

THE AWARDS PROCESS

Awards are critical to your NPD event; after all, they are the main reason everyone is getting together: to honor someone in the community with an award. So make sure your award process runs smoothly and effectively.

You might want to pattern your awards, criteria, nomination forms, and entry requirements after those presented by AFP at its annual International Conference. While International Headquarters is changing its awards process this year, most of the categories and criteria will remain the same. Following the materials used by AFP International allows chapters to easily nominate its local winners for the overall awards presented at the International Conference. The Awards for Philanthropy include the Outstanding Philanthropist, Volunteer Fundraiser, Corporation, Foundation, Fundraising Professional, and Outstanding Youth in Philanthropy. However, many chapters offer other awards, including:

- Outstanding Media Outlet (or Best Nonprofit Media Coverage)
- Outstanding Fundraising Campaign
- Outstanding Community Business Leader
- Outstanding Community Award

Nomination forms for AFP's awards programs can be found at the AFP website (www.afpnet.org) by clicking on "About AFP" and then "Awards."

Different Ways to Honor People

In addition to honoring outstanding young philanthropists, many chapters also look at ways to increase the number of people who are recognized every year. They allow organizations that sponsor tables to designate an employee or volunteer who will be recognized at the event. Others create different types of honors that do not require a judging committee—nominators simply submit names and if the honorees meet a few basic criteria, they will be recognized.

For example, the AFP Alabama Gulf Coast Chapter created a new honor called the "Award of Merit for Distinguished Charitable Donor." The award can be given to no more than six recipients each year, and they must be nominated by an AFP member in good standing. The award was designed for those individuals who would not normally be considered as 'outstanding philanthropist' or 'outstanding volunteer fundraiser,' but have still made substantial gifts over the years and been vocal supporters of the causes they support.

For several years the AFP Silicon Valley Chapter's awards have included the Distinguished Volunteer Fundraising category, with 30 to 50 honorees annually. The award recognizes the service and leadership of fundraising volunteers, and the chapter presents the awards to the first 50 nominees who meet the criteria. Nonprofit organizations may submit only one nominee for the award, although a group, such as a committee or an auxiliary, may be nominated. All of the honorees are required to appear for a scheduled group photograph session, and each also receives a resolution passed by the California State Assembly.

The inclusion of a Lifetime Achievement Award is a way to supercharge your event. This special award should probably not be given annually and great care must be taken to insure that any individual being so honored is universally seen as deserving. Some chapters make the Lifetime Achievement Award a board level decision, separate from their other awards.

THE JUDGING COMMITTEE

Choose a judging committee of no fewer than five people. The committee can include foundation executives, corporate executives, advertising/fundraising agency executives, nonprofit executive directors, and/or local celebrities, such as the mayor or a local TV personality. Here are a few guidelines for the judging process.

- The panel of judges should be permitted to name more than one recipient in any given year or not to name a recipient in any given year. In practice, however, it is not a good idea to recognize more than one winner as it tends to cheapen the award and cause logistical problems as well (which winner speaks first at the event?). It is far better practice to choose one and keep the other nominee in mind for next year.
- Nominations should be kept active for two years. The nominators will appreciate not having to do all the work again, and this policy can help avoid ties.
- Announce and stand firm that the decision of the panel judges shall be final.
- Make sure that everyone on the committee understands the exact criteria upon which to base their judging, as well as the exact process and time commitment required.
- In their awards programs, some chapters use a point system to rate nominations. This method can be very helpful, but the points themselves shouldn't decide who the winner is. Discussion among the judges is a critical part of analyzing the nominees and determining a winner. Using just a points system may skew results depending on how each judge allocates points. For example, the AFP Awards Committee uses a point system to help identify the top three or four nominees for each awards category. If a nomination is scored high by a majority of the judges, that nomination moves to the "final round." At that point, discussion takes over, and judges talk about why they graded each nominee as they did and what they found appealing about each nomination. In almost every case, this process ultimately brings out an honoree that the entire committee agrees upon. In the rare case where discussion is deadlocked over two nominees, the points or rankings can be used to help identify a winner.
- Some chapters are opening up their awards process, allowing nominations from individuals beyond the chapter membership and allowing organizations to self-nominate. Some chapters have reported a significant increase in nominations by following this process. However, chapters need to ensure that all nominations meet the same high standards.

THE NOMINATION PROCESS

Set a deadline for submitting nominations and do not accept late entries.

Determine whether you will accept entries by fax, email or solely through the mail. Is a postmark acceptable, or must the nomination be received on or before the day of the deadline? While nomination forms can follow any format, the chapter must find a balance between allowing too much information and supporting material, and not having enough information to make an informed and quality choice. AFP strongly encourages chapters to use criteria it has developed for its Awards for Philanthropy program (available on the AFP website – www.afpnet.org – under “About AFP and then “Awards.”).

Your nomination policy should be stated clearly on the nomination forms.

For example, announce that all nomination materials submitted shall remain the property of your chapter. Before nominating individuals, they must be contacted to make certain they will accept an award if chosen and attend the NPD event. If a last-minute situation occurs that prevents the honoree from appearing, perhaps a video could be made of the individual’s remarks. But this should be a rare occasion and certainly not advertised.

One especially sensitive issue is whether or not awards can be given posthumously, and what occurs if an honoree or nominee passes away before the event or during the judging process. While this is rare, it has happened on several occasions. Your awards committee should spend just a couple of minutes developing a policy for this situation. AFP International Headquarters’ awards policy is to not allow posthumous nominations, but it will continue to consider a nominee if he or she passes away after the nomination has been received. Chapters are free to develop whichever policy they feel is most appropriate.

Many groups list previous winners on their nomination forms to provide an idea of the type of person who might be suitable for an award. This also keeps people from wasting their – and your – time by nominating a past recipient.

The nomination process should be publicized as widely as possible

Nomination forms should be distributed to your chapter members, as well as to members of the philanthropic community. Also send a news release to your local newspaper calling for nominations. This distribution will probably be your first opportunity to make a body of people aware of NPD. Your cover letter should reflect your eagerness to get them involved and participating in NPD. Chapters will probably want to make award selections early in the year, since your honorees generate excitement about the event and, as much as possible, should be a crucial element of all marketing and publicity activities leading up to the event.

One packet containing information about all of the awards is very helpful.

Produce a Nomination Packet that explains the significance of NPD and your chapter's planned celebration in greater detail. Depending on your budget, this packet can be mailed as an initial contact, or only upon request after you have used a brochure or letter to alert interested parties to the awards ceremony. See the awards packet on AFP’s website for a

potential model (www.afpnet.org, under “About AFP” and “Awards”).

SAMPLE JUDGING GUIDELINES

The following are some sample judging guidelines which chapters can use and/or incorporate into their own procedures and policies. AFP strongly encourages chapters to have judging guidelines and make sure everyone involved in the judging process (including nominators and NPD committee members) understands the process. Disclosure and transparency are keys to ensuring a smooth judging experience.

Thanks to Lisa Intagliata, CFRE, of the AFP Florida, Southwest Chapter for submitting these sample guidelines.

I. SELECTION

- Judges are selected by the NPD committee members. It is advised to poll the AFP Board of Directors for their input and suggestions before opening it up for brainstorming at your NPD committee meeting.
- Assign one person on your NPD committee to be the “judge liaison”. The judge liaison is responsible for following up with the candidates who the committee feels should be asked to become an NPD judge as well as finalizing the panel of judges. They should clearly explain the duties and responsibilities of an NPD judge, time commitment involved and the overall judging process. **It is strongly recommended that when choosing who your “judge liaison” will be that you choose someone who will NOT be nominating anyone for an NPD award.**
- The judge liaison must go over the criteria for each award and make sure each judge has a clear understanding of what each nomination should contain as well as an understanding for how the “point system” on the application works.
- Select an **odd** number of judges and have back-ups trained and in place to be ready to fill in for judges who are not able to complete their duties.
- Secure all judges by May/June (for an NPD event occurring in November).
- Select judges who know the community well and are well known in the community (not necessarily past NPD winners). Try to select a cross-section of judges who represent diversity in culture, geographic location, background etc.
- A date for the judges meeting will be set once all judges are consulted. Judges will then be given a date, time and location to meet. It is best if one of the judges offers to host the meeting at their site rather than at the place of business of the judge liaison. This policy will help in keeping the place “neutral territory” for all involved.
- **No AFP member should sit in on the judges meeting.** Instructions should be given out to the judges by the “judge liaison” via mail at least 4 weeks in advance of the judges meeting and followed up by a phone call or e-mail one week prior. The judge liaison is not permitted to sit in on the judges meeting.

SAMPLE JUDGING GUIDELINES (cont.)

- If a judge is not able to make the judging session, an alternate is to be called in their place. No judge is allowed to send a “proxy” in their place. No judge may call in his or her vote either since the judging process brings to light much discussion and the group needs to make their final decisions as a whole.
- No judges are allowed to submit or be any party to a current NPD nomination/application.
- AFP members are not allowed to “lobby” the judges in order to benefit their application/nomination or someone else’s. If the judges have a question about information contained in a nomination, they are to call the nominator directly.

II. PREPARING THE JUDGES

- Give nomination forms to the judges via a complete packet at least 3-4 weeks before they met to do the judging. This allows them ample time to read through the applications and supplemental materials and draft a list of questions (if any) as well as come to the judges meeting prepared with who they feel their top choices are before the group discussion takes place.
- If the content of a nomination is called into question by a judge, it must be taken before the judges’ panel and discussed. It is suggested that the nominator be called and asked to clarify any questions a judge or judges have pertaining to the validity of facts or figures represented in the nomination.
- Judges may only select only one winner per category. No ties are allowed in a category. A decision must be made, even it is the decision not to give an award in a particular category due to lack of nominations or applications not meeting the correct criteria.
- In the event that the judges (as a group) feel a nomination should have been submitted under another category (for a different award), it is up to the judges to call the nominator and get permission to change the award category in which that candidate was nominated originally.

III. RECOGNITION

- Adhere special “Judges” ribbons to judges’ nametags and perhaps invite judges from previous NPD events to attend your event and honor them with a VIP ribbon on their nametag as well.
- Reserve a special “Judges” table at the NPD Event.
- Read each judges name from the podium during the program the day of your event and ask them to stand as a group and be acknowledged.
- Include the list of judges in your event program booklet and/or in the ad(s) for your NPD event in the newspapers. Include a brief biography and photo of each judge.

