

W.A.C.E. Annual Awards Program

Award Descriptions, Elements, and Criteria

W.A.C.E. Awards & Recognition Handbook

The Western Association of Chamber Executives (W.A.C.E.) is proud to honor excellence in chamber leadership, staff professionalism, and communications. These awards recognize outstanding achievements, innovative practices, and individuals who embody the values of being a **Catalyst, Convener, and Champion** for their members and communities.

Beyond recognizing annual examples of excellence in the various categories, W.A.C.E. believes that the process of submitting a Chamber's work for evaluation and feedback is a value in and of itself. To that end, we are committed to ensuring qualified, thoughtful judging of our awards, and to providing feedback to all entrants.

Section I: Chamber Communication & Program Awards

1. E-Newsletter Award

Purpose: Honors professional, engaging, and effective electronic newsletters.

Eligibility: Only e-newsletters distributed in the past 12 months are eligible.

Application Elements: Chamber info, newsletter copy/link, overview, content strategy, design notes, metrics, features, compliance confirmation.

Judging Criteria: Look & impression (20%), Content (25%), Headlines/readability (15%), Length/navigation (15%), Links (10%), Features (5%), Compliance (10%).

2. Newsletter / Magazine Award

Purpose: Recognizes excellence in print or digital newsletters/magazines.

Eligibility: Only editions distributed in the past 12 months are eligible; publications that are primarily membership directories are not eligible.

Application Elements: Chamber info, publication copy, overview, strategy, design notes, engagement evidence.

Judging Criteria: Photos (15%), Alerts (10%), Core competencies (15%), Headlines/copy (10%), Captions (5%), Editorial style (10%), Editorial content (15%), People-focus (5%), Design (10%), Production (5%).

3. Social Media Impact Campaign Award

NEW IN 2025

Purpose: Recognizes Chambers demonstrating measurable impact through creative, strategic social media campaigns.

Eligibility: Campaign launched and executed within past 12 months; social media as the central channel.

Application Elements: Chamber info, campaign overview, strategy, implementation, outcomes/metrics, lessons learned, supporting materials, budget summary.

Judging Criteria: Goals (15%), Creativity/Strategy (20%), Execution (15%), Outcomes/ROI (25%), Engagement/Impact (15%), Sustainability (10%).

4. Video Award

Purpose: Recognizes outstanding short-form videos showcasing chamber impact.

Eligibility: Videos must have been released in the past 12 months; no more than 3 minutes in length; no unauthorized copyrighted content; consent for W.A.C.E. use.

Application Elements: Chamber info, video file/link, overview, production notes, 3C alignment, distribution/metrics, rights certification.

Judging Criteria: Message effectiveness (40%), Professionalism (30%), Creativity (30%).

5. Website Award

Purpose: Honors chamber websites with strong design, functionality, content, and SEO.

Eligibility: Primary chamber website; actively maintained.

Application Elements: Chamber info, URL, overview, design/navigation, content strategy, media use, SEO notes, technical features, supporting materials.

Judging Criteria: Design/branding (35%), Content (35%), SEO (20%), Functionality/features (10%).

6. Overall Communications Award

Purpose: Recognizes Chambers with integrated communications excellence across platforms.

Eligibility: Must submit membership sales packet; submit an entry in at least 3 of the other Communication awards (E-Newsletter, Newsletter/Magazine, Social Media Campaign, Video, Website)

Application Elements: Chamber info, membership packet, proof of entries, 150-word social media essay; 150-word 3C Branding essay, optional supporting materials.

Judging Criteria: Membership packet (25%), Supplementary awards (25%), Social media (20%), Branding integration (20%), Cohesiveness (10%).

7. Outstanding Chamber Program Awards

Purpose: Recognizes exemplary Chamber of Commerce programs that highlight performance in a core competency area and/or demonstrate excellence in being a 3C Chamber. Honors programs that have achieved measurable success, align with the Chamber's mission, and can serve as a replicable model for other Chambers.

Eligibility: Chambers who are members of W.A.C.E. may submit nominations for programs that have been implemented within the past twelve (12) months.

Application Elements: Programs must demonstrate success in one or more core competency areas

- Strengthening the local economy
- Promoting and improving the community
- Political action
- Representing business interests with government
- Networking & building business relationships

Applications will address program goals & objectives, strategy & design, implementation, results & outcomes, challenges & lessons learned, replicability, and budget.

Judging Criteria: Alignment with 3C Model & Core Competencies (20%), Program Goals & Strategy (15%), Execution & Implementation (15%), Results & Impact (25%), Replicability (15%), and Innovations & Lessons Learned (10%)

Section II: Individual Recognition & Awards

1. Executive of the Year Award

Purpose: Recognizes an outstanding chamber CEO based on one year's (current) performance (not a "Career Achievement" award).

Eligibility: All chamber chief paid executives who are W.A.C.E. members; cannot reapply for 3 years after receiving award.

Application Elements: Nomination (self or 2 peers/leaders), documentation of achievements in finances, communications, legislative action, membership, community service.

Judging Criteria: Finances (20%), Communications (20%), Legislative (20%), Membership (20%), Community service (20%).

2. Hathaway Team Member of the Year Award

Purpose: Honors chamber staff (non-CEO) for innovation and dedication; includes a scholarship to the following W.A.C.E. Conference.

Eligibility: Staff only; minimum 2 years chamber experience

Application Elements: Nomination (peer or self), documentation of innovations, contributions, accomplishments, and professional involvement.

Judging Criteria: Innovation (25%), Program/financial contributions (25%), Professional accomplishments (25%), Dedication to chamber profession (25%).

3. Pettit Memorial Excellence in Leadership Award

Purpose: Honors long-term contributions to chamber professionalism and mentoring, in memory of Russell E. Pettit.

Eligibility: Any chamber CEO or department head who is a W.A.C.E. member. Nominations need to be endorsed by 3 W.A.C.E. members, or by a state or regional chamber executive association.

Application Elements: Nomination letters, documentation of service, peer testimonials (recommended).

Judging Criteria: Professional advancement contributions (40%), Mentorship (30%), Service to chamber/W.A.C.E. (20%), Commitment to unselfish leadership (10%).

4. Rose Memorial Scholarship Award

Purpose: Supports chamber CEOs with 10+ years' experience in pursuing professional development, in memory of Steve Rose. Scholarship valued at \$1,500 for use in pursuing additional professional development activities.

Eligibility: Chamber CEO, minimum 10 years chamber work (staff + executive), employed full-time, W.A.C.E. member, preference to ACE designees.

Application Elements: Application, résumé/CV, record of professional development, goals statement, verification of eligibility.

Judging Criteria: Commitment to development (30%), Leadership/contributions (25%), Chamber/community impact (25%), Alignment of professional development goals with ACE or credentialing (20%).

5. Hammer Memorial Scholarship Award

Purpose: Honors a chamber CEO exemplifying professionalism and leadership potential; recipient receives a 3rd-year Academy scholarship.

Eligibility: Chamber CEO, completed 2nd year Academy, commits to 3rd year.

Application Elements: Application, Academy record, leadership statement, CEO accomplishments.

Judging Criteria: Professionalism (30%), Future leadership potential (30%), Contributions to chamber (20%), Commitment to development (20%).

NOTE: This award will be presented in its current format for the 2025 cycle, but the following changes will be implemented beginning with the 2026 Academy:

- Eligibility will be extended to all Academy attendees.
- Award will be presented during the Academy program.
- Application and evaluation process will need to be revised.

6. Accredited Chamber Executive

Purpose: Recognizes Chamber professionals who have committed to ongoing professional development and have achieved a level of excellence in their ability to lead a local Chamber. Encourages Chambers to prioritize professional development for their staff.

Eligibility: Chamber CEO or staff professional with definite executive management responsibilities, graduate of WACE Academy or the U.S. Chamber Institute for Organization Management or have served as a chamber CEO for five years or more.

Application Elements: Application, proof of attendance at designated events or completion of specified activities, body of knowledge exam.

Reaccreditation: Initial Accreditation is valid for five (5) years; designation may be re-issued based on renewed application.

7. Annual Conference Scholarship *(Sponsored by WACE Educational Foundation)*

Purpose: Assist Chamber professionals to attend the Annual Conference.

Eligibility: Individuals employed by a local or state Chamber that is a member in good standing of WACE.

Application Elements: Application, essay, letters of support.
