

2026 New York State Tourism Excellence Awards

Categories, Descriptions & Requirements

Your program/project nomination must reference activity and outcomes that occurred between June 1, 2024, and December 31, 2025, and originated in New York State.

All nominees for individual recognition (Leadership Categories) must work and reside in New York State. Results reported for your nomination must be attributable to the program or project nominated.

Budget Clarification: If you are nominating a program/project (not an individual), you will be asked to indicate whether the nominated organization's *total annual operating budget* falls under or exceeds \$500,000. This distinction allows smaller organizations to compete equitably with larger organizations that may have significantly higher yearly operating budgets. This helps us recognize excellence appropriately across organizations of varying sizes, not by the nominated program/project budget.

List of Categories (in alphabetical order)

Excellence in International Tourism Marketing: New York Tourism Ambassador

Excellence in Leadership: Career/Lifetime Achievement

Excellence in Overall Tourism Marketing

Private Sector Entity

DMOs, TPAs (county level), and other level Tourism Marketing Organizations

Regional or State Level Efforts

Excellence in Sustainable Stewardship: Champions of Change

Excellence in Tourism Equity and Inclusion

Excellence in Tourism Marketing Campaigns, Projects & Programs

Public Relations Campaign

Printed Materials

Digital Marketing Campaign

Creative Use of Data to Drive Success Visitor Service

Innovations & Strategies to Address New/Unique/Changing Markets

Trails & Itineraries

The Great Outdoors of NYS

Excellence in Young Professional Leadership

The New Yorker Award

Platinum Standard Award (*not a separate category*)

Excellence in International Tourism Marketing: New York Tourism Ambassador

Nominees are those individuals, communities, or organizations engaged in innovative, new, unique and/or highly effective initiatives targeting increased international visitation to New York State. Travel trade partnership development, paid media campaigns, social media outreach, public relations initiatives, new itinerary promotion and or new market introduction are some examples of qualifying work.

Category Requirements:

- Outline of vision, strategy and plan of execution
- Budget information
- Relevant materials, creative, etc including multimedia as applicable
- Identify key stakeholders, partners and their involvement in the project
- Provide qualitative or quantitative results.

Excellence in Leadership: Career/Lifetime Achievement

This award honors career achievement for a tourism professional demonstrating excellence in leadership through outstanding initiative, impact of their work, and inspiration of others.

Note: If multiple submissions of the same nominee are entered, the judges will determine the strongest submission to be judged amongst the other nominations

Excellence in Leadership Requirements:

- Open to professionals of any age
- ***No self-nominations are permitted***
- Include the following where applicable:
 - o Number of direct or indirect reporting staff
 - o Documentation and photos of programs or projects lead, testimonials from those individuals that were directly impacted by the nominee's leadership skills.

Excellence in Overall Tourism Marketing

Nominations for organizations and entities in this category should include all aspects of their tourism marketing programs and initiatives, regardless if there is a unifying project theme.

Nominated project information shall include details of a nominee's planning and implementation of marketing strategies that are creative and innovative, and resulted in increased attendance, public and private partnerships, media exposure, website activity and/or consumer response. Eligible entities include organizations/entities of all kinds - attractions, shops, events, hotels, restaurants, associations, government agencies. destinations or regions.

Requirements: Documentation of an organization's current marketing plan, implementation examples and quantitative or qualitative results. Implementation examples may include social media, website, print advertising, familiarization tours, packaged itineraries, tourism impact surveys, and television and radio spots.

Excellence in Overall Tourism Marketing Categories:

- ❖ **Private Sector Entity**
- ❖ **DMOs, TPAs (county level) and other level Tourism Marketing Organizations**
- ❖ **Regional or State Level Efforts (Regional TPAs, Tourism Marketing Organizations/Associations, State Agencies, etc)**

Excellence in Sustainable Stewardship: Champions of Change

Nominees are those individuals, communities, or organizations who are working toward more sustainable practices in their organization. Business or Vendor partners who are encouraging more conscientious, low-impact visitor behavior, promoting the appreciation of local cultures, supporting local conservation efforts, reducing carbon emissions, implementing sustainable benefits to local communities or participating in local decision-making efforts that support greener communities.

Category Requirements:

- Program budget information required
- Project prospectus and/or photos
- Demonstrate project's vision, strategy and plan of execution.
- Identify key stakeholders, partners and their involvement in the project
- Provide qualitative or quantitative results.

The attraction or destination should be at least partially operational and accessible to the public anytime between **July 1, 2024 and December 31, 2025 (18 months)**.

Excellence in Tourism Equity & Inclusion

Nominees are those individuals, communities, or organizations that recognize and seek to advance Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion (D.E.A.I.) practices for the travel, tourism and hospitality industry. Initiatives may include workforce development, board building, marketing, or creating a more welcoming experience for diverse audiences including customers, visitors, employees and guests.

Category Requirements:

- Provide the project's vision, strategy and plan of execution.
- Describe the implementation of your D.E.A.I. initiative in action
- Identify key stakeholders, partners and their involvement in the project
- Provide qualitative or quantitative results to this point in time and describe how you plan to sustain these efforts for the future.

The initiative should have been undertaken anytime between **June 1, 2024, and December 31, 2025 (18 months)**.

Excellence in Tourism Marketing Campaigns, Projects & Programs

Nominated projects for each award are specific components of an entity's overall marketing initiatives. Nominated project information shall include details of a nominee's planning and implementation of marketing strategies that are creative, innovative, and resulted in increased attendance, public and private partnerships, media exposure, website activity and/or consumer response. Eligible entities include attractions, events, hotels, restaurants, shops, organizations, destinations or regions.

Requirements: Documentation of an organization's current marketing plan, implementation examples, and quantitative or qualitative results should be included.

Excellence in Tourism Marketing Campaigns, Projects & Programs Categories:

- ❖ **Public Relations Campaign:** Public relations campaigns can be for general, niche travel audiences, represent special events, crisis/disaster management, or general/overall tourism promotion, but must focus on a single theme.
- ❖ **Printed Materials:** Materials considered for this award can include visitor guides, advertising pieces, brochures, postcards, etc. Additional metrics in the documentation should include print quantity, distribution and audience. Entries must include one (1) electronic version of the printed piece/s.

- ❖ **Digital Marketing Campaign:** Nominated projects for this award should demonstrate creativity, originality, innovation and results-driven planning and implementation for digital outreach including (but not limited to) websites, digital advertising, email marketing, social media usage, etc.
- ❖ **Creative Use of Data to Drive Success:** Nominations should demonstrate the innovative use of market intelligence in informing successful campaigns, projects and/or programs.
- ❖ **Visitor Service:** This award goes to a destination marketing organization, community, association, agency or attraction that has worked strategically to enrich or enhance visitor experiences from the ‘welcome’ through the ‘come back and visit us again’.
- ❖ **Innovations & Strategies to Address New/Unique/Changing Markets:** Nominations should demonstrate a creative, innovative and tactical approach towards addressing emerging markets. Submissions should consider including links to online features, qualitative and quantitative documentation where available, anecdotal feedback/endorsements, etc.
- ❖ **Trails & Itineraries:** Nominated projects should focus on the developing, introducing and/or marketing a multi-destination itinerary benefiting multiple organizations, businesses, communities and/or regions.
- ❖ **The Great Outdoors of NYS:** Nominated marketing programs should highlight New York’s robust outdoor assets, experiences, sports, activities and unique natural resources.

Excellence in Tourism Stewardship: Shaping A Better Future

Nominees are those individuals, communities, or organizations that have fostered responsible, sustainable economic development activities and programs that enhance a destination for visitors and residents alike. Examples include revitalizing a downtown, adaptive reuse of a historic structure (e.g. to be used as a visitor center, museum, restaurant or lodging facility), and/or encouraging development of a tourism attraction or trail. Also, may include legislative advocacy, environmental protection or social causes, training programs (not related to visitor service), special events.

Category Requirements:

- Program budget information required
- Project prospectus and/or photos
- Demonstrate project's vision, strategy and plan of execution.
- Identify key stakeholders, partners and their involvement in the project
- Provide qualitative or quantitative results.
- The attraction or destination should be at least partially operational and accessible to the public anytime between **June 1, 2024 and December 31, 2025.**

Excellence in Young Professional Leadership

This award recognizes the brightest rising star in New York State Tourism. These young colleagues are the ones that have captured your attention because of their outstanding abilities, shown a strong commitment to increasing their expertise in the travel and tourism industry, and have demonstrated a capacity to become a future leader in our industry. Tell us about them.

Note: If multiple submissions of the same nominee are entered, the judges will determine the strongest submission to be judged amongst the other nominations

Excellence in Young Professional Leadership Category Requirements:

- Young professionals (age 35 or under) who match the above attributes
- ***No self-nominations are permitted***
- Nominees must have worked in the tourism industry for at least two years

The New Yorker Award

This special category acknowledges pro bono or extraordinary service to advance and/or support New York State tourism. Nominees (people and/or organizations) in this award go above and beyond to support and/or benefit New York State's tourism industry through demonstrated creativity, innovation, stewardship, and generosity. ***No self-nominations are permitted.***

Platinum Standard Award (not a separate category)

All entries will be considered for Platinum Standard recognition at the discretion of judges for entries in any category that establish 'best practice' standard and a benchmark of excellence. There can be more than one award or no award bestowed any given year.

Important Notes:

Preferential evaluation will be given to entities with programs and projects that demonstrate specific efforts to include diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in planning, development, and execution.

Not all categories/awards are guaranteed to have recipients. Please refer to our [FAQ page](#) for answers to frequently asked questions.