



engagementaustralia

EXCELLENCE

AWARDS 2026

APPLICANT GUIDELINES

Awards 2026

PURPOSE

In 2026, Engagement Australia continues to recognise excellence in engagement through the Engagement Australia Excellence Awards. These awards identify and celebrate the most exciting and impactful engagement activities undertaken by Australian and New Zealand Universities.



AWARD CATEGORIES

Award for Excellence in Community Engagement	Recognising outstanding collaborations between tertiary education and communities for societal benefit. Emphasis is placed on partnerships that engage rural, regional, urban, disadvantaged or marginalised groups within Australia and New Zealand.
Award for Excellence in Indigenous Engagement	Recognising outstanding collaborations between tertiary education and Indigenous communities in Australia, New Zealand and beyond, that empower and give voice to First Nations peoples.
Award for Outstanding Engagement for Student Learning	Recognising partnerships and engagement practices that enhance the quality of learning and teaching in tertiary education and deliver beneficial outcomes for students.
Award for Excellence in Industry Engagement	Recognising outstanding collaborations of mutual benefit between tertiary education and industry that contributes to enhancing the quality and impact of tertiary education.
Award for Outstanding Engagement for Research Impact	Recognising excellence in research that makes a substantial difference to the community, or Australian or New Zealand prosperity, undertaken jointly by researchers in tertiary education institutes and partners in community, business or industry contexts.
Award for Excellence in Student and/or Alumni Engagement	Recognising outstanding programs that improve student and/or alumni engagement and enhance the quality and impact of tertiary education.
Award for Excellence in International Engagement	Recognising outstanding international collaborations that raise the profile of tertiary education and make a substantial difference to the community both overseas and in Australia and New Zealand.

Entries in any category might consider the following in the application:

- **Demonstrated positive impact on the community:** What has been the societal benefit of the collaboration? What identified problem, opportunity or societal issue does it address? To what extent has this collaboration improved outcomes for the community and the tertiary education institution?
- **Collaborative approach:** How, and by whom, was this activity initiated? What role did each party play in identifying the challenge, determining goals and designing the program? What ongoing role do the parties play in this initiative? Have you encountered and overcome any obstacles in this relationship? What were the principles that guided your collaboration?
- **Innovation:** What makes your activity innovative in concept, objective, approach, design, delivery or content? How has this collaboration fostered innovation at your institution or in your partner?
- **Impact:** What evidence do you have that the program is making a difference? How many people have been involved and over what time period? Have you published about this work or has it been profiled in the media? Has your work influenced others in the sector, community, industry?
- **Demonstrated mutual benefits:** What benefit has been derived from your initiative for your institution and for the community or industry partner, and on what scale? To what extent has it successfully addressed the core problem or challenge faced by the community, tertiary education or industry partner? What tangible benefits have been realised for collaborating organisations? Has the initiative grown and/or attracted new participants since its inception? Has the initiative resulted in any further collaboration on other matters? Has the collaboration produced any unexpected benefits for the partners?
- **Institutional support:** How well does your initiative connect with your institution's larger community and industry engagement strategy, and has your institution demonstrated commitment to this initiative by supporting it either financially, in kind, or through policy and recognition of its value?
- **Sustainability and scalability:** How long has the partnership been in place and has it had sufficient time to evidence sustainability and longer term impact? Has the partnership moved beyond a project phase to be a core activity for the tertiary education institution and community partner(s)? Are the relevant communities committed to sustaining the initiative into the future? Has the initiative demonstrated the capacity to scale within the partnership over time? Is the initiative scalable and potentially applicable to other relevant communities, institutions or industry? Does it have the potential to significantly promote and elevate community engagement in the tertiary education sector as a whole?

Award for Outstanding Leadership in Engagement

Recognising an individual who has made notable contributions to engagement above and beyond that expected for their role, resulting in sustained partnerships for longer term impact.

Entries in this category might consider the following in the application:

- **Leadership qualities:** Why do you think your candidate is worthy of this nomination? What leadership qualities do they possess that differentiates them from their peers and colleagues. How do these qualities manifest themselves?
- **Demonstrated positive impact:** What demonstrable and measurable contributions has your leader had in your institution and the wider community, underpinned by their approach to collaboration and engagement?
- **Leader as a role model:** Does your candidate possess attributes that inspire others? Can you demonstrate the high-regard and respect this nomination has achieved through engagement?

WHO CAN APPLY?

Eligibility guidelines for the Engagement Australia Awards:

- Any collaborative programs or projects involving one or more tertiary education institutions, and one or more industry, community or government partners.
- The roles of each party in the collaborative process must be clearly outlined.
- Innovations have been in place for more than 2 years.
- The term 'industry partners' includes publicly or privately-owned companies
- The term 'partners' include federal, state and government departments, statutory authorities, industry associations, unions, not-for-profits and recognised community organisations.
- In addition to universities, tertiary education institutions may also include business schools, TAFEs or other accredited higher education programs.
- Non-winning projects can be resubmitted in subsequent years however winning projects are not eligible for an Engagement Australia Award in subsequent years.
- Applications are deemed eligible if there is evidence of a genuine collaboration underpinning the work and if the project has produced impactful results.
- Applications will be judged only in the category for which they have been submitted.
- All criteria must be addressed
- Applicants may submit multiple applications per award category.
- Applications must be complete at closing of the application period in order to progress to judging.
- Applications which do not meet the above requirements will be deemed ineligible and will not proceed to judging.

WHEN TO APPLY?

Key application dates can be found on the Engagement Australia website.

HOW TO APPLY?

Institutions are required to submit completed applications and associated evidence through the online portal managed by eAwards prior to the closing date.

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE APPLICATION?

To be eligible your submission must include a complete application comprised of the following sections:

APPLICATION – 2000 WORDS MAXIMUM

Citation - 100 words

Provide a high-level summary of the project - this will be used as a citation if the application is shortlisted.

Overview – 400 words

Provide an overview of the collaboration describing the project or program, including year of inception and timeframe of the program. Articulate the problem or opportunity being addressed. Describe the objectives of the program, and how collaborating partners were selected, or how partnerships were formed.

Significance - 300 words

Outline the major challenge your innovation is working to solve and any new approaches that were taken within the collaborative partnership, to meet the unique circumstances of the program. Detail how your program may differ from others in the same field.

Outcomes and impact – 600 words

According to the category you are applying for, describe the outcomes achieved via the collaborative program. These might be economic, financial, social, educational, environmental or community benefits. In addition to the considerations outlined for each category above, you might also like to consider including the below tangible measures of outcomes and impact:

- **All categories:** Describe the non-economic benefits of your project, such as environmental, cultural, and social benefits. Indicate which problems or opportunities were addressed, and whether the Program played a leading or major role; also indicate longer-lasting implications.
- **Community Engagement:** Provide figures for tangible outcomes where applicable, evidence may include community groups that have directly benefited and their approximate numbers, economic growth projected or jobs created, local, State or nation-wide outcomes, or informative material created and its outreach etc.
- **Indigenous Engagement:** Provide relevant data to demonstrate sustained improvement in outcomes for Indigenous Australians. You may also wish to include qualitative evidence of how the partnership has given voice to Indigenous people or impacted on the culture, attitudes, behaviour or values of participants or the organisations involved.
- **Industry Engagement:** Provide figures and tangible evidence of the outcomes of the partnership. This may include number of staff, students, community members involved, investment attracted, impact on processes, activities or services delivered by the partner or tertiary institution.

- **Student Learning:** Provide evidence of how this program has improved learning and teaching performance or quality at your institution, numbers of placement opportunities, student enrolments and data on student outcomes (retention, progression, success and employability) etc. Please also note if marginalised groups have been included in outcomes.
- **Student and/or Alumni Engagement:** Provide figures for tangible outcomes such as number of students engaging in the programs, active alumni, student outcomes (retention, progression and success), employment outcomes, PhD candidacies, improved rates for STEM participation, etc. Please also note if marginalised groups have been included in outcomes.
- **Research Impact:** Provide figures for tangible outcomes such as sales revenue, product numbers, investment attracted, industry growth rates projected, jobs or new companies created, new products or services. Also include any other expected benefits from developed technology or products.
- **International:** Provide figures for tangible outcomes achieved through the partnership for both national and international collaborators, research or teaching outcomes and examples of student engagement.

Detail of partnerships, level of engagement and sustainability – 600 words

Provide information about your collaborative partners and a description of the partnership. Provide details of how the partnership was structured and maintained. Applications that can show true partnership in the design, delivery and evaluation of programmatic activities will be considered highly. Evidence of a strong partnership methodology is essential. The considerations above may be useful for the types of information to include in this section. Please note that all programs should have been in place for more than 2 years.

Supporting evidence – links to websites etc – 1 page maximum

Include any further comments or promotional material you feel will highlight the objectives and the outcomes of the program. Please note that additional information can only supplement information already included in the application and will not be considered as a substitute for responding to any individual category.

Two Letters of recommendation from Institution and partner (industry, community, government etc) – 1 page maximum each

Please provide two signed letters of support. One letter should be from a participating industry or community partner; and one letter of endorsement from your institution. Each should be on official letterhead. Suitable signatories would be CEOs, upper level management, Vice-Chancellors, Deans or Heads of Departments. The letters should address any other special outcomes or stand-out features of the collaboration and be limited to one page.

WHEN WILL WINNERS BE ANNOUNCED?

Award recipients will be announced at the Engagement Australia Awards ceremony in November 2026.

HOW WILL APPLICATIONS BE ASSESSED?

The application process is as follows:

- Application prepared and submitted.
- Application processed by Engagement Australia to confirm eligibility.
- Application assessed against the assessment criteria below by a single judging panel comprising representatives from industry, higher education and community. Expert referees may be co-opted to the Panel depending on the content specialisations in the applications.
- Shortlist and winners finalised by the judging panel.
- Shortlisted applicants notified in late-September, with winners announced at the Engagement Australia Awards ceremony .

All applications will be competitively assessed on the merits of the application and how it reflects the award category.

Due to the volume of applications received, applications are assessed based on the documentation provided at the time of submission. Engagement Australia is unlikely to follow up missing documentation after applications have been submitted.



Applications meeting the eligibility guidelines will be assessed on the following basis:

CRITERIA	SCORING GUIDELINES
Significance	In a high performing initiative, the judging panel would expect to see a clear explanation of the innovation central to the program. This should note the originality of the solution, cite evidence of the program's leadership in its field (if possible) and differentiation from a program's competitors.
Outcomes & Impact: Realised Benefits	Applications should note clear outcomes with tangible results demonstrating the achievement of goals or improved outcomes. Results should be of a scale proportionate to the problem addressed by the initiative. Funding attracted for research, papers produced, or conference presentations are indicators of profile and activity, but are not considered tangible outcomes of an initiative.
Outcomes & Impact: Importance & Potential	Assess the significance of the problem addressed by the initiative and the extent to which the collaboration reduces this burden or enhances this opportunity. Consider the scalability, translatability and future direction of the initiative i.e. national impact, or extension into other fields or applications.
Collaborative Partners: Strength of relationship and level of engagement	High performing applications will be able to demonstrate the longevity of their partnership, and active and enthusiastic involvement by the partners. The judging panel will also look for depth and breadth to the collaborative activities, i.e. new activities in fields not originally envisaged; and engagement methods that have been instrumental in achieving outcomes.
Collaborative Partners: Sustainability of Partnership	High performing applications will provide confirmation that the relationship has the capacity to endure and grow beyond the initial mandate, or to persevere through significant changes in the external environment, or in the businesses and personnel of the participants. This includes the attraction of new partners, or the establishment of permanent organisation structures.

Please be sure to address all criteria and provide as much evidence as possible on each, across all sections of your application. Please also clearly note the scope, scale, and timeframe of your initiative.

ENQUIRIES:

For all enquiries please contact the Engagement Australia team at admin@engagementaustralia.org.au



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Leading The Engagement Agenda

Engagement Australia champions the unique role universities have with society to address contemporary global challenges and trends through teaching, learning, research and partnerships.

We do this by:

- Providing and inspiring leadership;
- Developing capacity and future leaders;
- Enabling peer-learning;
- Providing practical tools and tips; and
- Providing a platform for collaboration and knowledge creation.

Engagement Australia supports the wider contextual standard definition of community engagement, previously developed by the US-based Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which has succeeded in codifying the core characteristics and principles of community engagement. It defines Community engagement as a method of teaching, learning and research that describes interactions between universities and their communities (business, industry, government, NGOs, and other groups) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

Contact:

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