

SPOTLIGHT ON EXCELLENCE QUICK START CALL FOR ENTRIES GUIDE

This quick start guide is a consolidated version of the full Spotlight on Excellence call for entries document that's on the [Spotlight web page](#). If you are already familiar with the Spotlight program and entry process, this document provides important program updates for the current award cycle, current award categories, and payment information.

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Highlights for 2025

- We are excited to announce the roll-out of an early bird discount! See details on page 7.
- All payments and entries must be submitted using the online form on the Spotlight on Excellence Awards web page on cooperative.com by the deadline of December 5, 2024.
- Work submitted must have been implemented from November 22, 2023 through December 1, 2024. *(The only exceptions to the stated timeframes are entries in Best Strategic Communications Campaign, Best External Event or Best Internal Engagement that are planned/developed in one year and implemented or evaluated in another year.)*
- All entries will be submitted digitally via the Award Force platform. However, hard copy materials must be submitted to the Spotlight on Excellence Administrator postmarked no later than December 5, 2024, for the following award categories:
 - Best Special Publication – Small (1-8 pages)
 - Best Special Publication – Larger (8+ pages)
 - Best Annual Impact Report

Submit required hard copies to the Spotlight on Excellence Administrator:
 Talia Hamm
 Blue Wagon Group
 1108 Claude Street
 Dallas, TX, 75203

Questions? Please email spotlightonexcellence@nreca.coop.

2025 Award Cycle Deadlines and Key Dates

Early Bird Entry Period.....October 10, 2024 through October 31, 2024
 Entries Accepted.....October 10, 2024 through December 5, 2024
 Judging.....December 16, 2024 through February 3, 2025
 Winners Notified.....Week of February 24, 2025
 Winners Announced.....April 1, 2025

Award Categories

Award categories labeled “At-Large” are not separated and judged by co-op classification; all entries are judged together. NRECA and the CREC determined the quality of work in these categories is not affected by the size of the cooperative or its budget, so they are judged as one group. *Please note: Wholly-owned subsidiaries may not enter At-Large categories.*

Update for 2025 – Formatting Guide - Please be sure to review our formatting guide on the [Spotlight web page](#). It provides guidance regarding the required format(s) for your entry materials, what to upload, if hard copies are required, and any special notes for your category.

WRITING ENTRIES: Category and Description

1. Best News Story (At-Large Category)

Honors a time-sensitive external, internal or industry announcement. It differs from a feature story in that it is of immediate interest and focuses on facts and straight news reporting rather than narrative. Anything in the news report that could reasonably be disputed should be attributed. Syndicated, borrowed, or reprinted material is not eligible, nor are pieces written by freelancers, consultants or agencies.

2. Best Feature Story (At-Large Category)

Honors in-depth, interpretive coverage of a subject, or an entertaining, colorful story that informs the reader. It differs from a news story in that it is narrative in nature and shows significant depth, insight and/or new understanding of a topic, rather than focusing on the straight facts. It is not time-sensitive and is often evergreen. 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.

3. Best Column or Blog Post (At-Large Category)

Honors an article or blog post that is produced regularly. It is typically written in the first- or second person (I or you), and often includes the writer’s point of view. Examples may include first-person manager or employee columns/posts, external or internal editorials, etc. Only one column or blog post should be included per entry. Syndicated, borrowed or reprinted material is not eligible, nor are pieces written by freelancers, consultants or agencies.

4. Best External News Publication

Honors print or digital newsletters, magazines or other publications produced regularly to deliver news and information to co-op members or related audiences. Use this category to submit any external news publication incorporated as part of another publication (such as local pages in your statewide magazine).

5. Best Internal News Publication

Honors print or digital internal newsletters, magazines or other publications produced regularly to deliver news and information to co-op directors, employees or related audiences. Newsletters or publications produced by third parties are not eligible.

6a. Best Special Publication – Small (1 to 8 pages)

Honors infrequent print materials for internal and/or external audiences such as one-sheets, small brochures, quarterly reports, handbooks, mail pieces, etc. that do not exceed eight pages.

6b. Best Special Publication – Large (More than 8 pages)

Honors infrequent print materials for internal and/or external audiences such as books, calendars, larger brochures, quarterly reports, handbooks, mail pieces, special employee or promotional reports, etc. that are more than eight pages long. Special editions of newsletters should be submitted in Category 4 or 5.

7. Best Annual or Impact Report

Honors print or digital annual reports that effectively communicate the organization's mission, accomplishments and required financial information to the cooperative's membership. An impact report may contain some of the same elements as an annual report but focuses specifically on the co-op's impact in the community and conveys critical co-op achievements.

DIGITAL ENTRIES: Category and Description

8. Best Web-Based Project

Honors the work of designers, developers and/or content creatives who create a visually appealing, interactive, web-based resource to inform, engage and/or educate internal/external audiences. Emphasis is placed on exceptional design, quality of content, usability and functionality. Examples may include a website, section or web page. It must be an original digital asset, website or web page created by a cooperative staff member; however, the use of pre-built templates is allowed.

9. Most Innovative Use of Digital Engagement

Use of digital tools and technology platforms to engage audiences in an informative, educational way. Entries can include one or more directly related components for interaction, education, information, advocacy, advertisement, promotion or e-commerce. Examples include email campaigns; podcasts and webinars that provide information or updates on a new product, service or timely announcement; an activity that gives users a virtual reality experience into the utility world; gamification of energy-saving initiatives; a custom mobile app (not already supplied by a vendor); chat programs; and other campaigns that personalize digital content. Social media posts should be entered in Category 10. Social media campaigns should be entered in Category 11.

DIGITAL ENTRIES: Category and Description

10. Best Social Media Post

A single social media post featuring original content. The post should be creative, clearly showcase information and drive social engagement. Content cannot originate from a third-party, whether a contractor, vendor or online source. Social media campaigns should be entered in Category 11.

11. Best Social Media Campaign

Honors a strategic social-media campaign using original content that has clear goals, strategy and measurable results. Campaigns can include posts on Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, X (formerly Twitter) or any combination of social media platforms. Examples include storm response campaigns, public education efforts on various topics or other social campaigns to engage target audiences in unique and creative ways. Content cannot originate from a third-party, whether a contractor, vendor or online source.

12. Best Short-Form Video (Two Minutes or Less)

Honors an originally produced, short-form video that clearly/effectively conveys a message or tells a story, links to intended goals for video/distribution strategy for the target audience(s), is tightly-edited/well-paced and creative.

13. Best Long-Form Video (More Than Two Minutes)

Honors an originally produced, long-form video that clearly/effectively conveys a message or tells a story, links to intended goals for video/distribution strategy for the target audience(s), is tightly-edited/well-paced and creative.

ARTISTIC/DESIGN/OTHER ENTRIES: Category Descriptions

14. Best Photo

Honors a strong and engaging photograph (in black and white or color) that has been taken by an employee of the organization and used for publication, display or presentation. The photo should convey great composition, lighting, emotion and subject matter. Photos by freelancers or agencies, or other third parties are not allowed. *Note: Winning photos will be added to NRECA's libraries and may be used in future projects.*

15. Best Graphic Design

Honors print or digital materials (newsletters, brochures, ads, calendars, etc.), logos, illustrations, charts, graphs/infographics, signage, car wraps, visual presentation themes and branding assets, etc. that demonstrate high production quality, capture attention and draw the viewer's eye to critical information. It must be original work designed by a cooperative staff member.

16. Best Digital or Print Ad

Honors a single advertising piece (print, in-bill, digital, audio or outdoor) that demonstrates exemplary writing, creative graphics/ design, and high production quality to promote an idea, service or product to a targeted audience through paid media. Brochures should be submitted in Category 6.

17. Best External Event

Honors an external event, program or live production that engages the public to inform external audience(s) or celebrate a co-op milestone. This can include an annual meeting, grand opening, special celebrations, youth programs, other meeting or conference. Internal programs should be submitted in Category 18.

18. Best Internal Engagement

Honors an internal program or event that engages internal co-op audiences, including co-op employees or Board members. This can include an employee appreciation event, a co-op wide training day, milestone celebration, etc.; or an internally developed program focusing on employee recognition, leadership, career mentorship, healthy living or other topic that promotes employee engagement or development. External events should be submitted in Category 17.

19. Best Wild Card

Honors any communication or marketing effort that does not fit another category, such as exhibits and displays, specialty item(s) that shows originality and has an intentional goal in promoting a co-op message, and other items or programs that have an educational or entertaining appeal. Mass vendor-produced items that simply feature co-op logos applied to mugs, novelties, hats, T-shirts, etc. are not eligible.

FEATURED ENTRY: Category Descriptions**20. Best Strategic Communications Campaign and Edgar F. Chesnutt Award**

Honors an internal or external initiative that features either a short- or long-term, multi-channel communications campaign designed to inform, educate, persuade or promote an action (e.g., public relations campaign, program rollout, etc.) through specific objectives, budget and results. The campaign can include print, digital and physical elements. Entries should be program-specific, rather than a department's work plan. You will need to summarize the Research, Action, Communication, and Evaluation steps used for the campaign as specifically as possible within the word limits of the online entry form.

Entry Fees & Payment Information

Early Bird Discount

Early Bird Entry Period: Between October 10 and October 31, 2024, entrants will be able to purchase and submit early bird entries.

We are excited to announce an Early Bird discount for the 2025 awards cycle! Entrants will receive a 20% discount (\$96 per entry) for entries purchased and submitted in the early bird period. Simply follow the same payment link on the [Spotlight web page](#). Early bird entries must be purchased and fully submitted by the deadline, October 31, 2024. If entrants would like to submit additional entries after October 31, they must be purchased at the standard entry price.

Entrants will not be able to edit early bird entries after October 31, 2024. Entries will therefore be judged as is on that date.

Regular Entry Fee Period & Other Payment Information

Regular Entry Fee Period: November 1 through December 5, 2024

The regular entry fee for all categories is \$120. All payments and entries must be submitted using the online form on the Spotlight on Excellence Awards web page on [cooperative.com](#) by the deadline of December 5, 2024. Once payment is received, you will receive a confirmation email with a link to the entry form.

Refund Policy for Entry Changes and Cancellations

Entries, cancellation and changes in payments will be accepted until the deadline. A cancelled entry is fully refundable. If your entry is disqualified for any reason, you will not receive a refund.

Cancellations and additional entries can be made online. Visit [cooperative.com](#) > Member Center > My Registrations. Any other changes must be submitted in writing to the Accounts Receivable department at accountsreceivable@nreca.coop.

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.

Please note: The online payment portal and submission platform will accept entries submitted until December 5, 2024 at 11:59 PM Pacific. However, staff within the Accounts Receivable department at NRECA will only be able to assist you until 5:00 PM Eastern that day. No extensions will be given. Please plan accordingly.

Submission Information

- All entries must be submitted using the online submission platform, Award Force. You will receive a link to Award Force in the confirmation email that is sent to you after your payment has been received. Please read all instructions carefully and provide all information requested before proceeding with your submission.
- Entries, both in-progress or already submitted, can be revised, withdrawn and re-submitted up until the deadline on December 5, 2024.
- An employee of the cooperative must submit all entries. Agencies, freelancers or consultants are not permitted to pay for or enter submissions.
- Organizations can submit more than one entry per category but may not submit different editions of the same publication more than once in the Best Internal or Best External News Publication. Duplicates will be disqualified.
- All required fields must be completed for a successful submission. If you are missing required information, the Award Force platform will prompt you to complete the required field before proceeding.
- Entered work using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to assist with planning or ideation are permitted; however, the work may not be a complete creation of AI. If AI was used in development of the entered work, the use of such tools must be disclosed.
- If a password is necessary to access the hosting site, it must be included with the URL. Passwords and access must stay active until after the Connect Conference in May 2025.