



2027 Awards Program Guide

Recognizing Excellence. Defining the Standard.

What's New in 2027

We've made several updates to simplify the submission process and improve the judging experience.

- One complimentary Entry Check (previously named DQ Review) is included with every submission.
 - Category-specific evaluation criteria have been added for every Achievement Award.
 - DEIA initiatives and short project timelines are now folded into every category's judging criteria. They are no longer standalone categories, because they can be considered in every submission.
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A Personal Invitation

Dear ADMEI Member,

One of the greatest privileges of my career has been getting to know the incredible people behind Destination Management Companies (DMCs). Over the years, I've had the opportunity to celebrate your successes, learn from your creativity, and witness the passion you bring to every program, every event, and every client.

I know that what you do isn't easy.

Behind every seamless arrival, unforgettable event, and once-in-a-lifetime experience are countless hours of planning, problem-solving, collaboration, and local expertise. Much of your best work happens behind the scenes, often without anyone realizing just how much it took to make everything look effortless.

That's one of the reasons this Awards Program is so important to me.

Your work deserves to be seen.

Not because every project wins an award, but because every submission helps tell the story of our profession. It showcases the creativity, innovation, resourcefulness, and professionalism that DMCs bring to clients and destinations every single day. It reminds our industry that exceptional experiences don't happen by accident...they happen because of people like you.

Whether you're preparing your first submission or your fifteenth, I hope you'll take this opportunity to celebrate your team and everything you've accomplished together. Don't focus on whether your project was the biggest or the most elaborate. Focus on the challenges you solved, the experiences you created, and the impact you made. Those are the stories that inspire others and continue to elevate the Destination Management profession.

Thank you for the passion you bring to this industry and for everything you do to create memorable experiences for your clients and their attendees. It is an honor to serve this incredible community, and I can't wait to celebrate your accomplishments at the 2027 ADMEI Awards Gala in New Orleans.

With appreciation,



Val Delaney

Executive Vice President

Association of Destination Management Executives International (ADMEI)

P.S. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me. val@admei.org

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About the ADMEI Awards Program

Every DMC has a story worth telling. Not because it had the biggest budget or the most recognizable client, but because its team solved problems, created memorable experiences, and delivered results that only destination experts can.

The ADMEI Awards Program exists to celebrate those stories. It shines a light on the creativity, professionalism, and local expertise that define Destination Management while inspiring others across our industry.

If this is your first submission, welcome. This guide was written with you in mind. We'll walk you through the process, explain what you need, and help you prepare a submission that reflects the quality of your work, without the guesswork.

Since 2005, the ADMEI Awards Program has recognized excellence in Destination Management through two distinct award programs:

- **Achievement Awards** recognize exceptional programs, events, activities, and Destination Management Company services.
- **Recognition Awards** honor peers and industry leaders with special acknowledgment for their efforts and leadership.

Eligibility

ADMEI Awards are open to ADMEI Members in good standing.

For Achievement Awards, the submitting DMC must have played an integral role in planning and delivering the program, event, or activity. They must fall within the published eligibility period and, for in-person programs, take place within the DMC's local destination. Programs delivered outside the local destination (DMC traveled with its client) are eligible only when completed in collaboration with a local ADMEI member DMC.

For Recognition Awards, the nominated individual must be an employee or owner of a member DMC.

Key Dates

- **Eligibility Period — 1 September 2025 – 31 August 2026**
- Submission Site Opens — 10 August 2026
- Early Bird Discount Deadline — 6 September 2026
(*Save \$50 on Achievement Award entries — use Promo Code: Early27 at checkout.*)
- Final Submission Deadline — September 23, 2026 (11:59 p.m. Eastern)
- Judging — October 2026
- Finalists Announced — On or before 20 November 2026
- People's Choice Voting — January 2027
- Awards Gala — 23 February 2027 | Hyatt Regency New Orleans

Entry Fees

- Achievement Award \$350.00
- People's Choice Award \$ 50.00
- Recognition Award \$ 0.00

Achievement Awards

Achievement Awards recognize the exceptional programs, events, and services DMCs deliver every day. Each category highlights a different area of DMC expertise, but they all celebrate the creativity, innovation, operational excellence, and meaningful results that define award-worthy work.

Achievement Award Evaluation Criteria

Every eligible submission is reviewed using two sets of evaluation criteria:

- **Category-Specific Judging Criteria** — unique to each Achievement Award category and designed to recognize the elements that makes that category distinct. (Included within each [category description](#).)
- **Universal Judging Criteria** — applied consistently to every Achievement Award submission.

Evaluation Area	Judges Consider	Points
Client Goals & Objectives	How clearly the client's goals and desired outcomes were identified and achieved.	40
Destination Expertise	How local knowledge, relationships, and destination expertise contributed to the project's success.	40
Planning & Complexity	The level of planning, coordination, and management required to deliver the project.	20
Execution	How effectively the project was delivered from start to finish.	20
Innovation	Creative ideas, unique solutions, and fresh thinking.	20
Strategic Initiatives	Applicable sustainability, accessibility, DEIA, risk management, or other strategic initiatives.	10
Supporting Materials	How effectively photos, video, and supporting documents reinforced the submission.	20
Overall Impression	The overall quality, professionalism, and impact of the submission.	40
Category-Specific Judging Criteria	See category-specific judging criteria provided within each award category.	30

Entry Check (Formerly DQ Review)

Every submission includes one complimentary Entry Check before judging begins. If required items are missing or a submission doesn't meet the published requirements, you'll have one opportunity to correct and resubmit your entry within 48 hours.

What the Entry Check Covers

The Entry Check is an administrative review that confirms the submission meets the published entry requirements for the selected category. It does not evaluate writing quality, recommend a different category, or assess the overall strength of the entry.

Preparing Your Achievement Award Submission

Who Should Enter?

If your team created an exceptional experience, solved a complex challenge, or demonstrated the value of using a DMC, consider entering. Great submissions come from projects of every size.

Is My Program or Event Award Worthy?

Many finalists almost didn't submit because they assumed their project wasn't "big enough." Excellence isn't measured by budget. It's demonstrated through creativity, thoughtful planning, strong execution, and meaningful results.

Winning Tip

If you're proud of the work your team delivered, don't talk yourself out of entering. Let the judges decide.

Program vs. Event

An event is a single experience – either stand-alone or within a larger scope – such as a welcome reception, gala dinner, team-building activity, or awards ceremony. It has a specific purpose, location, and timeframe.

A program is a series of coordinated events designed to achieve an overarching goal, such as an incentive trip, multi-day conference, product launch, or corporate retreat. Programs typically span multiple days and involve several distinct events, each contributing to a unified theme or objective.

Before You Begin

The easiest submissions start before the deadline. Gather your project information, photos, video, supporting materials, and key results before you begin writing. A little preparation now makes the entire process easier.

Tell the Story

The strongest award submissions don't simply describe what happened; they explain why it mattered. Tell the story from beginning to end by explaining the client's goals, the challenges your team faced, your approach, and how the client's goals were achieved. Judges are seeing your project for the first time, so provide enough context for them to appreciate its significance.

Focus on Results

Support your narrative with measurable outcomes whenever possible. Client feedback, attendee engagement, operational improvements, fundraising totals, media coverage, sustainability metrics, or other meaningful results help demonstrate the impact of your work.

Showcase Destination Expertise

One of the defining characteristics of a DMC is local knowledge. Explain how your relationships, destination expertise, and on-the-ground experience created value for your client and contributed to the project's success.

Choose Supporting Materials Carefully

Every photo, document, diagram, or video should strengthen your submission. Select materials that illustrate key moments, reinforce your narrative, and **help judges visualize the experience**.

Keep It Clear and Concise

Well-organized submissions are easier to evaluate. Avoid unnecessary jargon, repetition, and lengthy explanations that don't support your story. Every paragraph should move the narrative forward.

Winning Tip

Don't try to impress the judges with every detail. Focus on the information that best demonstrates why your event or program deserves recognition.

Before submitting, ask someone who wasn't involved with the project to read your narrative. If they can easily explain the challenge, your solution, and the results, you've likely provided the context judges need.

Save Time

Draft your narrative in Word first, then copy it into the online submission form after your final review.

Create a dedicated folder for each submission containing your narrative, publicity summary, photos, logo, supporting materials, and video. Organizing everything **before** you begin uploading helps prevent missing files and last-minute stress.

Ready?

Visit the ADMEI Awards Platform to begin your submission: <https://admei.awardsplatform.com>

Achievement Award Submission Requirements

All Achievement Award submissions require the following:

- **Overview & Overall Impact (Maximum 1,000 words):** Provide a narrative that tells the story of the event, activity, or program while clearly addressing the applicable Universal and Category-Specific Judging Criteria. Include sufficient context to help judges understand the objectives, challenges, creative solutions, execution, and overall results.
- **Support Materials**
 - **Photos (jpg or png):** Photo collages are not permitted. Required: 2 individual photos identified as your primary photos for publicity purposes. Up to 8 additional individual photos may be included.
 - **Up to 5 supporting PDF documents:** samples, inspiration boards, diagrams, graphics, maps, collateral, and other documents that support the activity/event/program plan. (Photo collages of the executed program are not permitted.)
 - **Event / program budget:** Best Event and Best Overall Program categories require the budget to be uploaded. (They do not count as one of the 5 supporting PDF documents.) They will not be made public or shared with the judges. Budget must include all services and components managed by the DMC.
 - **Video (Optional but Encouraged):** .mp4 or .mov. DMC branding permitted. Upload **one video (maximum 3 minutes)** that enhances the written submission by illustrating the program experience, execution, logistics, or attendee engagement. The video should support—not replace—the narrative. Production quality is not evaluated. Judges are interested in how the video illustrates the program and supports the submission narrative, not the sophistication of the video production.
- **DMC Logo**
- **100-word description:** a summary of your submission, used for publicity purposes such as publication about the entry, the award event program, the reading of the finalists, and ADMEI media/press releases.
- **Client Permission:** A client approval letter is no longer required. The required **Client Permission and Authorization Statement** must be acknowledged in the online entry form before the entry can be submitted.

Avoid These Common Mistakes

- Repeating the same information instead of adding meaningful detail.
- Not demonstrating the value your DMC brought to the program, event or activity.
- Including photos or supporting materials that aren't referenced in your narrative.
- Waiting until the submission deadline to begin uploading files.
- Not listing your DMC's name exactly as it appears in the ADMEI [Find a DMC](#) Directory.

Before You Submit

Before clicking **Submit**, complete the [Final Submission Checklist](#) to ensure your entry is complete and ready for review.

Achievement Award Categories

13 Categories, additional budget sub-categories for activities, events, and programs.

Best Décor & Design (Event)

This award recognizes excellence and originality in the decorative elements of a single event, where the environment elevated the guest experience and supported the client's objectives. Entries should highlight how design components – such as theme décor, props, scenery, draping, furniture, linens, or rentals – contributed to the overall look, feel, and impact of that one event.

Category-Specific Judging Criteria

Effectiveness of the décor and design elements in supporting the event's theme, visual environment, and intended attendee experience.

Winning Tip

Beautiful photos are only part of the story. Help judges understand the creative vision behind the design, the challenges your team solved, and why you made the design choices you did.

Best Décor & Design (Program)

This award recognizes exceptional creativity and cohesive design execution across a multi-event program. This category celebrates the thoughtful integration of decorative elements that enhance the overall attendee experience and reflect a unifying theme or brand throughout multiple touchpoints. Submissions should demonstrate how design choices – from scenic elements and furniture to floral, lighting, props, and signage – worked together to create a seamless visual journey across the program's components.

Category-Specific Judging Criteria

Demonstration of consistency and cohesion of the design approach across multiple events to enhance the attendee experience across the entire program.

Winning Tip

Help judges see the bigger picture. Explain the design strategy that connected each event and how your team maintained a consistent vision while allowing every experience to feel unique.

Best Community Event

This award recognizes creativity in designing and delivering an open-to-the-public event, including, but not limited to, festivals, walks/runs, wellness fairs, product launches, game-day experiences, activations, or other activities/events that engage attendees in the local culture, flavor, and traditions of the destination.

Category-Specific Judging Criteria

Effectiveness in engaging the local community while reflecting the character and culture of the destination.

Winning Tip

Show how your team transformed an event into a community experience. Explain the decisions that created authentic local engagement and made the event unique to the destination.

Best Destination Marketing

This award recognizes a DMC's ability to showcase its destination, including, but not limited to, a unique site visit experience, FAM trip, or destination reveal. Marketing efforts can be in person or virtual, and DMC managed solo or collaborated with a hotel or Destination Organization.

Category-Specific Judging Criteria

Effectiveness in communicating the destination's identity, culture, and unique attributes through the overall experience.

Winning Tip

Connect your marketing strategy directly to the results achieved.

Best Emergency Preparedness and/or Response

This award recognizes excellence in mitigating risks during the planning cycle and/or responsiveness to incidents occurring during the live event. Entries should include the comprehensive emergency plans created and details of the steps taken to develop, or the detailed steps taken to respond to a crisis or issue during the event.

Category-Specific Judging Criteria

Effectiveness and comprehensiveness of emergency planning and/or response procedures in protecting participants and the attendee experience.

Winning Tip

Explain the risks your team identified and how your planning or response strategies addressed them. Demonstrate the reasoning behind the decisions your team made, why they were effective, and how they protected participants and the attendee experience.

Best Entertainment Production

This award recognizes excellence in entertainment production and services including, but not limited to, procuring, producing, choreographing, and designing overall event entertainment for any type of program or event.

Category-Specific Judging Criteria

Effectiveness in seamlessly integrating entertainment that supports the event concept and creates a memorable attendee experience.

Winning Tip

Focus on how entertainment advanced the client's goals.

Best Event — Based on Budget

This award recognizes a DMC's ability to plan and execute an event that achieves the client's goals and objectives. This category refers to **a single event** and its integration of at least one (1) of the core DMC services: transportation, tours/activities, event management, program logistics, and entertainment. Budget categories are:

- \$100,000 USD or less
- \$100,001 – \$250,000 USD
- \$250,001 – \$500,000 USD
- \$500,001 – \$1,000,000 USD
- Over \$1,000,000 USD

Category-Specific Judging Criteria

Effectiveness in developing an event that supports the intended concept and delivers an outstanding attendee experience within the available resources and budget.

Winning Tip

Keep your narrative focused on the event itself. If it's part of a larger program, explain only the context needed to understand its significance.

Best Incentive Program

This award recognizes an outstanding incentive program that inspired, rewarded, and motivated participants while delivering an exceptional destination experience. Judges are looking for programs that seamlessly combined strategic objectives, memorable experiences, and flawless execution.

Category-Specific Judging Criteria

Effectiveness of the alignment of the incentive experience with an authentic, unique, and memorable destination experience.

Winning Tip

Don't assume the destination speaks for itself. Explain how your team transformed the destination into an incentive experience unique to this client and group.

Best Logistics

This award recognizes exceptional operational planning and logistical execution behind a successful program or event. Not limited to transportation, this includes anything required to execute a logistically challenging element of an event or program.

Category-Specific Judging Criteria

Effectiveness of the logistical planning in creating a seamless experience despite operational complexity.

Winning Tip

Don't simply list logistics. Explain the challenges, your strategy, and the measurable impact your planning had on the success of the program.

Best Overall Program — Based on Budget

This award recognizes the ability to bring the WOW factor into multiple disciplines of a DMC that encompasses a series of coordinated events designed to achieve an overarching goal. Entries must include services from at least three (3) core DMC services: transportation, tours/activities, event management, program logistics, and entertainment. Budget categories are:

- Under \$500,000 USD
- \$500,000 - \$1,000,000 USD
- Over \$1,000,000 USD

Category-Specific Judging Criteria

Effectiveness of integration and coordination of multiple events and DMC services into a cohesive overall program experience within the available resources and budget.

Winning Tip

Judges are looking for excellence across the entire program, not just one standout moment. Show how thoughtful planning and execution produced a consistently exceptional program.

Best Sustainable Initiatives

This award recognizes the unique way that a DMC considers the social, environmental, and/or economic dimensions of sustainability throughout the planning and execution of a program or event.

- **Social** — fostering a sense of community, inclusivity, and attendee well-being (Diversity and Inclusion Programs, Accessible Facilities, Community Engagement, Volunteer Opportunities).
- **Environmental** — minimizing environmental impact by reducing resource consumption, minimizing waste, and promoting conservation (Zero Waste Initiatives, Carbon Offsetting, Green Transportation, Sustainable Catering).
- **Economic** — generating economic benefits for organizers, vendors, attendees, and the local community (local procurement, fairtrade practices, tourism development, partnership and collaboration).

Category-Specific Judging Criteria

Effectiveness in integrating sustainable initiatives that positively impact the local community, environment, and/or economy.

Winning Tip

Judges are looking for intentional decisions supported by meaningful outcomes. Rather than simply describing sustainable initiatives, explain how sustainability influenced your planning, decision-making, and execution, and how those decisions created meaningful impact.

Best Use of Technology

This award recognizes the DMC's innovative use of the latest technology to enhance a program or event and maximize the guest experience, including, but not limited to, special event technical production (lighting, audio, multimedia production, staging, and special effects), creation of a client app, and use of a hybrid or online streaming platform.

Category-Specific Judging Criteria

Effectiveness in integrating technology to enhance attendee engagement, improve program delivery, or streamline event operations.

Winning Tip

Innovation isn't about using the newest technology; it's about using the right technology. Technology is most impressive when it solves a problem, creates efficiencies, or elevates the participant experience. Help judges understand the purpose behind your technology decisions.

People's Choice Award

Additional option upon submission of an Achievement Award.

DMCs may elect to submit any Achievement Award entry to the People's Choice Award (public online voting site). The winning award is based solely on the total number of votes each finalist's storyboard receives and is separate from the Achievement Award winners.

Voting takes place January 2027. Public voters can submit one vote every 24 hours, and there is no limit to the number of votes per voter.

Preparing a People's Choice Award Submission

Unlike the Achievement Awards, the People's Choice Award is decided entirely by public online voting. Your storyboard should quickly capture attention, communicate the essence of your project, and encourage viewers to learn more about your work.

Tell the Story Visually

Think of your storyboard as a visual summary of your Achievement Award submission. Use compelling photos, thoughtful design, and the 100-word publicity description submitted to capture the essence of the event, activity, or program.

Design for Impact

Incorporate your DMC's logo, branding, colors, and visual style to create a polished presentation. Choose photos that immediately capture attention and reinforce your story, allowing the visuals to become the focal point of the storyboard.

Submission Requirements

The People's Choice entry must be submitted under the same title as the corresponding Achievement Award entry and use the same 100-word description. Storyboards must be created in a 16:9 format (1920 x 1080 pixels).

Recognition Awards

Individual awards recognizing outstanding contributions.

Recognition Awards celebrate the people whose leadership, service, and commitment strengthen ADMEI and the Destination Management profession. Unlike Achievement Awards, these awards recognize individuals rather than programs or events.

Preparing a Recognition Award Nomination

The strongest nominations tell a compelling story supported by meaningful examples. Rather than listing accomplishments, explain how the nominee's leadership, service, innovation, or professionalism made a lasting impact on ADMEI, their organization, or the Destination Management profession.

Who Can Submit a Nomination

Recognition Award nominations can be submitted by any member or by the nominee themselves. Judges do not know who submitted the nomination and evaluate each submission solely on the information provided.

Nomination Requirements

All Recognition Award submissions require the following:

- **Photograph of nominee.**
- **Logo:** If the submission becomes a finalist, the DMC's or Supplier Associate Member's logo may be used during the annual conference.
- **100-word description**, used for publicity purposes such as the reading of the finalists and ADMEI media/press releases.
- **Overview & Overall Impact** (not to exceed 1,000 words) highlighting the individual's efforts and contributions to the DMC, ADMEI, and/or the Destination Management industry.
- **One (1) letter of recommendation/support** from someone other than the nominator (employer, vendor, client, or peer).

Lifetime Achievement | Hall of Fame submissions also require:

- Second letter of recommendation/support from someone other than the nominator (employer, vendor, client, or peer).

Recognition Award Categories

ADMEI Volunteer of the Year

This award recognizes an individual whose valuable service and selfless commitment to ADMEI have made a significant difference in the advancement of ADMEI. The award highlights the individual's actions to further ADMEI's mission through their talent and service.

Carol Norfleet Destination Management Rising Star

This award recognizes an emerging Destination Management professional who has demonstrated exceptional promise, initiative, and leadership during their first one to five years in the profession.

Destination Management Professional of the Year

This award recognizes an individual who has given their time, dedication, leadership, and knowledge to advance the Destination Management industry.

Hall of Fame | Lifetime Achievement Award

The ADMEI Hall of Fame | Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes an individual who has given their time, dedication, leadership, and knowledge towards advancing the Destination Management industry over their lifetime. Additional criteria:

- Must be an active member of ADMEI for ten (10) or more consecutive years.
- Must be close to the end of their DMC career, with approximately 20 years within the industry.
- Must have earned their Destination Management Certified Professional Designation (DMCP).
- Must have a distinguished record of achievement at the highest levels within their company, community, and the DMC industry, with consideration given to integrity, character, and service.

There will be one honoree each year.

Joanne O'Connor President's Award

Selected by the ADMEI President, this award recognizes an individual whose exceptional support and contributions significantly advanced the President's initiatives during their term of office.

Supplier of the Year

Selected by the ADMEI Board of Directors, this award recognizes an Associate Member whose partnership, innovation, and support have strengthened ADMEI and the DMC industry.

How ADMEI Awards Are Judged

The ADMEI Awards Program is designed to provide a fair, consistent, and impartial evaluation of every eligible submission.

Who Are the Judges?

Judges are experienced professionals from across the meetings, events, hospitality, and related industries. They are selected for their expertise, objectivity, and familiarity with DMCs.

Judging Panels

Judges are assigned to panels, with each panel responsible for evaluating one or more award categories. This approach allows judges to become familiar with the unique objectives and judging criteria while ensuring consistency across all entries within that category.

Categories receiving a large number of submissions may be divided into multiple preliminary judging heats. Each heat is evaluated independently, and the three to four highest-scoring entries from each heat advance to the semifinal round.

For the semifinal round, a new judging panel is assembled to independently evaluate all advancing entries and identify the finalists in each category. This additional review helps ensure consistency, fairness, and impartiality throughout the competition.

Confidentiality

All judges sign confidentiality agreements before the review process begins. Submission materials, scoring, comments, and judging discussions remain confidential throughout the competition.

Judge Anonymity & Decisions

Judges remain anonymous throughout the judging process to protect the integrity of the competition, and all judging decisions are final. Judges' scorecards are confidential and remain the property of ADMEI.

How Entries Are Evaluated

Each eligible entry is reviewed independently using the published Universal and Category-Specific Judging Criteria. Judges consider the clarity of the narrative, how effectively the supporting materials reinforce the submission and illustrate the DMC's work, and how well the entry demonstrates excellence within the selected category. Because judges can score only what is presented, providing complete context and meaningful examples is essential.

Finalists

The highest-scoring entries in each category are recognized as finalists. Up to three (3) finalists may be recognized in each category. The Best Overall Program category may recognize up to five (5) finalists.

Final Submission Checklist

Before you click Submit, take a few minutes to complete one final review. A careful final check can help prevent delays during the Entry Check process and ensure your submission is evaluated exactly as you intended.

Your Entry

- ☐ I listed our DMC name as it appears in the ADMEI [Find a DMC](#) Directory.
- ☐ I selected the award category that best aligns with my program or event.
- ☐ The program, event, or activity took place in our destination (or we collaborated with another ADMEI member in the destination).
- ☐ My entry meets the published eligibility requirements.
- ☐ My narrative has been proofread and is complete.
- ☐ My 100-word publicity summary is ready.

Supporting Materials

- ☐ Supporting photos and documents reinforce my narrative.
- ☐ My video (if included) meets the published requirements.
- ☐ My company logo has been uploaded.

Final Review

- ☐ I have permission to use all client information, photos, videos, and logos.
- ☐ All files meet the required formats and size limits.
- ☐ I reviewed my submission one final time before submitting.

Good Luck!

Every award-winning submission begins with exceptional work. That's the part you've already accomplished. Now it's your opportunity to tell the story behind that success.

We hope this guide has given you the confidence to prepare a submission that reflects the creativity, expertise, and professionalism your team brings to every client engagement. Whether you're entering for the first time or returning with another outstanding project, thank you for sharing your work and helping showcase the value of Destination Management. We look forward to recognizing this year's finalists and celebrating the remarkable work of our members at the 2027 ADMEI Awards Gala.