



PARKS & LEISURE
AUSTRALIA

REGIONAL AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

CRITERIA HANDBOOK

PARKS & LEISURE AUSTRALIA AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

ABOUT THE AWARDS

Each year, Parks and Leisure Australia acknowledge the exceptional achievements in our industry through its prestigious Awards of Excellence.

The Awards of Excellence have been celebrated for many years. These annual awards recognise and showcase the outstanding initiatives and innovative efforts of 'the people behind the places'. Nominated projects promote and enhance opportunities for the positive use of leisure time for social, environmental and economic benefits to the community.

The Parks and Leisure Australia Awards of Excellence submissions are only accepted through our online system. It is recommended that applications are prepared and saved in Microsoft Word (or another program) and copied and pasted into the online format. If you are submitting directly into the online system, the system does not auto save so it is recommended that you complete the submission in one session. Videos are optional and a link or URL may be copied into the video field, however it is preferred a video file is provided if possible.

Nominees must be current members (corporate or individual) of Parks and Leisure Australia and are encouraged to attend the state and national awards presentations in the year in which they are nominated. If you wish to submit an entry but are not a current member, please contact the membership officer at membership@parksleisure.com.au.

The exact same projects cannot be entered into multiple categories, however if one large project has several individually distinguishable components it may be split to enter more than one category. Please seek advice from National Office for more information. You cannot re-submit a project which has won at a regional or national level previously.

All initiatives must have been completed or occurred and evaluated prior to the submission deadline and within the past 2 years.

A joint submission recognises that more than one organisation has contributed to an initiative, for example, a joint submission may be a Council and a consultant who worked together on a project.

For joint submissions all organisations nominated must all be members of Parks and Leisure Australia. Additional stakeholders are unable to be added once nominations have closed, so please consider this at the time of submitting the application. To check membership status, contact the membership officer at membership@parksleisure.com.au.

When completing your submission, do not presume the judges have prior knowledge of your region or initiative. Take the time to prepare a well written entry as it can only be judged on what is submitted. Nominations must address each of the criteria within the designated word limit and must be pertinent to the category for which it is being submitted.

It is useful to include information on your organisation's size, location, population, and operating budgets so the judging panel can put your submission into context with other applications.

The independent judging panels will have the option of interviewing submitters if they are unable to reach a clear decision during their deliberations.

You will be given the opportunity to provide up to three (3) files of supporting documentation/ photographs which must be uploaded to the submission (in PDF or JPEG formats and up to 15MB). Please only attach relevant documents.

You will be requested to include a 50-word summary, organisation logo and a high-resolution jpeg image for promotional purposes, which will be used throughout the promotion of the 2026 awards process.

National winners will be announced at the prestigious National Awards of Excellence Gala Dinner held in line with our National Conference each year.

JUDGING

- Judging is conducted by an independent panel of experienced parks and leisure practitioners. Judges are asked to declare if a conflict of interest exists and if so, are excluded from the judging of that category.
- Judges may not be familiar with your organisations size, location, population, and operating budget so, if appropriate, include this information in responses so judges can put applications into context.
- Awards are judged in accordance with the award criteria. Should the respective judging panel believe that no nomination meets the criteria or standard of excellence required, it will not be obliged to confer the particular award. Region winners are announced at a regional awards ceremony in your region.
- Region winners automatically become national finalists. Where there is only one nomination in a category, it will be considered by judges as to whether it is suitable to win the award at the region level, and suitable to progress to the national level. All decisions of the judging panel are final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

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AWARD CATEGORIES AND CRITERIA



INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

FRANK STEWART DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Eligibility: Nominees can only be nominated by a third party who is an active Parks and Leisure Australia member.

Description: The Frank Stewart Distinguished Service award is the longest standing award and was introduced by the Australian Leisure Institute. The Award is named in honour of a former Federal Minister for Tourism and Recreation and is the most prestigious individual award bestowed by Parks and Leisure Australia. As a Federal Minister, Frank Stewart led the very first Australian Department of Tourism and Recreation which demonstrated clearly the importance of the portfolio at a national level. The award recognises the significant contribution an individual has made to the development, promotion and advocacy of the parks and leisure industry through their personal and professional endeavours over a substantial period.

Prize: The Frank Stewart Distinguished Service Award winner receives an Honorary Life Membership to Parks and Leisure Australia and a commemorative plaque acknowledging the awarding of this prestigious honour. Laurie Boyd was the inaugural recipient of the Frank Stewart Award.

Criteria:

1. A demonstration of the nominated person's outstanding commitment and service to the parks and leisure industry, both within a state and nationally, including their length of contribution and their impact on the industry.
2. Their contributions to enhancing the development of colleagues within the parks and leisure industry, and noting any barriers that they had overcome.
3. Demonstrated high standard of professionalism and outstanding leadership within the parks and leisure industry (a minimum of 10 years) and a significant contribution to PLA through membership to the National Board, Regional Council, PLA Advisory or other parks and leisure committees.
4. Personal and professional contributions, including any specific achievements, that have enhanced the standard of the industry as a profession including regular contributions to events, committees, research and projects.

General Information

- You will be given the opportunity to provide up to three (3) files of supporting documentation which should include letters of support and/or commendations that demonstrate the extent to which the nominee participates, supports, and contributes to the industry.
- Please include a 50-word summary of achievements for promotional purposes.
- Please provide a profile image of the nominee (in high resolution jpeg format).

DAVID ALDOUS EMERGING LEADER AWARD

Target Industry Segment: Students (TAFE or University), graduates, employees, and young professionals within the industry.

Eligibility: Nominees may either self-nominate or be nominated by a third party (who is an active Parks and Leisure Australia member). All TAFE, University PhD students and graduates are eligible to apply.

Description: This award seeks to recognise and celebrate outstanding contributions made by a student or emerging professional in a course of study leading to a nationally recognised sector qualification in Australia or who has made a significant contribution to the parks and leisure industry.

Criteria:

1. Evidence of pursuit of excellence in career to date and commitment to professional development through education and training.
2. Demonstrated effective communication skills and evidence of leadership capability.
3. Capacity to be an effective ambassador for the parks and leisure sector and awareness of the current issues facing the sector.
4. Evidence of contribution to the Parks and Leisure industry, with involvement with Parks and Leisure Australia, State Regional Council, events, committees, and projects all highly regarded.

General Information

- You will be given the opportunity to provide up to three (3) files of supporting documentation which should include letters of support and/or commendation that demonstrate the extent to which the nominee participates, supports and contributes to the industry (the contribution could be through research, volunteering, participation and contribution to projects and or a person who continues to contribute to their education institute within the parks and leisure sector).
- Please include a 50-word summary of achievements for promotional purposes.
- Please provide a profile image of the nominee (in high resolution jpeg format).



ORGANISATIONAL AWARDS

COMMUNITY INITIATIVE OF THE YEAR

Target Industry Segment: Local governments, community organisations and groups that educate and celebrate our industry through enhanced community connection and participation.

Description: This award is designed to recognise the combined effort that is required to successfully deliver initiatives, projects, programs and events which promote and enhance social, environmental and economic benefits to the community. Evidence of success should form a component of the submission.

Criteria:

1. Describe how you identified the need for this initiative in your community.
2. What contributes to the excellence of this initiative when compared to others?
3. Describe the initiatives ability to benefit diverse community groups and participants.
4. Explain the impact of the initiative on the health, well-being or social connection of the community and provide evidence of this.

What the judges are looking for:

- Demonstrates outcomes the initiative achieved.
- The impact the initiative/s has on bringing the community together.
- The extent to which the program celebrates access for all, equity, and equality.
- Promotes diversity and reflects the cultural and heritage of the community.
- Information on how it promotes livability.



ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

Target Industry Segment: Organisations, groups, or individuals, that are taking action to protect or enhance the environment or are increasing understanding of environmental issues within their community.

Description: This award celebrates and acknowledges those who protect nature and parks, improve climate resilience, ensure sustainability, and care for our land. Awarded to an individual, team, or organisation for the development of innovative processes, practices, or technologies that contribute to the development of a sustainable future. Those responsible for subordinate strategies to an institution's overarching strategic plan are not included in this category.

Criteria:

1. Demonstrate how the project has met or exceeded its objectives in terms of mitigating environmental impacts and/or implementing environmental protection measures. Please include the significance of these actions.
2. Demonstrate how sustainability has been promoted or communicated to the community through this initiative. Demonstrate how the project will adhere to or expand upon best practice sustainability outcomes while ensuring that an optimum environmental outcome achieved.
3. Describe strategies used to conserve and enhance natural features, wildlife and flora, landscape features, buildings, and structures.
4. How have these activities positively impacted the environment, now and for the future?

What Judges are looking for:

- Evidence of a clear strategic approach and success of implementation.
- Demonstration of a significant or transformative program and/or processes that enhance service delivery, lower costs and, create a green and/or sustainable environment.
- How stakeholders at all levels are engaged in strategic conversations to help bring the project to life.
- How a truly integrated initiative is developed, including the leadership of change and innovation to turn ideas into a completed successful project.



STRATEGIC PLANNING

Target Industry Segment: State and local governments, consultants, community organisations and state associations.

Description: This award recognises outstanding strategic planning for parks, open space, sport, recreation, and leisure that enriches and revitalises communities.

Criteria:

1. What was the primary challenge or opportunity this plan aimed to address, and why was it important for your community or sector?
2. Describe the approach taken to develop the strategy/plan, including the engagement methods used and the industry networks or stakeholders who contributed.
3. Why were these methods and partnerships chosen?
4. How was the plan successful in addressing the identified issue? Please provide evidence of its effectiveness, and explain how the plan drove positive change—particularly in relation to environmental, social, health, and wellbeing outcomes within the community

What the judges are looking for:

- Demonstrates alignment to strategic drivers and initiatives.
- Demonstrates integrated planning: national, state, regional and/or local.
- Provides a high return on investment.
- Demonstrates your organisation has a better idea of how to allocate resources to align with goals.
- Planning projects which demonstrate that one of its objectives is to enhance the community's ability to respond to chronic and accurate shocks.
- Demonstrates the community engagement process used to endorse the strategy or strategic plan.



COMMUNITY FACILITY OF THE YEAR

Target Industry Segment: Local governments, leisure management groups, architects, designers and contractors.

Description: This community facility award recognises facilities that demonstrate innovative features of design, development, and operation and deliver significant benefits to the community.

Criteria:

1. Please describe what the project is – including what community need the facility sought to address and why was this important?
2. Outline how the facility was designed and delivered? Please describe the innovative features, community engagement methods (including any codesign processes), and partnerships involved, and explain why these approaches were chosen.
3. Describe how the facility has demonstrated success in meeting its objectives. Please provide evidence of its impact, and explain how it has promoted environmental responsibility, social inclusion, greater participation and community pride

What the judges are looking for:

- Demonstrated good project management and implementation which resulted in the success of the facility.
- Demonstrates the value of the facility to the community.
- Reduces the impact to the environment and promotes sound economic operation and promotes inclusive practices.
- Articulates the role of the facility within the community and the region.



PARK OF THE YEAR

Target Industry Segment: Local governments, community organisations, designers, and contractors.

Description: This award celebrates and promotes vibrant, successful well designed and managed new or significantly revitalised parks/ open spaces that exemplify best practice in design and management. This includes all parks and open spaces that are developed for community leisure, recreation or sport purposes.

Criteria:

1. Please describe the project, including the park's purpose, role, and significance.
2. How does the project align with planning priorities at the local, regional, state/territory, or national level?
3. How was the park planned, designed, and delivered? Please describe the innovative and defining features, the engagement methods used, and how the park puts the environment and people first. Why were these approaches chosen?
4. How has the park achieved its intended outcomes? Provide evidence of how its demonstrated a visionary or innovative approach to addressing specific needs or issues, and how has it contributed to the community's achievements and benefits?

What the judges are looking for:

- Promotes the benefits and the role it plays within the green network.
- Demonstrates measures taken to enhance biodiversity, habitat co-location, livability, and its ability to reduce temperatures, connect and celebrate the communities' culture and heritage.
- Articulates the role of the park within the community and the region.
- Demonstrates the role it plays to foster and build community engagement.
- Provides significant value to the community.
- Description of the special features or element/s which resolves or responds to a problem within the park.



PLAYSPACE AWARD (<\$1M)

Target Industry Segment: Local governments, landscape architects and designers, contractors, and equipment suppliers.

Description: This award is given to a playspace under the value of \$1M that contributes to the creation of a sense of "place" for its local community and exhibits landscape and/or structural design innovation that delights and aids childhood development.

Criteria:

1. Please describe the playspace, including its purpose, role, and significance to the community.
2. Describe how the play space was designed, including what community engagement was undertaken, for the playspace to be used by diverse community groups and participants.
3. What features, elements and materials make it different from other play spaces?
4. Outline the benefits of the project to the community and demonstrate whether the playspace has been embraced by the community and meets specific clients/target group needs.

What the judges are looking for:

- Links to the Local Government's Playspace Strategy and/or Open Space Strategy.
- The extent to which the playspace features are accessible to everyone.
- The extent to which the playspace enhances the economic, environmental, and social benefits to the community.
- Description of how it is integrated within its surrounding environment.
- Information on the partnerships developed and the outcomes of the evaluation process.



PLAYSPACE AWARD (>\$1M)

Target Industry Segment: Local governments, landscape architects and designers, contractors, and equipment suppliers.

Description: This award is given to a playspace over the value of \$1M that contributes to the creation of a sense of "place" for its local community and exhibits landscape and/or structural design innovation that delights and aids childhood development.

Criteria:

1. Please describe the playspace, including its purpose, role, and significance to the community.
2. Describe how the play space was designed, including what community engagement was undertaken, for the playspace to be used by diverse community groups and participants.
3. What features, elements and materials make it different from other play spaces?
4. Outline the benefits of the project to the community and demonstrate whether the playspace has been embraced by the community and meets specific clients/target group needs.

What the judges are looking for:

- Links to the Local Government's Playspace Strategy and/or Open Space Strategy.
- The extent to which the playspace features are accessible to everyone.
- The extent to which the playspace enhances the economic, environmental, and social benefits to the community.
- Description of how it is integrated within its surrounding environment.
- Information on the partnerships developed and the outcomes of the evaluation process.



BEST REGIONAL INDUSTRY INITIATIVE

Target Industry Segment: Regional and rural communities within Australia, state and local governments, community organisations.

Description: Regional/Rural Australia includes all the towns, small cities and areas that lie beyond the major capital cities (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Darwin, Hobart, and Canberra), who make a significant contribution through community initiatives which contribute to the parks and leisure industry. These projects can be playspaces, events, tourism, trails, programs, repurposing of facilities and environmental initiatives (i.e., water saving, habitat development and restoration projects).

Criteria:

1. Demonstrate how the initiative addresses specific regional and rural issues that may not exist in larger cities.
2. Outline the initiative and provide evidence of the benefits it has brought to the community
3. Describe the community consultation and community involvement adopted in developing and implementing the initiative.
4. How does the initiative achieve long term outcomes or sustainability?

What the judges are looking for:

- The extent to which the initiative addresses any social, cultural, heritage, environmental or economic issues.
- Innovative approaches taken.
- Information on the barriers and difficulties and the extent to which they have been overcome.
- Highlight the community members which supported and benefited from the initiative.
- Contribution to lasting solutions and sustainability.
- Information on the achievements and the benefits to the community, the region and the industry.



RESEARCH IMPACT AWARD

Target Industry Segment: Universities, Educational Institutes, Centre for Research Councils, Allied Industry bodies and consultants.

Description: This award acknowledges outstanding research achievement by a group or individual, professionals, student or academics who have made a significant contribution to the parks and leisure industry through expanded knowledge enhancement promoting the benefits or importance of the parks and leisure sector in Australian society.

Criteria:

1. Demonstrate how the research addresses a specific issue within the parks and leisure industry and shows independent thought. Provide a clear description of the research approach.
2. Demonstrate how the research has been applied practically in the parks and leisure industry.
3. Demonstrate that the research has been peer reviewed.
4. How does the research add value to the Parks Leisure industry?

What the judges are looking for:

- Methods used to develop the research.
- Does the research address a specific issue within the parks and leisure industry?
- Is the research of independent thought?
- The extent to which the research has or can be applied to current parks and leisure operations throughout Australia.
- Authorship or co-authorship of peer-reviewed published materials such as journal articles, articles in conference proceedings, monographs, books, book chapters, artistic works, software development, or other professional and technical documents.
- At least one, but no more than three, external letters of support should be included in the materials submitted for consideration. External letters of support provide judges with helpful insights about the contribution of the research accomplishments to the industry and society.



INNOVATION IN PARKS, SPORT AND RECREATION

Target Industry Segment: Local or State Governments, organisations, groups, or individuals.

Description: This award acknowledges outstanding innovative and creative achievement in any area of parks, sport and recreation, and how the application of this innovation has benefited the industry.

Criteria:

1. Please describe the idea, its purpose, how it has been implemented, and why it was needed.
2. Demonstrate how this innovation is new and accessible to the parks, sport and recreation industry.
3. Describe any challenges that were met during the implementation and how they were overcome.
4. Demonstrate how this innovation excels in consideration of economic, environmental, and social factors, and how it adds value to the industry.

What the judges are looking for:

- Innovation, creativity, and application, and why it stands out as award worthy.
- Is the idea new and accessible to the parks, sport and recreation industry?
- The extent to which it fulfils a gap within the industry.
- The extent of how the innovation adds value to the industry while also considering economic, environmental, and social factors.

