



section of professional associations  
international council on archives

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***GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING AN ASSOCIATION AWARD  
PROGRAM***

***2012***

## Introduction

An association awards program can be used as a way of recognising those who have made an outstanding contribution to the profession or given meritorious service to the association. An awards program can raise the profile of the organisation with the general public and provide an opportunity to promote the archival cause. Those receiving the award will gain kudos and recognition.

The guidelines provide a checklist of issues for associations to consider when designing, planning and implementing an awards program. After establishment, the checklist can also be used as a basis for evaluating and reviewing the program's operations. The guidelines and checklist do not cover the granting of scholarships.

## Check list for establishing an awards program

### ***Establish award categories***

Association awards generally fall into the following categories:

1. *Membership awards.* These are awards that recognise outstanding contributions to the profession or recognise a long term commitment to the association. For example Fellows, Honorary Members, Membership Recognition Awards and Distinguished Service Achievement Awards. While these awards are generally bestowed on individual members they can also be given to institutions, so long as they are institutional members of the association. Those given to individual members are retained by the recipients for life. The numbers of members holding such awards may be limited raising its prestigious standing, e.g., the Society of American Archivists has limited the number of Fellows to 5, as specified in their Constitution.
2. *Specific purpose awards.* These are awards that pertain to particular areas of archival activity or for a particular purpose e.g. for publishing or writing in the field of archives; for promoting public awareness about archives or for providing financial support to students.
3. *Group awards.* These are awards that recognise groups that have worked together and achieved excellence in a particular archival endeavour.

Specific purpose or group awards can be gathered under a collective award name. For example the Records and Information Management Professionals Australasia (RIMPA) Eddis Linton Awards for Excellence in Records Management are named in honour of the outstanding contribution to records management made by this person. These awards cover three categories: Information Proficiency Most Outstanding Individual; Most Outstanding Group; Student of the Year.

### ***Define the purpose of each award***

The purpose of each award should be clearly articulated. For example:

- The Society of American Archivists describes their SAA award of Fellow as “.. the highest honor bestowed on individuals by SAA and is awarded for outstanding contributions to the archival profession.”
- The Association of Canadian Archivists describes purpose of the ACA Honorary Membership Award “.. to recognize individuals whom the ACA wishes to honour for their contribution to the archival profession”.
- The Dutch association awards the Hendrik van Wijin Medal to individuals who have worked in extraordinary ways for the association and/or the archival sector.
- The Australian Society of Archivists describes their Distinguished Achievement award as an award “.. conferred on a member of the Society who has been mainly or solely responsible for an outstanding development or achievement in archives work and who has been a member of the Society for at least seven years”.

The group of awards that go to make up an association’s award program should not overlap in their intent and purpose.

### ***Establish a governance structure/ appointment of an awards committee and/or sub committees***

The awards program is best co-ordinated and administered by a committee or sub committee appointed by the governing body of the association. Such a committee can be established to oversee all association awards or there can be a separate committee for each award. Whatever governance arrangements are put in place it is advisable to mandate the structure, roles and responsibilities of the committee in the association’s constitution or by-laws.

In setting up a committee the following issues should be considered:

- How will the committee be formed e.g. by invitation, nomination, election?
- When is the committee appointed e.g. annually, biannually?
- How are unexpected vacancies filled e.g. by appointment of the association’s governing body?
- What is the eligibility for committee membership e.g. a distinguished or highly regarded member(s) of the association, past presidents, past recipients of the award, and if the award is sponsored by an organisation, a representative from that body?
- How long should a committee member be able to serve i.e. how many award cycles? It might be useful to have a member serve on at least two consecutive cycles to ensure some consistency in the committee’s operations.

- How will the committee chair be appointed? For example by the association's governing body, or selected by the committee members?
- Should there be provisions to cover situations where there may be a conflict of interest? For example in instances where a nominee might work with or for a committee member.
- Who will make the final award selection? For example will recommendations be made to the association's governing body to make the final decision, or will the selection task be allocated solely to the committee?
- How will the selection of award winners occur? Consensus may be preferable but if this is not possible, by majority vote?

It is the role of the committee to:

- Develop, advise and contribute to the development of an association's award program including development of award criteria.
- Assess nominations received against the published award criteria.
- Make recommendations on award winners.
- Meet award deadlines.
- Manage the award/program budget.
- Publicise the award and/or award program.
- Encourage nominations.
- Prepare citations to be read at award ceremonies.
- Prepare press releases publicising award winners.
- Prepare articles for inclusion in the association's newsletter or bulletin about the award winners.
- Review and monitor the existing award framework and make recommendations on any improvements including new awards.

It is the role of the committee chair to:

- Call and chair meetings of the committee.
- Ensure that records of the committee (meetings, nominations received, selection deliberations, copies of citations and publicity material) are created and kept. Such records are important in proving accountability and transparency in the selection process.
- Represent matters relating to the operations of the committee to the association's governing body.
- Present a speech to the award presentation ceremony about the awards and winners.

### ***Establish criteria***

The criterion for an award is the standard or guideline used to prepare and assess nominations. Criteria for each association award should be readily accessible to members e.g. available on the association's website. Publishing criteria will ensure that the nomination process is carried out in a fair and transparent manner.

When developing criterion for membership awards some possibilities include:

- Recognising significant contributions to the association.
- Increasing the international and national standing of the profession.
- Implementing or leading a particularly significant professional initiative.
- Recognising professional innovation.
- Recognising professional knowledge.
- Promoting public awareness about archives.
- Recognising outstanding professional leadership.
- Serving the profession with distinction.
- Delivering exceptional archival service to clients.
- Collaborating in an archival endeavour.

Eligibility to be considered for an award is also necessary to identify. Possibilities include:

- individual archivists
- members with a specified length of membership and involvement in the association
- a group of archivists who had worked on a project
- archival institutions, records centre, manuscript libraries
- non profit or government organisations providing a service to the archival community
- volunteers who has contributed to a project or to the operations of an archival institution
- students undertaking archival studies
- archivists of a particular ethnicity
- archivists of a particular age when younger members are being targeted
- other professionals whose work has impacted on the field of archives
- politicians supportive of archives.

The following are examples of membership award criteria:

Criteria for the Distinguished Service Award of the Society of American Archivists. "The award recognises an archival institution, education program non profit organisation, or government organisation that has provided outstanding service to its public and has made an exemplary contribution to the archives profession. The institution being nominated should have achieved distinction in one or more of the following ways:

- Demonstrably contributing to archival theory and the development of new archival practice.
- Serving its constituency in an outstanding fashion.
- Showing extraordinary ingenuity and resourcefulness in improving efficiency of operations or improving methods of work.
- Going well beyond the normal performance requirements expected of an archival agency and thus providing a model for others.

- Developing over a period of years an archives program of such depth and scope as to warrant special recognition.”

Criteria for the Association of Canadian Archivists Membership Recognition Award applied when individuals are considered.

- “Nominee has at least seven years of professional archival experience, including promoting greater public awareness, appreciation or support of archival activities or programs; and
- nominee’s volunteer activities have made a significant contribution to the development and/or improvement of the ACA; and
- nominee has consistently contributed: to the profession through active participation in the ACA or on behalf of the ACA, or to the corpus of professional archival literature.”

Criteria for specific purpose awards should be directly related to the cause it is promoting. For example the Society of American Archivists, Sister M Claude Lane, O.P., Memorial Award, “recognises individuals who have made a significant contribution to the field of religious archives. Criteria include:

- Involvement and work in the Religious Archives Section of the Society of American Archivists.
- Participation and leadership in religious archives organisations.
- Contributions to archival literature that relates to religious archives.
- Evidence of leadership in a specific religious archives.”

Other factors to consider when developing award criteria include:

- membership requirements – whether winners must be members of the association (individual and institutional members) or are they also open to others
- frequency of the award – annually, biannually
- winner restrictions – whether there are restrictions on the number of times a person may receive a particular award
- number of recipients – whether or not multiple winners are allowed.

### ***Establish documentation requirements***

Each nomination must be supported by:

- *A nomination form.* Nominations are ideally made on a specially designed form where details about the nominator(s) and general identify information given about the nominee are provided, and the reasons for the nomination and assessment of the nominee against the criteria are provided. Alternatively a statement by the nominator(s) addressing the criteria could be submitted. The completed nomination form/statement should be signed by the nominator(s).

- *Written referee statements.* Individual, institution or group nominations should be supported by referee statements from members of the association who have had direct contact with the work of the person/institution/group being nominated. The statements should aim to address the one or more of the award criteria. The committee should have the option of also personally contracting the referees for further comments on the person, or seek additional referee statements.
- *A biography of the nominee* giving comprehensive information from the person's graduation through his/her career. If the nominee is an institution or a group, a brief history could be submitted.
- *Supporting information.* Nominations can be supported by submitting supporting information e.g. copies of publications/ articles, copies of press releases on achievements attained. For publication awards a number of copies of the publication should also be sent to the committee for examination.
- *A photograph of the nominee.* A head and shoulder high definition digital photograph that can be used in any publicity or communications activities to support the award.

Nominations could be submitted using an online form and uploading supporting documentations, or posted or sent by email.

If the nomination is successful the details submitted in the above documents can be used as a basis for developing the citation to be read at the presentation ceremony and released for publicity purposes.

All nominations and documents created in assessing the nominations and all deliberations of the award committee should be confidential.

### ***Establish a timetable***

A timetable is important to establish in order to ensure an orderly deliberation process. Steps to include in a timetable:

- publicising the award(s) and issuing a call for nominations by a due date
- closing nominations on the due date
- evaluate nominations
- making a decision which will form the recommendation on a winner to the association's governing body
- make the recommendations to the association's governing body on a winner (it should be accepted that an award may not be granted each year if there are no suitable candidates)
- endorsement or otherwise of the recommendation of the winner by the governing body

- nominee/winner notified that they have been nominated and recommended to receive an award asking if they are prepared to accept the award providing details about the award ceremony
- advise those responsible for the nomination of the outcome
- publicising the award ceremony
- organising the award (presentation item e.g. print a certificate, engrave a medal etc)
- holding the award ceremony – including coordinating speeches, arranging catering, preparing a press release
- publicising the award both within the association (e.g. on association's listserv, in Newsletter or other association publication, on website) and to the general public.

### ***Decide on the award presentation item***

The item given to recipients of an award can include a certificate, a letter signed by the president of the association, a citation, a certificate, a medal, trophy, a gift, a plaque, financial assistance or an honorarium. Where an award is given to a group a decision will need to be made about whether each member receives an item, for example, the group leader may receive a medal on behalf of the group, with all members receiving a certificate.

### ***Establish funding arrangements***

Awards can be funded through a budget allocation from the association's funds or endowments that earn income through investments.

Funds required to support an award may include:

- travel and accommodation costs to support meetings of the award committee
- printing of nomination forms or award brochure
- purchase of award item
- publicity/promotion costs
- travel and accommodation costs to support winners attending the award ceremony
- venue and catering costs for the award ceremony.

With endowments earned income should be used to support the award process. They can be funded as a one off donation by a benefactor or be open to ongoing donor contributions. Endowments funded by a one off donation should be enough to support at least a five year cycle to ensure the continuation of a recognized award. The management of Endowment Funds may be the responsibility of the association's finance officer or finance committee rather than the awards committee.

The most common way of managing an Endowment Fund is by segmenting the fund into two accounts: the Endowment Fund, which should not be spent but invested



and earns income through the returns on the sum invested; and the Working Account, where the income earned (the total or partial amount) is deposited and used to fund direct costs associated with the managing the award. There maybe a requirement to set the Working Account at a certain level to meet expected costs. If this level cannot be maintain in some years the award may need to be deferred for those years.

### ***Arrange the award ceremony***

A special ceremony is appropriate to present the award or it could be part of the annual general meeting of the association when it would be expected that a large number of members would be in attendance to participate in the event.

The association's president acts as the presiding officer on the occasion. Special guests could include a donor/sponsor for the award. A possible order of ceremony could be:

- The chair of the award committee reads the purpose of the award and then the citation.
- The president/or donor hands the award to the recipient.
- Acceptance speech is made by the recipient.

### ***Publicise the award***

Publicising an award or an awards program can encourage participation and present a valuable opportunity to promote the association. The following are some possible advertising opportunities:

- The association's website could have pages dedicated to the award program providing details on each award, criteria, eligibility, timeframe, sponsorship, a brief history of the award, links to nomination forms and other documentary requirements and a list of award recipients and their citations. When winners are announced a special front page feature could be developed on the site.
- An awards booklet or brochure could be distributed to the general membership and to other appropriate venues such as archival institutions.
- The association's listserv and newsletter or bulletin could be used to call for nominations and to announce award winners after they are presented.
- The association's journal, or other publication, can be used to publish the full citation.
- Local and national newspapers and journals of allied professions.

### ***Monitor and review the award program***

Once an awards program is established and has been operating for a few years it may be appropriate to review its management. The following are some questions that could be asked in such a review:

- Has the purpose of the award been understood?
- Has criteria proved adequate to support the recommendation process?
- Could the nomination form be improved?
- Have supporting documentation requirements been sufficient to assist the assessment process?
- Has the committee worked effectively?
- Is the suite of awards making up the program comprehensive covering key areas where recognition is though appropriate, or are there gaps which could be covered by a new award?
- Have financial allocations been adequate?
- Have Endowment Funds been managed appropriately?

### ***Examples of association award programs***

The following association websites provide examples of award programs:

Archives and Records Association of New Zealand Inc. (ARANZ)

[http://www.aranz.org.nz/Site/about\\_ARANZ/members\\_awards.aspx](http://www.aranz.org.nz/Site/about_ARANZ/members_awards.aspx)

The Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) <http://archivists.ca/content/awards-and-recipients>

Records and Information Management Professionals Australasia (RIMPA)

<http://www.rimpa.com.au/grants-and-awards/>

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) <http://www2.archivists.org/recognition>

The Australian Society of Archivists (ASA)

[http://www.archivists.org.au/page/Learning\\_and\\_Publications/Recognising Excellence - ASA Awards and Scholarships/Awards for professional achievement/](http://www.archivists.org.au/page/Learning_and_Publications/Recognising_Excellent_-_ASA_Awards_and_Scholarships/Awards_for_professional_achievement/)

Koninklijke Vereniging van Archivarissen in Nederland (KVAN)

<http://www.kvan.nl/kvan/prijzen.php>

For information on the Award program of the Association des Archivistes du Québec please contact the Executive Director at [dq.infoaag@archivistes.qc.ca](mailto:dq.infoaag@archivistes.qc.ca)