative, unique, or fresh is the nomination?

5 = Exceptionally original, 0 = Completely unoriginal

4. Evidence (0-5 points)

Does the nomination include evidence of outcomes?

5 = Strong links to evidence, 0 = Lacks evidence

ELIGIBILITY

The awards are open to all IPAA ACT organisational members. The initiative submitted should be related to public administration or a public service outcome. Joint nominations where cross-organisational and/or cross-jurisdictional collaboration has contributed to the common end-to-end initiative are encouraged in all categories, provided the lead agency is an IPAA ACT member. The "Lead Agency" is the agency with primary carriage of the initiative. Supporting or collaborating agencies involved in the joint initiative can be government, non-government, or both and do not need to be IPAA ACT members (as long as the lead agency is an IPAA ACT member).

This Awards program explicitly recognises the work of teams, and therefore IPAA ACT will not accept nominations that focus solely on the work of an individual.

FEES

Each nomination will be charged an entry fee that is based on the IPAA ACT organisational membership tier of the nominating organisation. *Fees below are inclusive of GST.* To confirm your organisation size, [reference this list](#). Fees are charged on the final page of the secure online application portal via credit card. (This means you may continue to work on your nomination within the awards portal and do not need to pay the fee until you are ready to submit it).

Small organisations will be charged \$500 per entry.

Medium organisations will be charged \$1,100 per entry.

Large organisations will be charged \$1,500 per entry.

TIMELINE OF KEY DATES

Please visit the [Spirit of Service Awards website](#) for the most up-to-date information or contact awards@act.ipaa.org.au.

- Nominations open: Monday 16 February 2026
- Nomination drop-in Q&A sessions (optional):
 - Tuesday 10 March at 10am
 - Thursday 12 March at 4pm
- Nominations close: Tuesday 2 June 2026
- Assessment period: Tuesday 9 June – 30 June 2026
- Nominations that are shortlisted as finalists will be notified in: mid-July
- Awards Gala: Thursday 5 November 2026

The following dates apply only to nominations that proceed to the finalist phase:

- Pitch Training (virtual): August 2026
 - This is an online training for finalist teams to learn tips and tricks for creating a compelling 3-minute pitch video, which will later be presented to the judges panel.

- Pitch videos due: early September 2026
- Pitch Event (in-person in Canberra): mid-September 2026
 - This is an in-person event where each finalist team presents their pitch video to the judges panel and then participates in a short Q&A about their initiative. In-person attendance is **strongly** encouraged, but virtual participation can be accommodated for teams outside Canberra.

PREPARING A NOMINATION

Resources

You will need the following resources to prepare and submit your nomination(s):

- A copy of the Nomination Guidelines (this document),
- A copy of the [Nomination Template](#), and
- Endorsement of the nomination from senior leadership (a signature is required. More details are included below.).

All these documents are available from <https://act.ipaa.org.au/awards/spirit-of-service-awards/>

The Awards Portal where you will submit your nomination is:

<https://spiritofserviceawards.awardsplatform.com>

Register your intent to nominate

It is important that you register your interest in submitting one or more nominations by registering an entry once the awards portal is opened (i.e., from **16 February 2026** onwards). This ensures that we can easily communicate with you about the nomination process and any upcoming deadlines. Please ensure that the person who registers your nomination is someone whose contact details won't change over the nomination period, as we will be using their email address to stay in touch with you.

Register as an **Entrant** here - <https://spiritofserviceawards.awardsplatform.com>

Please note – the entry fee for a nomination is not charged until the final step of the process when you are ready to submit. This means you can register your entry at no charge and can continue to update and refine your nomination over the course of the nomination period. You just need to submit and complete payment before the deadline (2 June 2026) for your nomination to be considered.

Once you have completed the **Start entry Tab** you can **Save + Close** your entry. You will be able to keep adding to your nomination over the nomination period, making sure that you **Save + Next** or **Save + Close** as you progress through preparing your nomination as information entered on the page is not automatically saved. The entry fee will not be charged until the final stage of the application when you are ready to submit your final nomination.

Download the Nomination Template and compile your nomination

You will need to compile a range of information and resources for your nomination so we suggest that you read these Guidelines and use the Nomination Template to develop the content and supporting materials that you will need. The Nomination Template provides detailed information on what information is required in each section of the nomination application.

You can compile your nomination using the Nomination Template (a Word document) and use this document to obtain sign-off on your nomination before you upload it into the Awards portal.

High-level sign-off is required before you can submit your nomination so we suggest that you also take into account the availability of the relevant senior executive(s) close to **2 June 2026** (the closing date for nominations) so that your nomination can be endorsed and uploaded before the closing date. If your nomination is a joint submission involving multiple agencies, a senior leader at each agency will need to sign off.

Select one or two assessors to nominate

Each nomination must include a minimum of one (1) assessor for smaller agencies and two (2) assessors for medium or large agencies. Assessors fulfill an important role in the awards process by providing a large peer review group for the first phase in June.

How to choose your assessors:

- Please note: the nominated assessor(s) from your agency must not have any involvement with the initiative being nominated or any other initiative being put forward by your organisation.
- We recommend nominating assessors with experience in evaluation, assessment and/or review across either policy or program areas. They may be in the EL1, EL2, or APS6 or equivalent levels.
- Please notify your assessors that they have been nominated so that they are expecting communications from the IPAA Awards team in early June to begin the process.

During the 3-week Assessment Phase (June) each assessor will be assigned approximately 3 nominations to read and score against the provided rubric. Each nomination review takes approximately 1-hour to complete, requiring a total of 3-hours' time commitment spread across the 3-week assessment period.

Assessors receive all required preparatory materials from the IPAA ACT Awards team and must adhere to a code of conduct.

Conflicts of interest are strictly managed by the Awards team. Assessors will not assess nominations from their own agency, or any other nominations within the award category your agency is submitting to.

Senior Executive Endorsement

Your nomination needs to be endorsed by a senior executive at or above Band 2 or equivalent level in the **lead agency and all collaborating agencies** listed in the nomination. In submitting a nomination, participating organisations agree that:

- Information and images from their nomination may be used by IPAA to promote the *IPAA ACT Spirit of Service Awards*.
- They will contribute one (1) to two (2) assessors to participate in the assessment process and will provide them with release time to participate in assessor training, undertake assessment and participate in any other steps needed to produce a shortlist of finalists for the judges' panel.
- If invited to advance to Stage 2 (pitch presentations before the judges panel), they will provide:
 - the resources (personnel, time and travel/accommodation) so that members of the initiative team can attend a pitch training (provided by IPAA) and can participate in the pitch to the judges' panel.
 - designated representatives to participate in interviews at or after the Awards Gala. This content and/or footage may be used to promote the IPAA ACT Spirit of Service Awards.
 - designated representative(s) to serve as a media spokesperson at or after the Awards Gala.
- If the agency wins an award, they will work with IPAA to showcase the initiative by participating in a *Work with Purpose* podcast episode or an IPAA event.
- If the agency wins an award, they may be asked to work with IPAA to develop case study materials that may be made available on the IPAA ACT website.

Please print the completed nomination template for signature by the relevant senior executive of the lead agency and any other agencies listed under the Agency Details tab. You will scan and upload the signed pages through the Awards Portal on the endorsement page.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

All enquiries about the nomination process or the Awards portal should be directed to awards@act.ipaa.org.au or by calling 02 5137 4347.