



J.C. Brown CEO Communication Leadership Award



J.C. Brown CEO Communication Leadership Award

Call for Entries 2026



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J.C. Brown CEO Communication Leadership Award



About the J.C. Brown CEO Communication Leadership Award

The J.C. Brown Award recognizes a chief executive officer or general manager committed to advancing communication at their electric cooperative and within the electric cooperative industry.

The award was established in 2003 and is part of the Spotlight on Excellence Awards program and is an initiative of NRECA and the Council of Rural Electric Communicators (CREC).

This award memorializes the late J.C. Brown and his unwavering dedication to the importance of communication as a vital link connecting electric cooperatives with each other and their consumer-members, and to advancing the cooperative business model.

Individuals nominated for this award should demonstrate through their actions a clear understanding of and commitment to, the strategic role of communication in employee, member, and community relations. The executive should have a proven track record of advancing the role of communication at his or her electric cooperative, public power district, statewide association, or generation and transmission (G&T) system.



Submission Information

Submission Preparation

Entries must be submitted by a current cooperative employee and may not be submitted by a marketing, advertising, or PR agency or any other paid or outside consultant.

All entries must be submitted using the online submission platform. The link will be provided within the confirmation email which will automatically be sent after payment processing. If you do not receive an automatic confirmation email, please reach out to Mary-Kate.Thomas@nreca.coop.

The online submission allows for uploading supporting materials, including video clips, PDFs, and .jgs.

Submission Instructions

1. Visit cooperative.com/jcbrown
2. Select the "Submit a Nomination" button to link to the payment portal.
3. Submit your payment information.
4. Check your email for a payment confirmation email containing the link to the online submission platform.
5. Create an account on the Award Force submission platform or log in to an existing account if you have already created one before this award cycle.
6. Select the following information:
 - a. Chapter: J.C. Brown CEO Communication Leadership Award
 - b. Category: 2026 J.C Brown Nomination Form
7. Complete the required information on all tabs shown on the screen.
8. Select the **"Save + next"** to save the information on that page and advance to the next tab. Select the **"Save + close"** option to save the information and close out of the entry to continue at another time.
 - a. You must select either button to save your information before leaving the page. Otherwise, your information will be lost, and will need to be re-entered.
9. Press the **"Submit entry"** button to submit your nomination upon completion.
10. **You may login to your account and revise your materials (even if they have been submitted), up until the deadline.** After the deadline, you will lose access to any editing permissions and the judges will review the submission from the last day of the submission period.

Nomination Entry Edits/Changes and Cancellations

Nominations and cancellations will be accepted until **October 31, 2025**. Cancellations for entries are fully refundable until the deadline and can be made online: www.cooperative.com > Member Center > My Registrations.

Submission Questions

Questions regarding entry guidelines or specifics should be directed to Mary-Kate Thomas at Mary-Kate.Thomas@nreca.coop.



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Payment Information

Nomination Fee

The nomination fee is **\$126** per entry. All payments and nominations must be submitted by 11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time on October 31, 2025.

Payment Process

The nomination fee must be paid before receiving access to the entry form. Once the fee is paid, the nominator will be issued a confirmation email with a link to the entry form. Entries for which payment has not been received before the deadline will not be considered.

Questions Regarding Payment

Questions regarding payment should be directed to the Accounts Receivable Department at 703.907.6875 or by email at accountsreceivable@nreca.coop.

Notification

The individual who submitted the nomination for the winning entry will be notified no later than **November 26, 2025**. All other individuals will be notified no later than **December 5, 2025**.

All entries are treated confidentially. **All communications regarding the nomination entry will be directed to the person who submitted the nomination.** The nominee will not be notified about their nomination, disqualification, or for any other reason during the award period.

Submission Feedback

All individuals who submitted a nomination will receive feedback on their submission. The feedback will include a general summary of their entry; areas of strength; areas of improvement and a numeric score. Feedback will be available via the Award Force platform after the CEO Close-up Conference in January.

Award Recognition

The J.C Brown Award will be presented to the winner at the CEO Close-Up Conference. Additionally, the winner and their communications team will be recognized in conjunction with the Spotlight on Excellence Awards program at the Connect Conference.

Highlights of the winning entry will be displayed at the Spotlight Café at the Connect Conference and will be featured on the J.C. Brown Award webpage on cooperative.com, as well as other NRECA features or communications.



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Critical Information

Award Cycle and Deadline

The 2025-2026 J.C. Brown Award cycle will begin accepting nominations on **September 8, 2025**. The deadline to submit a nomination is **October 31, 2025, at 11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time**. Both payment and nominations must be completed prior to the deadline.

Eligibility

Nominees must be currently serving as a CEO or general manager of a cooperative, public power district, statewide association, or generation and transmission (G&T) system and must be a voting member of NRECA at the time of submission.

An individual cannot win this award more than once. Nominations of individuals who have already received the J.C. Brown CEO Communication Leadership Award are not eligible to win a second time and their nominations will not be considered.

Nominations must be submitted by an employee of a cooperative and may NOT be entered by a marketing, advertising, or PR agency or any other paid or outside consultant. However, nominations can be submitted by co-op employees who are employed at a cooperative other than where the CEO/GM is currently employed.

Disqualification

An entry may be disqualified for the following reasons:

- Payment was not received.
- The nomination was submitted after the deadline had passed.
- The individual nominated has already received the award.
- The nominee is no longer serving as a CEO or general manager at their cooperative at the time of the entry period.
- The cooperative is not a voting member of NRECA.
- The nomination entry was submitted by a marketing, advertising, or PR agency or any other paid or outside consultant.
- Any or all the submission exceeded the word count.

The CREC and NRECA reserve the right to disqualify any entry that knowingly submitted false or misleading information and was not forthright on their entry form. Entrants will be notified of disqualification via email and entry fees will not be refunded.



Award Criteria

The nominations will be judged on the completion of the following four criteria. Each response is limited to 500 words. Point values have been assigned to each criterion to guide the panel of judges. The final score of each nomination will be determined by combining the four individual criterion scores.

a. Strategic Communications Approach (26 points)

How does the nominee integrate communication into the organization's strategic planning and management processes? Evidence may include, a well-defined strategic communication plan, active CEO engagement as well as adequate annual budgets and resources devoted specifically to communication.

Consider:

- a. How is the nominee engaged with staff/board/consumer-members?
- b. How does the nominee foster communications innovation?
- c. How are communications included in the co-op's strategic planning process and in other leadership meetings where important co-op issues, practices, and challenges are discussed?
- d. How often is the strategic communication plan updated and reviewed for effectiveness?

Note: Budget size alone is not a major factor; it is part of the overall plan.

b. Internal Leadership Approach (26 points)

How does the nominee ensure co-op employees are informed, engaged, and empowered with the information they need to be effective communicators?

- a. Does the nominee view all employees of the organization as part of the communication team? For example, are staff members in all areas of the organization—particularly those who have contact with consumer-members—kept informed about the co-op's priorities and kept up to date on important organizational developments and on changes to major co-op products, services, and programs?
- b. Is there evidence of an effective employee communication program at the co-op, as well as two-way communication within the co-op, i.e., top-down, and bottom-up?
- c. Are there examples or indicators demonstrating how information on critical projects and management decisions is shared in a timely and open fashion in executing the cooperative's communication plan?
- d. Other examples include a dedication to hiring professional communication staff people, as well as providing adequate educational and training opportunities for staff.

c. The Cooperative Difference (26 points)

How does the nominee's commitment to communication, both internal and external, help advance the seven cooperative principles, philosophy, and way of doing business?

- a. Evidence may include any type of leadership action, communication activity, or product that promotes the cooperative principles to staff, consumer-members, or other audiences.



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d. Measures of Success (26 points)

Please note indicators of the success of the cooperative's communication/marketing programs during the nominee's tenure, and on which he or she has had an influence. This criterion is not intended to be an evaluation or showcase of the cooperative's communication products and services as defined in the larger Spotlight on Excellence awards program.

- a. Other information may include awards received by the cooperative during the nominee's tenure but should not be limited to that. For example, the evidence should include how the organization measures the success of its communication programs and projects, i.e., what evaluation techniques and methods are used to determine whether strategic communication goals have been met. CEO/GM involvement or endorsement should be described.
- b. Additional evidence may include how the organization's communication programs have led to changes in thinking, attitudes, or actions among consumer-members and/or other key audiences, and how the nominee has been a part of this result.

Supplemental Materials

Up to three additional supporting materials may be added to reinforce your submission. All supporting material will be viewed by the judges but will not be separately scored. If included, supporting material must be uploaded using the area provided in the online nomination form.

Submission Tips

Your nominee may be a great communications champion, but unless you provide solid proof points, your score sheet won't reflect what you see in your co-op's leader.

Successful entries:

1. Closely match the responses to each of the four questions and prompts.
2. Provide proof points and details such as examples, evidence, and data to support your contention.
3. Include optional supporting material to provide additional context and dimension for your contentions.
4. Recognize that every question is important. Past winners have scored in the highest part of the "excellent" range across all four categories. See score chart.

Don't get discouraged if your submission doesn't win this time. Every cycle is different. For the majority of award winners, it took more than one cycle before they won the top honor.



Judging Information

The J.C. Brown nominations are reviewed by a panel of three judges, consisting of one retired CEO or senior communicator from the electric cooperative industry, and two judges from outside the industry who possess senior-level experience.

For each award cycle, all three judges review the nomination materials for each candidate, regardless of how many nominations are submitted. The work of the judges is confidential, and they do not collaborate. Judges work independently on evaluating the entries and submit their evaluations to the NRECA Award Program Manager.

The winner is determined by having the highest average score across all three judges.

Scoring

Judges consider the completeness of the entry forms and whether entrants followed all instructions. The effectiveness in achieving the stated goal will be heavily weighted in the scoring. While the judges will review all supplemental material submitted, it will not be scored. Evaluations will be based on absolute scores rather than a comparison of entries. The entrant with the highest average score across all three independent judges will be deemed the winner.

Judges' Evaluation Form

The evaluation form is the centerpiece of the awards judging. There are four, equally weighted criteria. All entries will be evaluated and scored independently by each of the judges. The work of all judges has equal weight when averaging nominees' individual scores.

| POINTS & CRITERIA BREAKDOWN | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------------|-------|
| Category | Maximum Points | Excellent | Good | Average | Below Average | Poor |
| Strategic Communications Approach | 26 | 26 - 21 | 20 - 16 | 15 - 11 | 10 - 6 | 5 - 1 |
| Internal Leadership Approach | 26 | 26 - 21 | 20 - 16 | 15 - 11 | 10 - 6 | 5 - 1 |
| Cooperative Difference | 26 | 26 - 21 | 20 - 16 | 15 - 11 | 10 - 6 | 5 - 1 |
| Measure of Success | 26 | 26 - 21 | 20 - 16 | 15 - 11 | 10 - 6 | 5 - 1 |



Sample Scoring Sheet for Judges

Criterion 1. Overall Strategic Communications Approach _____ points

Answers the question, “How does the nominee integrate communication into the organization’s strategic planning and management processes? Evidence may include, a well-defined strategic communication plan, active CEO engagement as well as adequate annual budgets and resources devoted specifically to communication. “

Considerations include:

- c. How the nominee engaged with staff/board/consumer-members.
- d. How the nominee fosters communications innovation.
- e. How communications are included in the co-op’s strategic planning process and in other leadership meetings where important co-op issues, practices and challenges are discussed.
- f. How often the strategic communication plan updated and reviewed for its effectiveness?

Criterion 2. Internal Communications Approach _____ points

Answers the question, “How does the nominee ensure co-op employees are informed, engaged, and empowered with the information they need to be effective communicators?”

Considerations include:

- g. Does the nominee view all employees of the organization as part of the communication team? For example, are staff members in all areas of the organization—particularly those who have contact with consumer-members—kept informed about the co-op’s priorities and kept up to date on important organizational developments and on changes to major co-op products, services, and programs?
- h. Is there evidence of an effective employee communication program at the co-op, as well as two-way communication within the co-op, i.e., top-down, and bottom-up?
- i. Are there examples or indicators demonstrating how information on critical projects and management decisions is shared in timely and open fashion in executing the cooperative’s communication plan.
- j. Other examples include a dedication to hiring professional communication staff people, as well as providing adequate educational and training opportunities for staff.

Criterion 3. The Cooperative Difference _____ points

Answers the question, “How does the nominee’s commitment to communication, both internal and external, help advance the seven cooperative principles, philosophy, and way of doing business?”

Additional considerations include:

- a. Any type of leadership action, communication activity or product that promotes the cooperative principles to staff, consumer-members, or other audiences.



Criterion 4. Measures of Success

_____ points

Answers the question, “How successful have the cooperative’s communication/marketing programs and efforts been during the nominee’s tenure, and on which he or she has had an influence?”

Note: This criterion is not intended to be an evaluation or showcase of the cooperative’s communication products and services as defined in the larger Spotlight on Excellence awards program.

Overall Summary for this entry, including all four criteria (to be completed after finishing evaluation of the four criteria on the following four pages)

Summary of Entry

Total Points: _____

Strengths of entry:

- 1.
- 2.

Areas for improvement for entry:

- 1.
- 2.

Revised as of 07.24.25