

THE COUNCIL OF  
RURAL ELECTRIC  
COMMUNICATORS  
AND NRECA  
ANNOUNCE

2020



# SPOTLIGHT

on Excellence  
Awards

# Call for Entries

**Deadline to enter: Dec. 6, 2019**  
[cooperative.com/spotlight](http://cooperative.com/spotlight)

## Table of Contents

About the Spotlight on Excellence Awards Program.....	2
Important Notes and Instructions .....	2
Entry fees, Deadlines, , Judges' Comments and Critical Information.....	3
Submission of Entries .....	3
Eligibility .....	5
Judging and Scoring .....	6
Co-op Classifications .....	6
Award Information, Notification and Award Recognition .....	7
Award Categories and Criteria .....	7



## About the Spotlight on Excellence Awards Program

The Spotlight on Excellence Awards Program recognizes a body of outstanding work produced by electric co-op communication and marketing professionals across the cooperative network. The categories reflect the wide scope and valuable contributions of co-op communicators today. Winners of the Spotlight on Excellence Awards represent leading practices across all communication platforms and position them as the best in the field. Their superior accomplishments have lasting impact, demonstrate a high level of professionalism and deliver exceptional results.

The umbrella of the Spotlight on Excellence Awards includes two individual awards, along with the larger, project-focused Spotlight on Excellence Awards. The LaBerge Award for Excellence in Strategic Communications and the J.C. Brown Leadership Award are both administered separately from the Spotlight on Excellence Awards themselves and have different qualifications and eligibilities. Go to [cooperative.com/spotlight](http://cooperative.com/spotlight) for more information on these awards.



Administration of the awards is through the Council of Rural Electric Communicators (CREC), which seeks to advance the recognition, education and professionalism of electric cooperative communicators and their affiliated organizations. The Spotlight on Excellence awards program was created in 1987.



## Important Notes and Instructions

Please read carefully as you pick your categories and follow the instructions for each one as stated. Some have requirements that others do not have.

Entrants in the **Best Special Publication-large and Best Annual Report to Members categories are required to send a hard copy of their entry** to the Spotlight on Excellence Administrator as well as posting a PDF copy online with their entry form. The judges will review the hard copies along with the online entry information to complete their scoring and comments. Only these two categories have this requirement. Additional information is highlighted in the descriptions of both categories.

### Categories Requiring Hard Copy Samples From GOLD Winners

- External News Publication
- Special Publication
- Annual Report to Members
- Wild Card
- Graphic Design
- Event
- Total Communication Program

To help prepare your Spotlight entry, you can view a searchable database of winners in the Spotlight on Excellence section of [cooperative.com/spotlight](http://cooperative.com/spotlight).

In addition, **several categories require Gold winners to submit hard copy samples of their entry (see box)**. Samples will be due to the Spotlight Administrator no later than five business days after the close of the contest and will not be returned after the conference. These samples of leading practices will be displayed in the Spotlight Café area at the CONNECT conference. Digital

versions of all winning entries will be posted on [cooperative.com](http://cooperative.com) and may be viewed at the Spotlight Café as well. ALL Spotlight entries are submitted online. The links to the appropriate entry forms will be available once payment is made at [cooperative.com/spotlight](http://cooperative.com/spotlight) (see "Deadline").



## Entry Fees, Deadlines, Judges' Comments and Critical Information

### - Entry Fees -

The entry fee is \$95 for all but two categories. The entry fee for Best Total Communication Program and Best Event is \$150. Fees must be paid to receiving access to the Entry Form. (View a sample form here. All payments and entry submissions must be submitted using the online form on the Spotlight on Excellence webpage by the deadline of Friday, December 6, 2019. Once the fee is paid, you will be issued a confirmation page with a link to the Entry Form on cooperative.com. Entries for which payment has not been made will be disqualified.

### - Judges' Comments -

For an additional fee of \$5 per entry, you can receive general comments from the judges on your entry, regardless of whether it receives an award. These comments will not be in-depth commentaries but will point out positive aspects of your entry and, where appropriate, suggestions that could have made it stronger. To receive feedback, you must check the box on the entry form at the time of entry.

### - Entry Changes and Cancellations -

Entries, cancellations and changes will be accepted until the deadline date. Cancellations for entries are fully refundable; the fee for judges' comments is non-refundable. Cancellations to the entry and additional entries can be made online via Cooperative.com > Member Center > My Registrations. Any other changes must be submitted in writing to Accounts Receivable at [accountsreceivable@nreca.coop](mailto:accountsreceivable@nreca.coop) or faxed to 703.907.5951.

“

*Holy cow. If all the columns competing in this category were like this one, judging would be a lot more fun! However, picking a winner would be painful...*

*This is what a column should be. It doesn't always have to be about the co-op itself. Rather it's a poignant study of people living in the co-op area that really has a statement...*

*You've got the start of a good photo here, but they aren't doing anything... Get them in action as they're doing some work when they get higher up the pole, then you can zoom or crop in on them to really make them the focus of the image.*

*What a great way to get the word out to members about something that can stir up controversy - Change. You covered all bases in a creative manner and provided good messages to members. I love the idea of Meet Your New Meter Reader. It's evident a lot of effort went into this campaign.*

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## Entry Questions

Questions regarding entry guidelines or specifics should be directed to Carol Crabtree, Spotlight on Excellence Administrator, at [spotlightonexcellence@nreca.coop](mailto:spotlightonexcellence@nreca.coop).

## Payment Questions

Questions regarding payment should be directed to the Accounts Receivable Department at 703.907.6875 or by email to [accountsreceivable@nreca.coop](mailto:accountsreceivable@nreca.coop).

## Additional Resources

If you want a more in-depth look at the entry forms, scoring criteria or other FAQs, go to [cooperative.com/spotlight](http://cooperative.com/spotlight).



## Submission of Entries

Please read all instructions carefully. Provide all information requested in the entry forms, noting that each category has its own set of requirements for submission. Failure to provide all requested information could cause you to lose points and could be the difference between a winning entry and a near miss. In some instances, a single point separated a gold winner from a silver winner, or no award at all.

- 1** All entries must be submitted using the online form provided after payment is confirmed on the Spotlight on Excellence webpage. This form allows for uploading additional support materials, including audio and video clips, PDFs (preferred) and jpegs. A total of 100 MB per entry is available, split into four 25 MB files.
- 2** Entrants may provide a URL link to support materials, especially video or audio clips, instead of uploading a file. If a password is necessary to access the hosting site, please include it with the link. Passwords and access must stay active until the CONNECT Conference.
- 3** Entries must be made by an employee of the cooperative and may NOT be entered by a marketing, advertising or PR agency or any other paid/outside consultant. If you have worked with an agency on the project, they may supply support materials, statistics or information to include with the entry. If you are uncertain about your project's eligibility, please contact the Spotlight on Excellence Awards administrator at [spotlightonexcellence@nreca.coop](mailto:spotlightonexcellence@nreca.coop) for clarification.
- 4** You will be able to use the online entry form as often as necessary to enter all your submissions, but cannot go back in to an entry to edit once you press "Submit." Please note that each category has its own set of requirements for submission.
- 5** Completely fill out all information on your entry form. Failure to do so may result in a lower score or disqualification of your entry.
- 6** Organizations can submit more than one entry per category. Organizations cannot, however, submit the same publication more than once in the Best Internal or Best External News Publication category.



## Mailing Address for Hard Copies

Entrants in the Best Special Publication-large, and Best Annual Report to Members categories must send one hard copy of their entry to be forwarded for judging. These samples must be received no later than five business days after the deadline date. All Gold winners in the categories specified must send hard copies of their winning entries to be displayed at CONNECT. (Further information will be sent to winners once they are announced.) Use this address for all mailings:

Carol Crabtree  
Spotlight on Excellence Administrator  
1021 Matterhorn Dr.  
Reynoldsburg, OH 43068-1715

**RETURNING!** We are offering a special deal to cooperatives that haven't entered in five or more years. Try your hand by entering one project at full price, and you'll be able to enter a second one for free! Twice the chances to win at half the price.

Please see the special instructions in the payment section.

## At-Large Categories

There are five At-Large categories; all entries are judged together, without separation by classification. Each is clearly marked. These categories are not affected by the size of the cooperative or its budget and therefore are judged as one group.

## Disqualification

If the administrator determines that an entry was either submitted by, or primarily created, implemented and evaluated by an agency or consultant and not by the cooperative, it will be disqualified.

The cooperative must have regular, ongoing and strategic involvement in the creative, execution and review process of a project with an agency or consultant for it to be eligible for a Spotlight on Excellence award. The Best Total Communication Program category will be subject to increased scrutiny for agency involvement. If you are uncertain about your project's eligibility, please contact the Spotlight on Excellence Awards administrator at [spotlightonexcellence@nrec.coop](mailto:spotlightonexcellence@nrec.coop) for clarification.

If the Spotlight administrator determines an entry is submitted in the wrong category, it will be moved to the proper category without notification to the entrant. Otherwise, an entry that does not follow all rules as outlined in this announcement may be disqualified.

Entries for which payment is not received will be disqualified.

Entrants will not be notified of disqualification, nor will entry fees or judges' comments fees be refunded. The Council of Rural Electric Communicators and NRECA reserve the right to pull an award if it is revealed that an entrant was not forthright on his/her entry form.

## Retention of Entries and Review by Peers

All winning entries will be displayed at the CONNECT Conference. While most entries will be displayed digitally, some categories require the winner to provide hard copies or samples. These examples will be on display in the Spotlight Café at CONNECT and may be featured on [cooperative.com](http://cooperative.com) and in other NRECA features or communications. Because entries or samples will not be returned, entrants should retain copies that hold value, or pick up their samples at the Spotlight Café no later than noon on the last day of the CONNECT conference.

Best Photo winners' entries will be added to NRECA's libraries and may be used in further communications at a later date.



## Submission Questions

Email any questions regarding your submission to Carol Crabtree, Spotlight on Excellence Administrator, at [spotlightonexcellence@nreca.coop](mailto:spotlightonexcellence@nreca.coop).



## Eligibility

Only NRECA voting members – electric cooperatives, public power districts, G&T cooperatives and service members (including statewide associations) in good standing—may submit original work produced and implemented by their employees or under the direction of their employees from December 4, 2018, through December 3, 2019. The cooperative must have ongoing strategic and/or hands-on involvement in the creative, execution and review process of a project with an agency for it to be eligible for a Spotlight on Excellence award.

Collateral pieces used in entries for Best Total Communication Program or Best Event may only be submitted in one award cycle and must be submitted no later than the award cycle coinciding with implementation/evaluation of the program or event. Consultants, agencies and freelancers are not allowed to submit entries to the awards program directly, nor are they eligible for awards in any category.

All entries must have been used to promote the mission of the cooperative organization. Pieces produced for organizations other than electric cooperatives are not eligible.

## Exceptions

The only exceptions to the above timeframe are entries in Best Total Communication Program or Best Event that are planned/developed in one year and implemented/evaluated in another year. In that case, the program may be entered in one award cycle only and no later than the award cycle coinciding with implementation and evaluation of the program or event.



## Judges and Scoring

### Judges

Faculty from accredited schools of journalism as well as practicing communications, marketing and graphic design professionals will judge all entries.



### Scoring

Judges consider the completeness of the entry forms and whether entrants followed all instructions. The effectiveness of entries in achieving the stated goal will be heavily weighted in the scoring. Evaluations will be based on absolute scores rather than a comparison of entries.

Entries scoring between 90-100 points qualify for the Gold Award. Entries scoring between 80-89 points qualify for the Silver Award. Judges will not give an award in a classification/category if no entries meet these scores. The judges will award the Edgar F. Chesnutt Award to the cooperative whose entry receives the highest score of all entries in the Best Total Communication Program category, regardless of classification size. The judges will not provide feedback on entries unless entrants check the box on the entry form and pay the additional fee at the time of entry.



## Co-op Classifications

For judging purposes, cooperatives are divided into five classifications, based on the number of meters served, and whether a cooperative is a distribution co-op, or another type as follows:

**Distribution Cooperative: 1-20,000 meters**

**Distribution Cooperative: 20,001-50,000 meters**

**Distribution Cooperative: 50,001-90,000 meters**

**Distribution Cooperative: more than 90,000 meters**

**Statewide Association, G&T or Service Member**



## Award Information, Notification and Award Recognition

### Award Information

Awards will include individual winner's names for Best News Story, Best Feature Story, Best Column and Best Photo.

All other categories will feature the name of the winning organization only. All winners have the option to purchase additional awards after CONNECT for those who assisted them with the winning entry. Names may be added at that time.

### Notification

Winners will receive a listing of all winning entries via email by mid-March. At that time, winners in categories requiring a hard copy sample will be notified of the deadline for receipt and any other pertinent details.

### Award Recognition

The Council of Rural Electric Communicators hosts a Spotlight on Excellence reception recognizing Spotlight on Excellence Award winners during the CONNECT conference. Details will be provided after notification of winners. Awards can be picked up at CONNECT. Winners who can't attend the conference must notify the administrator in advance so their awards will be mailed to them at no charge. Otherwise, non-attending winners who don't notify the administrator in advance will be billed for the shipping cost of their awards.



## Categories and Criteria

### Writing Entries

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#### 1. Best News Story (*at-large category*)

External, internal or industry announcement. Differs from a feature story in that its focus is on news, rather than narrative. Only individual news stories should be submitted, so if the story is part of a series, please submit only one story per entry. Syndicated, borrowed or reprinted material is not eligible, nor are pieces written by freelancers, consultants or agencies.

**What to submit:** The news release/story in the publication where it appeared in PDF format.

#### 2. Best Feature Story (*at-large category*)

In-depth, interpretive coverage of a subject, or an entertaining, colorful single story of a subject that informs the reader. Differs from a news story in that its focus is on narrative, rather than on news. Only individual feature stories should be submitted, so if the story is part of a series, please submit only one story per entry. Syndicated, borrowed or reprinted material is not eligible, nor are pieces written by freelancers, consultants or agencies.

**What to submit:** The story in the publication where it appeared in PDF format.



### **3. Best Column *(at-large category)***

Manager's columns, informational columns such as energy advisor updates, external or internal editorials, etc., can be submitted in this category. Only one column should be entered per entry. Syndicated, borrowed or reprinted material is not eligible, nor are pieces written by freelancers, consultants or agencies.

*What to submit:* The story in the publication where it appeared in PDF format.

### **4. Best External News Publication *(hard copy sample from Gold winner required)***

A newspaper or publication produced regularly for members or related audiences. Use this category to submit any external news publication including newspapers, magazines, newsletters and newsletters incorporated as part of another publication. Syndicated, borrowed or reprinted material is not eligible, nor are pieces written by freelancers, consultants or agencies.

*What to submit:* Either a direct URL leading to PDFs of the three best issues Dec. 2018-Nov. 2019 (If semi-annual, submit two), or upload the PDFs. Uploaded PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB and may be split into four 25MB files.

### **5. Best Internal News Publication**

Includes internal newsletters aimed at directors, employees or related audiences. Use this category to submit any internal newsletter, newspaper, magazine or newsletter incorporated as part of another publication. Syndicated, borrowed or reprinted material is not eligible, nor are pieces written by freelancers, consultants or agencies.

*What to submit:* Either a URL leading directly to PDFs of the three best issues Dec. 2018-Nov. 2019 (If semiannual, submit two), or upload the PDFs. Uploaded PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB and may be split into four 25MB files. E-newsletters should be submitted in Category 8.

### **6a. Best Special Publication-Small *(hard copy sample from Gold winner required)***

One to eight pages (single sheet entries, bill inserts, small brochures, folders, etc.). Infrequent print materials for internal and/or external audiences such as brochures, statement stuffers, quarterly reports, handbooks and mail pieces.

*What to submit:* Either a URL leading to PDFs of a sample or samples according to how often it was produced during the year or upload the PDFs. PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB, split into four 25MB files.

### **6b. Best Special Publication-Large *(hard copy sample from Gold winner required)***

More than eight pages (larger brochures, books, etc.). Infrequent print materials for internal and/or external audiences such as brochures, statement stuffers, quarterly reports, handbooks, mail pieces and employee and promotional "annual reports." Special editions of newsletters should be submitted in Category 4 or 5. Calendars do better if entered in Category 12.

*What to submit:* Online, provide either a URL leading to PDFs of a sample, or upload the PDFs. PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB, split into four 25MB files. Also send one hard copy sample of the publication to the Spotlight on Excellence Administrator at the address provided on page four.

### **7. Best Annual Report to Members *(hard copy sample from Gold winner required)***

Targeted to the cooperative's membership, the annual report should effectively communicate the organization's mission, personality and required financial information.

*What to submit:* Online, provide either a URL leading to PDFs of a sample, or upload the PDFs. PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB, split into four 25MB files. Also send one hard copy sample of the publication to the Spotlight on Excellence Administrator at the address provided on page four.



## Digital Entries

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### 8. Most Innovative Use of Digital Communication

Digital communication used in creative, innovative ways. Includes podcasts, webinars, videos two minutes or less and produced exclusively for online use, etc. Entries can include one or more directly-related components for interaction, education, information, advertisement, promotion or e-commerce.

**What to submit:** URL and the password, if necessary. Email pieces, PowerPoint-style presentations and electronic annual reports should be submitted in PDF format. Campaigns should be submitted under Category 16. Uploaded PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB, split into four 25MB files.

### 9. Best Use of Social Media (*at-large category*)

Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter or any combination of social media platforms that were successful for your cooperative.

**What to submit:** PDFs or jpegs containing the elements you used in your campaign or program. Uploaded PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB, split into four 25MB files.

### 10. Best Digital Storytelling

Emphasis on how well the message is conveyed, or story told; linkage to intended goals for video/distribution strategy as it relates to target audience(s). Tightly-edited, well-paced programs running longer than two minutes.

**What to submit:** Either a URL for the program and script, or an uploaded file and a script in a PDF or Word format, along with any special instructions for viewing. Videos with unscripted interviews may submit storyboards in place of a script. Uploaded PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB, split into four 25MB files.

## Artistic/Design/Other Entries

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### 11. Best Photo (*at-large category*)

The black and white or color photograph must have been taken by a system employee and used by the organization for publication, display or presentation. Photos by freelancers or agencies, or photos taken for an organizational contest, are not allowed. Note: Winning photos will be added to NRECA's libraries and may be used in future projects.

**What to submit:** A hi-res jpeg of the photo and a PDF or screen shot for proof of publication. A URL leading to the photo and proof of publication is also acceptable. Uploaded PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB, split into four 25MB files.

### 12. Best Wild Card (*hard copy sample from Gold winner required*)

Any communication or marketing effort that does not fit another category, such as speeches, calendars, displays, specialty items, posters, tent cards, coffee mugs, etc.

**What to submit:** Either a URL that leads to photos or scans of samples in a PDF format, or the PDFs themselves. Uploaded PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB, split into four 25MB files.



### **13. Best Graphic Design** *(hard copy sample from Gold winner required)*

Entries can include any printed materials (newsletters, brochures, forms, ads, calendars, etc.), logos and illustrations, charts, graphs and visual presentations. Signage and car wrap designs can also be entered here. The focus should be on illustrative work rather than overall design.

**What to submit:** Either a URL leading to photos or scans of samples as used with the targeted audience or PDFs of the illustration, including its final usage as photos or scans. Uploaded PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB, split into four 25MB files.

### **14. Best Individual Ad**

A single advertising piece (print, video, audio or billboard) used to promote an idea, service or product to a targeted audience through paid media. Brochures should be submitted in Category 6. HTML pieces should be submitted in Category 8. Judges will look for excellent writing, graphics, design, production, quality and creativity.

**What to submit:** Print-style ads should be submitted in PDF format; audio/visual style ads should be referenced by a link to their online site if possible. If not, upload an mpeg4 file. All entries, regardless of medium, must be accompanied by proof of publication in PDF format. Uploaded PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB, split into four 25MB files. If you want to send a series of ads, each individual ad must be entered separately.

### **15. Best Event** *(hard copy sample from Gold winner required)*

Highlights an event to celebrate a co-op milestone or to inform an internal or external audience. Examples include a grand opening, special celebrations, kids' programs or a meeting or conference. Annual meetings can be submitted in this category.

**What to submit:** Key materials used for the event, including key promotional materials. Include a summary that states the purpose of the event, how the program was implemented, and results and how they were measured, including number of attendees. The summary is limited to 500 words. Submit photographs of components, such as displays, as well as up to five photos of the event itself either by URL leading to the complete entry, or in PDF format. Uploaded PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB, split into four 25MB files.

## **Featured Entry**

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### **16. Best Total Communication Program and Edgar F. Chesnutt Award** *(hard copy sample from Gold winner required)*

Either a short-term campaign or long-term program designed to inform, educate and/or persuade, or designed to promote or seek to obtain an action or consent on a thought, concept or idea through specific objectives, budget and results. Entries should be program-specific, rather than a department's work plan.

**What to submit:** All materials used in the campaign or program. Include specific budgets, target audience information and any restrictions. You will need to summarize the program describing your Research, Action, Communication, and Evaluation steps. Be as specific as possible within the word limits of the entry form online. Either provide a URL leading to the complete entry package, or upload photos and support materials in PDF format. Uploaded PDFs must be no larger than 100 MB, split into four 25MB files.