Award Winning Application FAQs

Every year, NEAFCS receives numerous award applications from our members. Every year, some programs are selected as national winners, while others are not. Why do some award applications succeed where others do not? Hopefully, this will help guide your award application to the top!

What are the guidelines for applying for awards?

Award criteria and the application process are on the NEAFCS Web Site at neafcs.org. Select and click on the Awards category on the home page, and you will get the main page for Awards and Recognition. Go to the Awards Manual. First review the General Eligibility Requirements on pages 3 – 5 of the Awards Manual. These requirements apply to all awards categories. Next, select the award you are interested in applying for to obtain more information about what is needed to successfully submit your application.

Make sure you carefully follow the specific guidelines and criteria, i.e., years of service, etc. These are different for each award and individuals who do not follow the guidelines will be disqualified.

How do I know which Awards category works best for my program?

Not all programs fit in all categories. Try to find the right award for your program. If you have questions, please contact your affiliate Vice President for Awards and Recognition.

Do all awards need a letter of recommendation?

No. Requirements for some awards have changed so check the Awards Manual carefully to see if your award application requires a letter of recommendation. If your letter of recommendation is going directly to the Awards chair in your state, it might be a good idea for you to check and see if it has gotten there, so that your award is not disqualified.

How do I apply with the on-line award application?

The on-line award application simplifies the award application process for members and Affiliate Awards Chairs. Only award applications submitted on-line will be accepted.

Completing the application process couldn't be any easier! Just follow the directions on the On-line Awards Application page and you will have the application done in no time. After your application is accepted, you will be directed to print it out and a confirmation email will be sent to you from the National Office. Send the signed hard copy of the on-line awards application form, and your award materials to your Affiliate Awards Chair. The on-line form should serve as the cover of your application materials. This is the only copy of the on-line form that you need to send.

How do I submit a team application?

Important Note: Individual and team entries are judged as one group. There are not separate individual and team awards in any awards category. If you are entering a team application, you will be able to insert team member names on the on-line award application. Please make sure that names are spelled correctly. It is up to the team leader to make sure that all identified NEAFCS members on a team

have paid their dues no later than February 1st, or the application will be disqualified. Additional team members cannot be added after the **February 15th awards deadline**.

What is important to emphasize in my award application?

Impact! This is much more important than the number of participants that were involved. How did this program make a difference? Is the information current? Highlight impact accomplishments first. What are the educational aspects of the program? Why is your program important? What did the participants learn? Did they gain new skills? Were there behavior changes? Make sure your award application shows that your program made a difference to the people it reached!

Evaluation! Make sure you know how to interpret the evaluations. In the past, judges have noted a lack of interpretation of the evaluation or understanding of the impact on the audience. How did the research impact an Extension program? Did you base your project on existing research? Make sure you can detail how your program applied the related research. Are the results valid? What was the sample population? What are the demographics of the community? Is it rural or urban? Fifty participants in an urban area might not sound impressive, but 50 participants in a rural location might be half of the clientele! Use actual percentages, not statements such as "a few" or "most". List results in frequency value of percentages. Make sure your evaluation and/or impact data are understandable.

What else can I do to send in a winning application?

Be creative! Make your application worth reading. Plan ahead to give yourself enough time to revise and rewrite. Proof read your application! Many times, the judges have a difficult time deciding how to rank the entries. Spelling errors, sloppy applications, or grammatical errors sometimes are the deciding factor for points awarded. Have someone proof your application. Before you send, double-check your grammar, style, and the ease of understanding the points you are trying to make. Be neat. Send it in on time!

Make sure the points you make in your application fit the award for which you are applying. For instance, if you are applying for the **Program of Excellence Through Research Award**, make sure your application includes supporting information about using the results of the research in future Extension programs. **Radio** spots need to have a personal feel, not sound like a programmed lecture. Try to avoid using strict scripts. **Community Programs** need to show collaboration, not co-sponsorship; with impact shown, not just the number of participants. **Newsletters** need quality style and format, with strong and interesting content so the reader will read it to the end.

How much do I need to document as references?

It is fine to use all kinds of resources for the information put together, but they all need to be identified. Judges need to know what was adapted, what was revised, and what was written by the applicant(s). Make sure to specify how much was written by the applicant(s) and how much was adapted, as well as which part of the curriculum was not original. Make sure your reference list is written in the correct format. Some judges may lower your score if your references list is not written in the correct way.

Should I send extra materials to help support my application?

Please make sure to follow the specifications as outlined in the Awards Manual. Support information sent that is not required or exceeds the page requirements will not be judged and may result in a lower score.

What is the 30 word summary for?

The 30 word summary is used to prepare the Annual Session script for recognition of award winners. The summary is not included in the judging process. It is important that you follow the word count guidelines. If the summary is edited, it may not emphasize the award winners' successes in the preferred manner. Please use the word count in your word processing program or count the words manually. It is also important that members use original and creative descriptions for their word summary. Although it is helpful to look at past award booklets to get an idea how to write a summary, it is more important that your 30 word summary is as original as your work.

How should I package my award application?

Check the Awards Manual at neafcs.org for the requirements for each specific application. Most are required to be inserted in a clear plastic folder or vu-notebook. Please use a clear folder instead of the colored ones, as it is much easier for the judge to see your application. There are many different types of folders available, please choose the type that is appropriate for your application. Make sure that if you have a video tape, DVD or CD, that it is labeled and secure in the sleeve and that it won't fall out, but also try to make sure your supporting information doesn't get folded and wrinkled in the folder. Label each piece in case they get separated in shipping. Place a signed, print copy of the online entry form as the **first page/cover** of the award packet and visible without opening the cover.

What does the judging sheet mean?

Entries are given scores, much like the judging process for 4-H'ers at the county fair! Different categories in the application are judged, such as meeting page requirements, year requirements, impact of program, neatness of application, etc. These are all given point values, which are then added together for the final score. This is not the same as test scores – there is no "passing" or "failing". This helps the applications to be ranked for regional and national awards. Looking at the individual scores within the judging sheet may be more helpful for determining what the judge saw as a program's strength or weakness.

There are minimum scores for award applications to proceed on to the next level. 80 points is the minimum needed for a Regional Award and 85 for a National Award. This is on each individual judging sheet, not an average of the two. For instance, if on one of your judging sheets states you received 97 points and the other one showed 80 points, your award could be considered for a Regional Award but not a National Award, even though an average of the two scores would be 88.5. Both judge scores will need to meet the criteria for minimum scores.

Can I get my award application back?

Yes! If you are a national winner your award application will go to Annual Conference for display at the awards table within the exhibits hall. You are welcome to pick it up at the end of the conference or ask a fellow member to do it for you. You may also select the pay for return option when you complete the online award application. Your award will be mailed back to you at your expense.

Any other last-minute suggestions?

Make sure you know your affiliate submission deadline. Since the VP for Awards & Recognition must have all applications to her postmarked by February 15th be mindful of when you have to get your

application to your affiliate Awards VP. We are very fortunate to have sponsors for our awards. Make sure to thank them if you are fortunate enough to be selected as a national award winner. And if you aren't selected this year, look at the judge's comments you received. Is there something you can correct on your application and send it in again next year? Don't give up. We are all winners with NEAFCS, and every year, we get to try again!

Resources:

Judges Tips for Award Preparation, by Laurie Stevens, NC, for the Training Task Force, NEAFCS
Awards – How to Apply for Them, by Carolyn Gilles, PA, for the Training Task Force, NEAFCS
AWARDS – A "How to Apply" Guide - Compiled by Susan E. Cosgrove, State Awards Committee Member, NEAFCS, Mississippi Affiliate, November 2003.

Written by Amy Peterson, 2004-2005 VP for Awards & Recognition
Revised by Marsha Lockard, 2008-2009 VP for Awards & Recognition
Revised by Carol Chandler, 2010 – 2011 VP for Awards & Recognition

Contact your affiliate or the national Vice President for Awards and Recognition with any further questions.