

**Shine a light
on leaders who ...**

motivate share
build community
collaborate innovate
foster diversity
inspire

Calling for
EXCEL Award Nominations

The GRF CPAs & Advisors EXCEL Award

The Excellence in Chief Executive Leadership (EXCEL) Award spotlights outstanding leadership among Washington area nonprofit chief executives. The award recognizes achievement in the areas of innovation, motivation, community building, ethical integrity and strategic leadership.

Eligibility Guidelines

To be qualified for consideration, nominees:

- Must hold a salaried, full-time (minimum 35 hours per week) chief executive position at a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in the Washington metropolitan area. The geographic area is defined as the District of Columbia, Suburban Maryland (Montgomery and Prince George's Counties) and Virginia.
- Must be an executive director, CEO, or president of a Washington-area nonprofit organization with an annual budget under \$10 million.
- Must have served as the chief executive at his/her current organization for a minimum of three years as of May 31, 2026. All examples and explanations used in the application must have occurred during the applicant's tenure at the current organization.

Any individual meeting these requirements may be nominated. There is no fee to participate. Past EXCEL Award winners are ineligible for future EXCEL Award consideration.

The Award

One person will be selected as the 2026 EXCEL winner. They will be given access to a **\$10,000 professional development account**. The awardee's organization will receive a **\$2,000 cash award** to be used to support professional development programs for its staff.

Up to two people may be selected as honorable mention recipients. Each honorable mention recipient's organization will receive a **\$3,000 award** to support professional development programs for the candidate and/or its staff.

Any winner whose organization is not a member of the Center for Nonprofit Advancement at the time of the Award presentation, will be granted Center membership. Membership dues will be deducted from the recipient's grant award. The recipient will have full access to all resources available to Center members for a 12-month period.



Professional Development Account Defined

The professional development account can be spent on future educational or professional development activities related to the role and responsibilities of leading a nonprofit organization.

Covered expenses include:

- Classes (i.e., adult education, professional development or higher education)
- Executive coaching
- Leadership training programs
- Conferences
- Books/magazines
- Professional memberships
- Services to benefit professional development as leaders of a nonprofit organization

Sample expenses could include opportunities like enrollment in a certificate program at a local university, hiring an executive coach to gain a new skill or a strategic outlook to career expansion, membership in a professional association or participation in Leadership Greater Washington or other similar programs. Creative ideas that connect to the individual's professional development are welcomed.

The account will be available for a 24-month period. All expenditure requests must be submitted for review to the EXCEL Award committee chair and Center staff who retain the right to approve or refuse any requests. All decisions are final. Only pre-approved expenses will be covered. Award account money cannot be spent on an organization or individual that is affiliated with or is a family member of the winning executive director. Any expenses beyond the \$10,000 amount will be the responsibility of the awardee.

To receive the award money, please submit a copy of the PAID invoice for what the money was spent on. Expenses will be covered by reimbursement. Payments will be made within 60 days of submitted paperwork. Any unused dollar amount in the account will be forfeited. If the EXCEL Awardee leaves his/her chief executive position (either by his/her own choosing or as a board decision) during the two-year expenditure period, the remaining amount in the account will be forfeited.

The money given to the awardee's organization for the purpose of staff development will follow the same criteria as above.

Award Sponsorship

GRF CPAs & Advisors, a Bethesda-based accounting firm, has sponsored this award every year since it was first launched in 2005. It is administered by the Center.



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Nomination & Selection Process

It is the committee's responsibility to select candidates to advance in the selection process. The selection committee will be composed of nonprofit community stakeholders.

The selection process includes five stages:

- 1 Nomination:** All eligible EXCEL Award candidates must be nominated. Nominations can be made by board members, staff members, volunteers, clients or community members. Nominations can be made with or without the candidate's knowledge. Self-nominations will not be accepted.

A nominator is welcome to consult and collaborate with the nominee so that a strong well-developed nomination can be submitted. Only one nomination per individual will be considered. If more than one nomination for an individual is received, nominators will be contacted to determine which application is to be forwarded to the selection committee for consideration. Nominations are due by midnight, **Friday, August 7, 2026**

E-mailed applications must be submitted in Microsoft Word by midnight on August 7, 2026 to: **seans@nonprofitadvancement.org**.

No additional letters supporting the nomination will be accepted or forwarded to the selection committee.
- 2 Selection Committee Decision:** The selection committee will review nominations and choose up to 6 semi-finalists. Both the nominator and the candidate will be contacted. For candidates not selected to move forward, only the nominator will be contacted.
- 3 Interview:** Nominees advancing to this stage will be given a 40-minute interview by members of the selection committee. This interview will take place on either **Thursday or Friday, September 10 or 11**. Questions will focus on leadership philosophy, skills and experiences as chief executive. When candidates are invited to attend the interview, they will be asked to submit their organization's current mission statement and annual report, budgets and audits from the past two years. No more than 3 finalists will be selected once interviews are complete.

(If the nominee is not available on September 10 or 11, an alternative date will be arranged. However, full selection committee participation cannot be guaranteed at this interview.)
- 4 Site Visit:** A virtual site visit by members of the selection committee will be scheduled with each finalist's organization. The candidate and the nominator will be required to attend this meeting. Up to three others are also welcome to speak on behalf of the candidate. Site Visits will be scheduled with the finalists during the timeframe of **September 28-October 9**.
- 5 Selection:** One person will be awarded the GRF CPAs & Advisors 2026 EXCEL Award. Up to two honorable mention recipients may also be selected. The decision of the selection committee is final.

2026 EXCEL Award Timetable

- Monday, July 6 Competition opens
- Friday, August 7 Application Deadline (submitted by midnight)
- Friday, August 28 Semi-finalists notified
- September 10 or 11 Interviews with semi-finalists
- Monday, Sept. 14 Finalists notified
- Sept. 28-Oct. 9 Site visits at finalists' organizations
- November 2026 Winners announced at Center's Annual Celebration
- November 2026 to November 2028 Professional Development Expenditure Period



Nomination Form

Please complete **Parts One and Two** of this form.

Part One

1. Candidate's Name _____
2. Candidate's Title _____
3. Candidate's Organization _____
4. Organization's Mission _____
5. Candidate's Work Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
6. Candidate's Work Phone Number _____
7. Candidate's E-mail Address _____
8. Candidate's Organization Website _____
9. How did you hear about this award? _____
10. Nominator's Name _____
11. Nominator's Contact Phone Number _____
12. Nominator's E-mail Address _____
13. As the nominator, how would you describe your relationship with the candidate? (*check all that apply*)
 Board Member Staff Member Volunteer Client Funder
 Community Member Other: _____
14. Check here to verify the candidate is a full-time (35 hours or more), salaried, chief executive of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.
15. How many years has the candidate served as the organization's chief executive? _____
(Candidate must have served as organization's chief executive for at least three years as of May 31, 2026.)
16. Organization Budget Size \$ _____
(Eligible organization's budget must be under \$10 million.)
17. Please share # of full-time staff _____ # of part-time staff _____ # of volunteers _____



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Part Two

Please answer the following four questions. The responses to these questions will be considered in the EXCEL Award selection process. **Please provide examples and specific details in your answers.** Please contain your submission to no more than 1,000 characters per question. We encourage you to provide in-depth answers, as it will help the Selection Committee 's decision-making process.

1. Why do you think the nominated individual is deserving of the 2026 EXCEL Award? Address how the candidate has led the organization in the areas of innovation, motivation, community-building, inclusiveness/diversity, and/or ethical integrity. Please include specific examples.
2. How has the candidate's leadership inspired the organization's stakeholders—board, staff, clients and community?
3. Describe an example of leader-led innovation; new ways of governing, strengthening outcomes or serving the mission better. Including, but not limited to, hiring/onboarding, talent management, organizational management, board governance, and financial management.
4. An important aspect of the EXCEL Award is to teach specific actions, activities, practices and philosophies that other nonprofit leaders can emulate. Share one specific "teachable moment" that has been implemented during the nominee's tenure that best expresses the nominee's leadership.

Application Submission Information

The application must be submitted by **August 7, 2026**.

Mailed applications must be postmarked by **August 7, 2026** and mailed to:

The 2026 EXCEL Award
Center for Nonprofit Advancement
Sean Sweeney
1717 K Street, NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20006

E-mailed applications must be submitted in Microsoft Word by **midnight on August 7, 2026**. Send the completed application to: seans@nonprofitadvancement.org.

Questions about the 2026 EXCEL Award should be directed to: **Sean Sweeney**, Director of Operations, at 202.302.5014 or seans@nonprofitadvancement.org.