



2026 New York State Tourism Excellence Awards Categories, Descriptions, & Requirements

The New York State Tourism Excellence Awards is the premier recognition program for New York State's tourism industry. Nominating a program, project or person is a once-a-year opportunity to recognize the amazing work done every day to advance the tourism industry in New York State. [Nominate now.](#)

Program/Project Nominations: Must reference activity and outcomes that occurred between June 1, 2024, and December 31, 2025, originated and executed in New York State.

Individual Nominations: All nominees for the leadership categories must work and reside in New York State.

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 tourism 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 tourism operating budgets. This helps us recognize excellence appropriately across organizations of varying sizes, not by the nominated program/project budget.

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

Not all categories and awards are guaranteed to have recipients.

You may refer to our [FAQ page](#) for answers to frequently asked questions.

Full List of Categories and Subcategories

(in alphabetical order)

Excellence in Leadership: Career Achievement

Excellence in Tourism Marketing Campaigns, Projects & Programs

Subcategories:

- Creative for Tourism Marketing
- Digital Marketing
- Great Outdoors of New York State
- Innovations & Strategies to Address New/Unique/Changing Markets
- International Tourism Marketing
- Overall Tourism Marketing
- Printed Materials
- Public Relations Campaign
- Trails & Itineraries
- Using Data to Drive Success

Excellence in Transformational Tourism Stewardship:

Subcategories:

- Destination Development & Community Engagement
- Sustainable Stewardship
- Tourism Equity & Inclusion
- Tourism Advocacy
- Workforce Development

Excellence in Young Professional Leadership

The New Yorker Award

Platinum Standard Award

Category Descriptions & Requirements

(in alphabetical order)

Excellence in Leadership: Career Achievement

This award honors career achievement for a New York State 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

Category Requirements:

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

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.

Category Requirements:

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

Subcategories:

- **Creative for Tourism Marketing:** Nominations include concepts for integrative tourism marketing campaigns and tourism commercial/video for online or television, and should highlight the strategic thinking, concept development, and

creative execution behind the work, demonstrating originality, effectiveness, and alignment with campaign objectives.

- **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.
- **The Great Outdoors of NYS:** Nominated programs should highlight unique and effective marketing of New York's robust outdoor assets, experiences, sports, activities and unique natural resources.
- **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.
- **International Tourism Marketing:** Nominees are individuals, communities, or organizations engaged in innovative, new, unique and/or highly effective initiatives targeting increased international visitation to New York State.
- **Overall Tourism Marketing:** Nominations represent a comprehensive, integrated marketing demonstrating excellence across multiple disciplines. Submissions should reflect a cohesive strategy implemented over at least six months and incorporate a range of tactics. Entries must demonstrate strategic vision, innovation, measurable results, and overall impact.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Using Data to Drive Success:** Nominations should demonstrate the innovative use of market intelligence in informing successful campaigns, projects and/or programs.

Excellence in Transformational Tourism Stewardship

Nominees are individuals or organizations that have fostered responsible, sustainable destination development activities and programs that enhance a destination for visitors and residents alike. Examples may include downtown revitalization, historical structure repurposing, legislative advocacy, environmental protection, training programs, encouraging development of a tourism attraction or trail, etc.

Category Requirements:

- Nominations must demonstrate a vision, strategy, plan of execution
- Qualitative or quantitative results to this point in time and describe how you plan to sustain these efforts for the future

Subcategories:

- **Destination Development & Community Engagement:** Recognizes excellence in planning, development, or enhancement of tourism assets that strengthen a destination's appeal for both visitors and residents, with meaningful engagement of residents, businesses and community partners to ensure successful and sustainable tourism development. Nominees demonstrate inclusive, collaborative approaches that connect tourism to quality of life, civic pride, successfully bridging residents and visitors that contributes to long-term destination vitality and competitiveness. Eligible efforts may include resident engagement programs, community-driven tourism planning, cross-sector partnerships, volunteer initiatives, downtown revitalization tied to tourism, trail or corridor development, strategic investments that elevate the visitor experience while supporting community goals.
- **Sustainable Stewardship:** Nominees are those individuals, communities, or organizations who are working toward more sustainable practices in their organization such as encouraging more conscientious, low-impact visitor behavior, supporting local conservation efforts, reducing carbon emissions, etc.
- **Tourism Advocacy:** Recognizes demonstration in exceptional leadership advocating for the tourism industry at the local, regional, or state level. Nominees exemplify a commitment to elevating tourism's economic, social, and cultural value through policy engagement, funding advocacy, stakeholder education, or legislative initiatives that strengthen New York's tourism ecosystem.
- **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, such as workforce development, board building, marketing, or creating a more

welcoming experience for diverse audiences including customers, visitors, employees and guests.

- **Workforce Development:** Recognizes the advancement of New York State's tourism industry through effective workforce development strategies, demonstrating creativity in recruitment, retention, training, or career pathway development, and/or have established unique cross-sector collaborations that strengthen local tourism talent pipelines.

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.

Category Requirements:

- Young professionals (age 35 or under) who match the above attributes
- No self-nominations are permitted
- Nominees must have worked in the New York State 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 a benchmark of excellence.

There can be more than one Platinum Standard Award, or no award, bestowed any given year.