



center for nonprofit
advancement



Board Leadership 2026 Award

Nomination Packet



About the Award

Now in its 15th year, the Center for Nonprofit Advancement's Board Leadership Award competition recognizes and spotlights outstanding nonprofit Boards of Directors in the Washington area.

This award competition recognizes the role that Boards play in building and sustaining successful organizations—ensuring their nonprofits are well led, well supported, and responsive to the people and communities they serve.

Standards of practice in governance are increasingly embraced by organizations of all sizes and at all stages of development. The Board Leadership Award competition is an effort to acknowledge Boards that have exerted their leadership in an exemplary way. Boards will need to have demonstrated a steady track record of good governance, excellent support, improvement and notable achievements for their organization. Previous winners include Martha's Table, ISPU, Carpenter's Shelter, Friends of the Library, Montgomery County, Out Teach, America's Charities, and CARECEN.

The Purpose

The purpose of the Board Leadership Award is to strengthen and promote nonprofit organizations by acknowledging exemplary governance in the sector and providing a process that encourages all to learn and improve. The Award also strives to lift up the principles, criteria, and best practices that represent exemplary governance.

Sponsors

The Board Leadership Award competition is owned and administered by the Center for Nonprofit Advancement. Additional support is provided by BoardSource.

Eligibility

Boards of nonprofit organizations based in the Washington metropolitan area are eligible.

- The organization must be based in the geographic area defined as the District of Columbia, Virginia or Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland.
- Two-thirds of the Board members must have served on the Board a minimum of one year as of the due date of the nomination.
- All examples and explanations used in the nomination must have occurred during the Executive Director or Board members' tenure and must have been accomplished/implemented within the past five years.
- Internal nominations must be made in cooperation with the current Executive Director. External nominations must be made in cooperation with the Board Chair and the Executive Director.

Any organization meeting these requirements may be nominated.

Nomination fee: \$150

Once the nomination is submitted an invoice will be sent. *(There is no charge for Center member organizations.)*

Award Winning Grants

The selection process is based on the work of the entire Board. One winner and up to two honorable mentions will be selected. The winner will receive a **\$10,000 grant** for their nonprofit organization. Honorable mentions will each receive a **\$1,000 grant**. Winning and honorable mention organizations will also receive communication exposure and training and development opportunities for the Board and CEO. The decision of the Selection Committee is final.

Award recipients whose organizations are not members of the Center for Nonprofit Advancement at the time of the Award presentation in July will be granted Center membership. Membership dues will be deducted from the recipient's grant award. The recipient will have full access to resources, goods and services available to Center members for a 12-month period.

What does an outstanding Board look like?

An outstanding Board will demonstrate that, by challenging itself, it has made a meaningful difference in the life of the organization. An outstanding Board will have moved beyond recommended fundamental roles and responsibilities to bring new levels of leadership and focus within the Board that deliver results for the organization.

There is a presumption that Boards nominated for the award can demonstrate adherence to fundamental board practices, including support for the mission • respect for staff leaders • sound recruitment practices • a common commitment to diversity in perspectives and representation • participating actively in board affairs • prudent oversight of financial and program matters • personal generosity • and thoughtful, well informed decision making. Boards will be expected to confirm that fundamental practices are in place as part of the review process.

The recipients of the Board Leadership Award will demonstrate to other Boards and organizations in the Washington region the value of approaching governance with the goal of moving beyond fundamental Board practices and toward making the most of the Board's composition and contributions to organizational effectiveness and growth.

Judging Criteria:

All organizations will be scored and judged based on the following overarching domains:

Domain 1: Ensure Legal and Ethical Integrity— Board ensures the organization complies with/is in good standing with federal, state, and local requirements.

Domain 2: Organizational Identity/Purpose— Board has consensus and ensures organizational identity and purpose (stakeholders, mission, vision, values, impact/ends, strategic priorities, etc.).

Domain 3: Strategic Vision/Leadership— Board collaborates with the chief executive to exercise intentional strategic vision and leadership.

Domain 4: Oversight/Stewardship— Board sets, maintains, monitors, and evaluates clear and appropriate (1) policies and practices and (2) separation between governance and operations.

Domain 5: Chief Executive Oversight— Board selects, oversees, supports, and collaborates with chief executive officer.

Domain 6: Governance Practices— Board develops and uses sound governance principles and practices.

Domain 7: Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity— Board champions and prioritizes diversity, inclusion, and equity by ensuring a clear vision and results-focused policies, strategies, practices/example, and financial commitment.

Feedback

All applicants will receive brief written comments on their Part One application from the Selection Committee. This feedback is shared with the organization's primary contact via e-mail within 60 days of notification that the organization is no longer in consideration for the Award. (In other words, applicants invited to complete Part Two will not receive feedback on their Part One application. They will receive feedback if they are not selected as a finalist.)

Finalists will receive comments after the award process is complete. Applicants can also contact a member of the Center's staff for additional feedback or guidance after the selection process has been completed. At the discretion of the Center's staff, finalists may be able to contact the chair of the Selection Committee for additional perspective.

The Nomination and Selection

A committee of distinguished members of the business, philanthropic and nonprofit sectors will review all nominations and identify candidates to advance in the selection process. The nomination and selection process includes three stages:

Part One

1. Nomination: All eligible Board Leadership Award candidates must be nominated. Nominations can be made by the Executive Director/President/CEO in cooperation with the Board Chair and other board members, or by external stakeholders, such as funders, donors and recipients of the organization's services. Nominations without the acknowledgement of the organization's Board Chair and Executive Director will not be accepted. Only one nomination per organization will be considered.

Part Two

2. Interview: The Selection Committee will determine the nominees selected for virtual interviews. Any additional information required by the committee will be requested at this point. The Executive Director and knowledgeable Board members, including the Board chair and the chair of the committee responsible for the achievement described in the application, will participate in an interview that explores the basis of the nomination and the philosophy, action, experiences and impact of the board.

Part Three

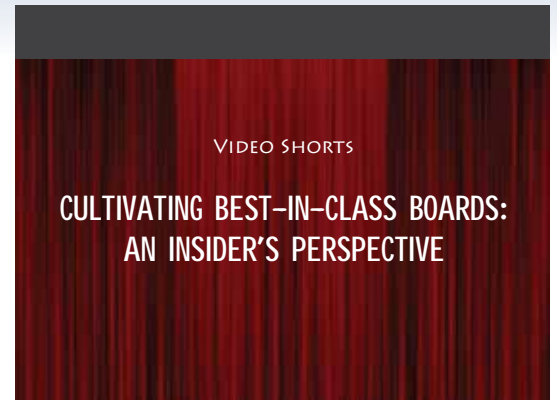
3. Site Visit: The Selection Committee will determine the nominees to be selected for in-person site visits. The Selection Committee may request additional information to be presented during this site visit. The Executive Director and knowledgeable Board members, including the Board Chair must be present.

Finals

4. Selection: After the site visit, one of these finalists will be awarded the Board Leadership Award and up to two will be awarded honorable mention. The decision of the Selection Committee is final.

Award Selection and Awardee Responsibilities

The Board Leadership Award winners will be announced through the Center’s communications and local news outlets. The Award winner’s representatives will be expected to attend events and/or other meetings and make themselves available for interviews and written publications through which their outstanding Board leadership ideas and practices will be shared with others in the community. The Award winner and honorable mentions are required to participate in the Award best practice video shorts.



Part One: How to Nominate

Those interested in nominating a qualified Board of Directors should complete the nomination form. Only one application per organization will be accepted. The deadline to submit nominations is **Friday, March 20, 2026**.

Please fill out the PDF nomination form, which includes a fact sheet and essay questions. The nomination also requires supplemental documents that should be submitted at the same time as the nomination form, which can be found on the Board Leadership Award page of the Center’s website: nonprofitadvancement.org.

All nomination materials can be submitted by email:

Email to:

Sean Sweeney at

seans@nonprofitadvancement.org Please

indicate “BoardAward26” in the subject line.

The fee to participate is \$150. Once the nomination is submitted an invoice will be sent to you. *(There is no charge for Center member organizations.)*

Part Two: Interviews

After a review of all information, the Selection Committee will choose up to six semi-finalists. Each organization selected to move to this stage of the competition will be contacted to schedule an on-camera interview with the Selection Committee. Interview days for semi-finalists have been scheduled for **May 12 and 14, 2026**.

After a review of all the information from both Part One: Nomination and Part Two: Interviews, the Selection Committee will choose up to three finalists who will be invited to participate in a site visit.

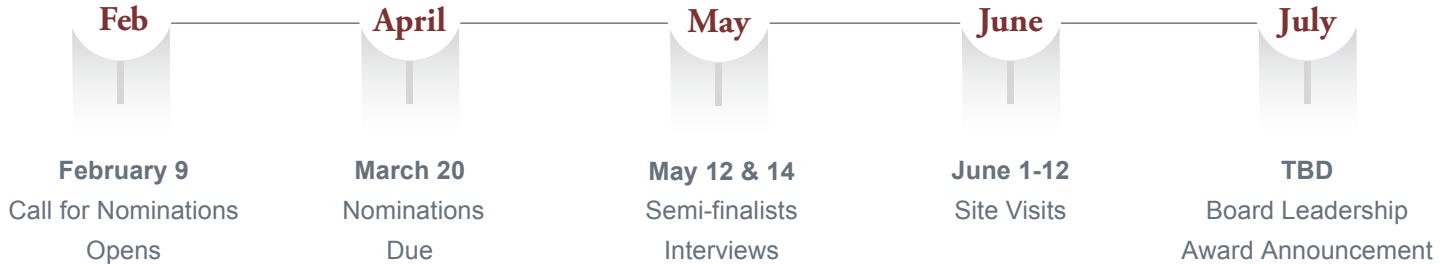
Part Three: Finals

Up to three organizations will be asked to participate in a site visit. Site visits will consist of a 15-minute presentation made by the finalist organization followed by 45 minutes of questions by members of the Selection Committee. Site visits will take place in-person, and will be conducted between **June 1 – 12, 2025**. Finalists will be provided additional guidance and information on the format and structure of the site visits. The committee will select the 2025 winner and honorable mentions after the completion of all site visits.



Please note: The Award presentation is not part of the adjudication process, as the selection will have already been made. All finalists, however, are required to participate in the presentation activities in **July 2026**. The logistics of the presentation will be determined as we get closer to that time.

Award Timeline



Nomination Checklist:

To submit a nomination for the Board Leadership Award, please include:

- Completed Fact Sheet
- Completed Questions
- Copy of organization's 990, list of Board members and board member job descriptions

Questions can be directed to: Sean Sweeney at seans@nonprofitadvancement.org or 202.302.5014