The Ultimate Guide to Awards Management

Streamline Submission and Review for Your Organization While Enhancing User Experience for Nominees, Judges, and Staff

Introduction

If your organization manages an awards program, you are probably looking for ways to improve your efficiency, reduce your costs, relieve the burden on staff, and improve the user experience for nominees and judges.

This guide is designed to help you identify solutions on the market, prioritize your needs, weigh your options, evaluate potential vendors, and flawlessly implement your preferred solution.

Our 10-point evaluation checklist will help navigate the process to ensure the best possible outcome for your organization based on proven, best-practice experience from hundreds of member-centric organizations.
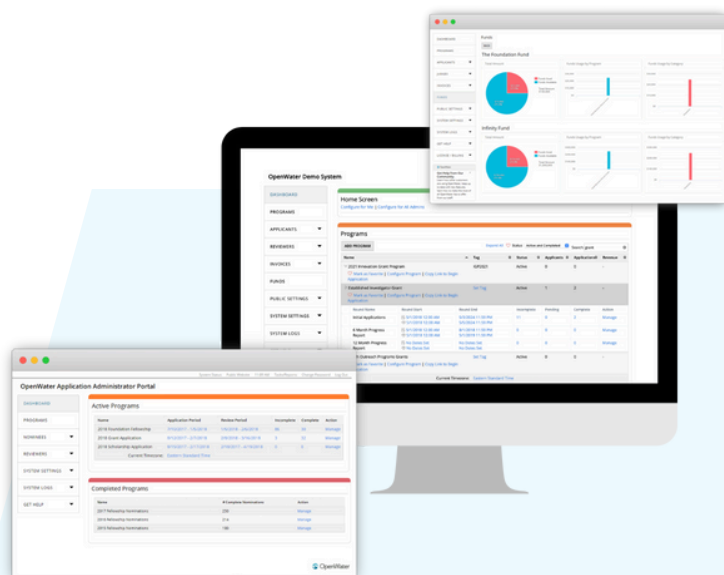
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01 Do You Really Need Awards Management Software?

Many organizations struggle with their awards programs and attempt to control costs by using manual processes (such as spreadsheets). Or, they may have clunky/failing awards software that can't keep up. Either can lead to increased staffing costs and lost revenue. Take our short quiz to learn whether your organization needs an awards management solution:

Awards Management Quiz		
Yes	**No**	
		Do your programs require multiple, distinct workflows and have complex judging needs?
		Do you need your awards data to integrate with your CRM?
		Do you process a large volume of entries (100 or more)?
		Do you manage multiple programs?
		Do you have limited IT/coding resources?
		Do you need reliable, real-time support?
		Is your current awards program placing a huge burden on your staff and judges?
		If you could manage your programs more efficiently, would you introduce more programs resulting in additional revenue sources?

If you answered "Yes" to any of these questions, you need awards management software!

Benefits of an Awards Software

There's so much you can do with an automated solution — particularly one that integrates seamlessly with your membership management system. Awards software can help you:

- ✓ **Eliminate manual processes**

- ✓ **Manage multiple programs with consistent processes, branding, and reporting**

- ✓ **Handle large volumes of entries**

- ✓ **Relieve pressure on your judges and staff**

- ✓ **Improve the user experience**

- ✓ **Automate communications to easily keep everyone informed**

- ✓ **Create comprehensive reports and dashboards with just a few clicks**

- ✓ **Ensure fairness and transparency**

- ✓ **Generate additional non-dues/non-membership fee revenue**

Adding an awards management solution to your tech stack should support your overall digital transformation goals and objectives. Let's look at how awards software can help you.

02 Understanding Your Awards Software Options

You have several choices when it comes to the type of awards management software; you will want to select the solution that meets your organization's particular needs.

1 **Types of Solutions on the Market**

✓ Standalone Awards Management Software

These solutions are dedicated platforms specifically designed to manage the end-to-end process of awards and recognition programs. They typically include tools for entries, judging, scoring, communication, and reporting. If you do not require any integration with your membership management system, this may be right for you.

✓ Association Management Software (AMS) with Awards Modules

These AMS systems focus on membership management, event management, communications, and financial management, but they also offer awards management capabilities as an optional module. These solutions may not include award solutions with the latest features you will need to properly manage a complex submission and review process with more than 100 entries.

Event Management Software with Awards Features

These event-centric solutions are designed primarily for managing events, but may include some award features, such as submission and judging tools. This basic option will likely not work if your organization has multiple programs, large volumes of submissions, or complex workflows.

Customized Solutions

These solutions are highly customized to your particular needs and are either developed in-house by a large IT staff or through a third-party developer. They typically include automated workflows adapted to your award processes, task management, and tailored forms. Customized solutions may not initially meet industry best-practices, but they can be tailored to address nearly all of your needs — but they are time-consuming and expensive to build, maintain, and upgrade.

Integrated Solutions

This best-of-both-worlds solution combines the advantages of best-in-class awards management that easily integrates with the most popular CRMs, Association Management Systems, and Engagement Management Systems. In this case, you have the latest, most advanced awards management features that seamlessly integrate with your platform, so you have a centralized source of awards data.

2 What Can You Do With the Right Awards Management Software?

Awards software helps organizations manage the intake of entries and facilitates the review of nominations by judges. A robust awards management solution integrates with your membership management software to pass critical information about membership participation back and forth to provide a full view of all member interactions. It allows you to:

- **Streamline Processes** by automating and organizing the entire awards process, from entries, through judging, final selection, and notifications

- **Access a Centralized Platform** where all awards-related activities can be managed, thereby reducing administrative burdens

- **Improve Accuracy and Efficiency** by minimizing human errors (lost/misplaced items) and speeding up processes, such as nomination review and scoring

- **Create Customized Nomination Forms** to suit different award categories

- **Automate Workflows** from the entries to the winner notifications

- **Provide Easy-to-Use Judging Tools** that allow judges to score and comment on entries online, with configurable scoring systems

- **Implement Convenient Communication Tools** for automated emails and notifications to keep nominees, judges, and other stakeholders informed

- **Take advantage of Powerful Reporting and Analytics Tools to** report on entries, judging outcomes, and other key metrics

- **Ensure Parity and Transparency** throughout each of your programs

03 Why Your Current Process is Costing You Money

A lack of awards management software can lead to inefficiency, increased costs, and missed opportunities — which can impact your association's bottom line and growth potential.

Here are some of the ways your organization could be negatively impacted:

Staffing Costs	Managing awards manually involves significant administrative work, such as data entry, sorting entries, coordinating with judges, and handling communications.
Wasted Time/ Inefficiency	Administrative tasks can be time-consuming and prone to delays without automation. This can lead to higher operational costs because more staffing hours are needed.
Increased Risk of Errors	Manual processing is prone to mistakes and lost documents/ attachments; these may require additional time and resources to resolve, resulting in greater costs and potential damage to your organization's reputation.
Poor Communication and Engagement	Manually keeping nominees, judges, and other stakeholders informed and engaged is time-consuming. Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings and missed deadlines —resulting in a potential loss of participants, members, and sponsors.
Lost Revenue Opportunities	Past experience with a slow, manual awards process can deter future participation, leading to a loss of revenue from sponsorships, partnerships, or increased participation fees.

Decision-Making Based on Incomplete/ Inaccurate Data	The lack of reliable real-time data can result in inaccurate decision-making, inefficient resource allocation, and missed opportunities, which could cost money.
Compliance and Security Risks	Managing sensitive data manually can lead to compliance risks, especially regarding data privacy and security regulations. A data breach or non-compliance can result in costly fines and perhaps even legal fees.
Lower Member and Participant Satisfaction	An outdated process can frustrate members, leading to dissatisfaction and lower engagement. This can result in lower retention rates, fewer repeat participants, and decreased membership or program fees.

Case Study Vignette

Problem

Complex judging rules, Tedious workloads, Reporting & Tracking

Solution

OpenWater helped ASAE:

- Easily manage multiple judging rounds
- Increase fairness
- Facilitate collaboration
- Reduce staff time
- Access tailored dashboards & reports

> " *By using the OpenWater platform our staff at ASAE were able to positively affect member engagement through greater visibility and communication. The automation of emails and manual processes cut down on staff time significantly which allowed us to focus more on the member experience* "
>
> – asae

04 Three Key Objectives of a New Solution

With the right awards management software, your association can streamline your operations, improve the quality and consistency of awards programs, and ultimately enhance the overall experience for your nominees and judges. This leads to a more efficient, fair, and scalable awards process that can grow as you do.

Overall, you'll likely want to look at how your solution will help you meet three primary objectives:

1	Increasing Your Efficiency and Reducing Costs

Awards management software can significantly enhance efficiency and performance for associations by:

Automating Processes:

- Discounts on annual meeting registration, publications/resources, and membership renewals
- Early or Exclusive access to annual meeting announcements, publications, and annual compensation survey results

Reducing Manual Data Entry and Intervention:

- Minimizes administrative burden by automating manual tasks, allowing staff to focus on your organization's mission
- Reduces errors associated with manual data entry, leading to more accurate outcomes

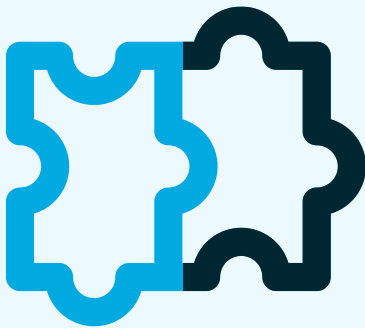### *Improving Program Management:*

- Provides a centralized platform for better management of awards programs, improving tracking, reporting, and overall organization
- Supports growth in the number of entries without a proportional increase in costs, making it scalable for future expansion

Saving Time and Money:

- Limits time and resources required to manage awards programs by automating repetitive tasks
- Decreases the need for manual labor and reduces costly mistakes
- Leads to significant long-term cost savings by reducing the manual workload and increasing efficiencies

Integrating with Your Membership Management System

Integrating awards management software with your existing system centralizes all awards-related activities, improving access and organization for staff, judges, and nominees. It enhances communication, reduces and ensures consistent evaluation criteria to reduce bias.

The integration also offers advanced reporting and analytics for data-driven decision-making, scalability to accommodate growth, customization to meet specific needs, and enhanced data security and regulatory compliance.

Benefits include:

Centralized Data Management: Combining awards management software with a membership management system provides a single platform for managing all awards-related activities, making it easier for staff, judges, and nominees to access and manage information.
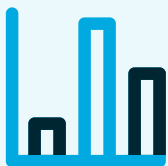
Enhanced Communication: Integration enables automated emails, notifications, and updates to be sent to nominees, judges, and other stakeholders directly from the system, improving communication and reducing manual follow-up.
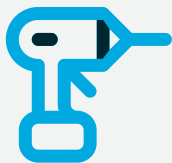
Reduced Errors: Automating data entry and processing between the awards software and system minimizes human errors, such as incorrect data entry or misplaced documents.

Consistent Evaluation and Criteria: The integration ensures consistent application of evaluation criteria across all nominees, reducing bias and maintaining fairness in the judging process.

Powerful Reporting and Analytics: Real-time reporting and analytics from the integrated system provides insights into application trends, award distributions, and performance, enabling data-driven decision-making.

Scalability and Customization: Integrated systems can scale to accommodate growth in the number of programs or entries and can be customized to meet the unique needs of distinct workflow processes.

2   Improving the User Experience

Awards management software can significantly enhance the user experience for member-centric organizations by providing streamlined, user-friendly interfaces and features that simplify and improve every aspect of the awards process.

Here's how it can improve the user experience:

For Nominees:

✅ **User-Friendly Design:** The software offers an intuitive interface and guided processes, making it easy for nominees to navigate and submit entries.

✅ **Accessibility:** Nominees can access the platform from various devices, including smartphones, allowing for flexibility and convenience.

✅ **Simplified Submission:** The platform supports online entries, auto-save features, and multiple file formats, making the application process easier and more efficient.

✅ **Real-Time Tracking:** Nominees can monitor the status of their entries in real-time and receive automated notifications, providing transparency and reducing anxiety.

✅ **Enhanced Communication:** Built-in messaging tools and automated responses simplify communication, ensuring all information is captured and inquiries are addressed promptly.

✅ **Data Security:** The software ensures secure entries and controlled access, protecting nominees' sensitive information and enhancing trust.

✅ **Detailed Feedback:** Nominees receive comprehensive feedback directly through the platform, along with instant reporting on entries and outcomes, thereby improving their overall experience.

For Judges:

Your judges are the lifeblood of your awards program. They are often volunteers — possibly retirees or those who are deeply experienced in your field. You want to ensure you make the process as painless and enjoyable as possible to avoid burnout; a well-designed awards management application will help you by providing:

✓ **Increased Efficiency:** Automation reduces time-consuming manual tasks, thereby reducing workload.

✓ **Consistent Scoring:** Customizable rules ensure fair and uniform evaluations.

✓ **Real-Time Tracking:** Centralized systems help monitor progress and manage deadlines.

✓ **Enhanced Collaboration:** Better coordination and communication helps judges and staff.

✓ **Reduced Errors:** Automation lowers the risk of data entry errors and discrepancies.

✓ **Effective Reporting:** Automated tools facilitate better feedback and insights for future improvements.

Case Study Vignette

AMERICAN-SCANDINAVIAN FOUNDATION

Problem

Poor User Experience for international grant nominees & judges, significant staff burden

Solution

OpenWater offered:

- Easy-to-use submission process - particularly for international nominees
- Improved judging and collaboration tools
- Easily managed multiple judging rounds
- Improved processes to reduce staff time

> *OpenWater makes it easy for our applicants to submit their grant applications. Our judges have found the program to be an efficient and easy tool that let's them decide on the grant awards without having to reach out to staff for additional support*

— AMERICAN-SCANDINAVIAN FOUNDATION

05 Selecting the Right Software for Your Organization

Choosing the right awards management software for your member-centric organization requires careful consideration of several factors to ensure the software meets your specific needs.

You will need a comprehensive feature set with:

- ☐ Customizable submission and review templates

- ☐ Customizable public-facing program page that matches your organization's branding

- ☐ Multi-round submission and review processes

- ☐ Integration with all membership management systems — with Single Sign-on (SSO) convenience

- ☐ Unlimited custom reports

- ☐ Automated emails and notifications

- ☐ Advanced management tools to track and monitor progress

- ☐ Collaboration tools for judges and staff

- ☐ Customizable scoring rules

- ☐ Customizable workflows to meet varying program needs

10 - Point Checklist

Use this checklist to guide you through the platform launch process:

1	**Advanced Functionality to Meet Complex Program Needs**	If your processes are complex and require multiple, distinct submission and review workflows, the software must be able to demonstrate its ability to meet your specific demands.
2	**Integration Capabilities:**	It must be able to integrate with popular membership management systems, such as iMIS, NetForum, or Salesforce — as well as payment processing systems, including PayPal and Stripe.
3	**Real-Time Support:**	Look for real-time support with experienced, knowledgeable agents — including live chat (not chatbots!), email, and phone support. Also ensure the provider offers training resources, including tutorials, webinars, user guides, etc.
4	**User-Friendly Interface:**	A user-friendly interface that's easy to navigate for all skill levels, with guided steps for entries, judging, and key processes to minimize errors.
5	**Flexibility**	Look for a system that lets you tailor submission forms, judging criteria, and workflows to fit the unique needs of your awards program.
6	**Scalability:**	Choose software that can scale based on additional users, submission volume, categories, and programs to meet your growing needs. Also, ensure the provider performs regular updates to keep up with technological advancements.

| (7) | **Reporting and Analytics:** | You'll need to be able to generate unlimited customized reports on key metrics to monitor progress and evaluate program success. |

| (8) | **Data Security and Compliance:** | Verify the software complies with relevant data protection regulations and adheres to the highest security protocols to protect sensitive information. |

| (9) | **Mobile Access:** | Your members and nominees will likely access your awards program via their phones at some time, so your software must be offer a responsive design to seamlessly adjusts to the various devices. |

| (10) | **Ease of Implementation:** | You'll want a vendor with a proven track record in quick and successful implementations and smooth data migrations delivered on-time and on-budget. |

Case Study Vignette

Problem

No Awards Website Coding Knowledge, Reporting issues

Solution

OpenWater implemented:

- Easy-to-customize website templates
- Seamless application process
- Flexible reporting dashboards
- Automated emails

> 66 *My favorite part about OpenWater is how seamless marketing the award program is to our members - It's easy to create visually appealing and user-friendly websites* 99
>
> – NECA

Evaluating Solutions: The Importance of Social Proof

Nearly every vendor can provide a few cherry-picked reviews or testimonials to demonstrate happy customers — but it's important that you dig deeper. You will want to know:

- ✓ How was the solution used?

- ✓ How complex were their programs and how many distinct workflows did they have?

- ✓ Is the client similar to your organization (size, industry, application volume, etc.)?

- ✓ What do clients say about the quality and responsiveness of the software's support team?

Look for providers that can supply relevant:

- ✓ Case studies

- ✓ Success stories

- ✓ Direct quotes

- ✓ Independ client review site posts

- ✓ References from *multiple current clients*

06 Maximizing Your Return on Investment (ROI)

The right awards management software will help you reduce your costs, increase efficiency, and ensure user satisfaction. But to get the full return on your investment, you will want to keep a few other things in mind as you evaluate your options:

1 ## Upgrade Path

Your organization's needs will change with time; you need a solution that will not only provide the latest features but will also allow you to quickly and seamlessly upgrade your software to meet new demands. This should be seamless and not require a significant new investment to maintain or upgrade the software.

2 ## Integration with Your Existing System

By ensuring the awards software integrates with your membership management system, you will get the most out of the solution and will know it will be with you for the long term.
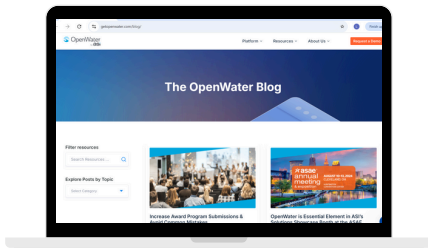
3 ## Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)

You will want to consider both direct and indirect costs, such as staff time saved through automation, hidden fees, ongoing maintenance, and the upgrade path, when evaluating your actual short- and long-term software costs.

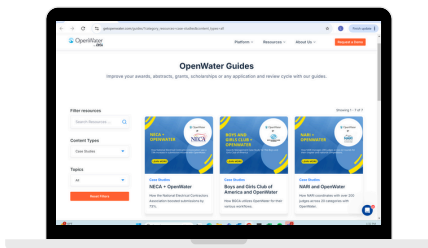## *07* Next Steps & Additional Resources

Awards management software can quickly and easily increase your awards program efficiency and performance while significantly enhancing the user experience. If you are considering an addition to your tech stack, we have several resources you will want to check out:

Educational Blog

Get the latest industry news, hacks, and advice on application and review best practices.

openwater.com/blog

Client Success Stories

Read about how ASAE and other organizations just like yours have optimized their nomination and review processes with OpenWater.

openwater.com/guides

Watch an OpenWater Quick Tour

In just two minutes, learn how OpenWater can streamline and improve your application and review process.

openwater.com/quick-tour

About ASI

Advanced Solutions International (ASI) is a leading global provider of cloud software and services for associations
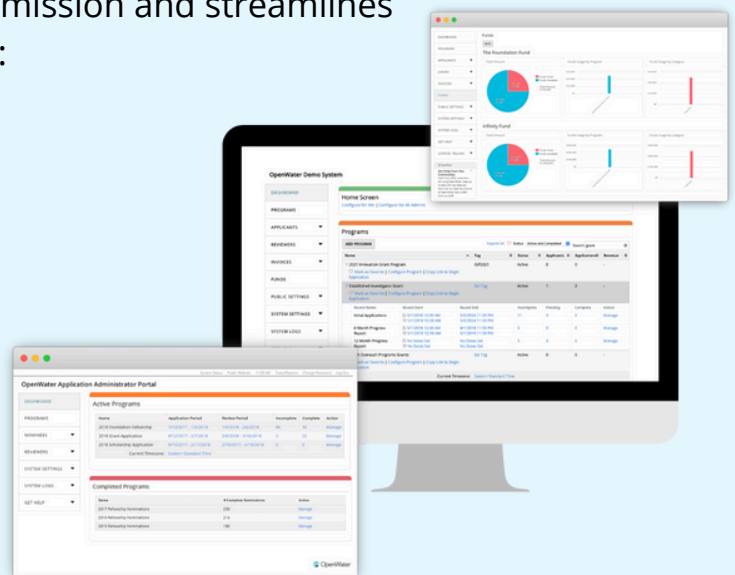
and non-profits. We help clients digitally transform, streamline operations, and grow revenue through industry expertise, best-practice advice, and high-quality solutions. Our portfolio of solutions includes iMIS® for association and non-profit management, TopClass LMS for learning management, OpenWater for application and review management, and Clowder® for year-round mobile app management.

Simplifying Your Complex Submission and Review Processes

OpenWater is an off-the-shelf-ready application and review management system that collects any type of submission and streamlines the entire review process, including:

- Awards
- Fellowships
- Grants
- Prizes
- Abstracts
- Scholarships
- Board Nominations
- Call for Papers
- Entries/Submissions

OpenWater seamlessly integrates with the most popular AMS, CRM, and Engagement Management Systems, including iMIS, Salesforce, and NetForum.

Schedule a personalized demo to discover how you can navigate your awards program more efficiently, reduce stress on judges and staff, and enhance the member-experience at openwater.com/demo

OpenWater
by asi

www.openwater.com