

2026 IPRA Awards Info & Criteria

Who qualifies for the program?

The Awards & Recognition Program gives professionals an opportunity to recognize *colleagues, agencies, and community members / volunteers* for their extraordinary work and contribution to the industry.

Why is it important to nominate?

Taking the time to recognize someone shows an *appreciation* for their contribution to the organization and encourages them to stay *motivated* and *engaged*.



2026 IPRA Awards Info & Criteria

Individual Conference Awards

Young Professional, Professional, Community Impact, Robert Artz Lifetime Achievement

Agency Conference Awards

Champions for Change, Exceptional Workplace, Outstanding Park/Facility, Outstanding Program/Event

Section Distinguished Member of the Year

Standing award for eight (8) Sections

IPRA/IAPD Community Service Award

Available for purchase for agency volunteers

2026 IPRA Awards Info & Criteria

Young Professional of the Year Award

Presented to a current Illinois Park and Recreation professional who has made an impact in the field of parks and recreation and/or in the community that they serve (less than 8 years).

Professional of the Year Award

Presented to a current Illinois Park and Recreation professional who has made an impact within the parks and recreation industry (minimum 8 years).

Community Impact Award

Presented to a current Illinois Park and Recreation professional who has made a significant impact in the community they serve (minimum 8 years). Current Executive Directors and CEOs are not eligible

2026 IPRA Individual Awards Criteria

Criteria

- Current IPRA member **(YP, POTY, CI)**
- Served for fewer than 8 years as a full-time professional in the field of P&R **(YP)**
- Served a minimum of 8 years as a full-time professional in the field of P&R **(POTY, CI)**
- Served as an officer for IPRA with the Board of Directors, Membership Council, Section Board or Committee **(YP, POTY)**
- Made a significant achievement for their agency or an achievement through community involvement **(YP, POTY)**
- Certified professional (CPRE, CPRP, CTRS, CPA, SHRM or equivalent in area of expertise requiring continuing education credits) **(POTY)**
- Made a major contribution to their local agency/community through involvement with local community, non-profit, business organizations or government agencies **(CI)**

2026 IPRA Robert Artz Award

Robert Artz Lifetime Achievement Award

The IPRA Robert Artz Lifetime Achievement Award was established to honor Robert Artz's legacy of service to the park and recreation profession. Bob died in a plane crash in 1979 at the young age of 48. He was an ambassador of the national leisure movement, and he strengthened the Illinois Park District system through his hard work and perseverance. Bob is best remembered for his outstanding leadership traits, candor, strong will, high standards, and dedication to the betterment of parks and recreation services.

The recipient of the Robert Artz Award will have had lasting impact and created awareness of the importance of parks and recreation among peers and in the community they serve.

Robert Artz Criteria

- Current IPRA Professional / Professional Non-Metro Member.
- Served a minimum of twenty-five (25) years as a full-time professional in the field of parks and recreation, of which at least fifteen (15) have been in Illinois.
- Served IPRA as an officer for the Board of Directors, Membership Council, section board, or committee.
- Certified Professional (CPRE, CPRP, CTRS, CPA, SHRM or equivalent in their area of expertise requiring CEUs).
- Has made a significant achievement for their agency or through involvement within their community.
- Candidates that have retired on or before the date of the Awards Luncheon (Friday, January 28, 2022) are not eligible to receive this award.
- Current IPRA Board of Directors are not eligible to receive IPRA professional recognition awards.

2026 IPRA Robert Artz Award

Robert Artz Nomination Form

- List all certifications held by the nominee.
- List where nominee has worked full-time for last 25 years.
- How has nominee served IPRA as an officer?
- List significant achievements at agency served or in own community.
- Describe outstanding abilities, morals, and commitment to parks and recreation.
- Identify examples of professional leadership and involvement.
- List any publications or articles produced by the nominee.
- Explain any other notable accomplishments that should be included with this nomination.

2026 IAPD/IPRA Champions for Change Award

Champions for Change Award

The IAPD/IPRA Champions for Change Award is presented to an agency with unique and exemplary practices of increasing access and fostering diversity and inclusion within their community or organization. These are measurable practices that remove barriers, result in positive social change, and inspire others to follow in their path. It improves the working experience and engagement levels of employees from underrepresented communities, and/or the lives of all people through the delivery of excellent services that provide social equity and access in the community.

Champions for Change Award Criteria

- Agency must employ at least one IAPD/IPRA member.
- Services, training, and/or programs noted in the application must have taken place during the 2025 calendar year.
- Agency must have demonstrated outstanding measurable efforts and accomplishments that have increased awareness and understanding, and promoted the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion within their organization and/or community.

Tips for Application

- Explain details and provide highlights. Programs, services, policy changes noted in the application should exemplify/showcase the impact instilled upon your community and/or agency from a DEI perspective.
- Is your agency fostering an inclusive environment? Is everyone all in? What about your staff, board, and community?

2026 IPRA Exceptional Workplace

Exceptional Workplace Award

The Health and Wellness Committee awards the EWA to agencies who identify and achieve a high level of health and wellness for their employees and recognize their achievements.

Criteria

- Answer approximately 40 questions relating to what your agency offers regarding Health and Wellness practices and procedures.
- Provide copies of your agencies Diversity Policy and Wellness Policy.
- Share a short description of why your agency should receive this award.
- Reapply for this award every 5 years.
- Recipients are notified prior to the awards ceremony at the Annual IPRA Business Meeting.

2026 IPRA Outstanding Program or Special Event

Outstanding Program or Special Event Award

The IPRA Outstanding Program and Special Event Award is presented to public agencies for outstanding and unique achievements in program development and implementation and special event planning.

Award Categories

- Program Award – new or ongoing program is a multiple-day activity, such as a program that meets for four, six or eight weeks. (1 per Division, if applicable)
- Special Event Award – one-time occurrence, although the event may take place over a few days (such as a festival). (1 per Division, if applicable)

Divisions

- Agency's operating budget is LESS than \$5 million dollars.
- Agency's operating budget is \$5 million dollars or GREATER.

Criteria

- Agency must employ a current IPRA Member.
- Project must have taken place during 2025.
- Nominator must provide supportive documentation to a Dropbox file by the deadline. Documentation must be in one PDF file and limited to 5 pages (maximum 5MB), and it should include the following:
 - Budget
 - Photos
 - Promotional materials

2026 IPRA Outstanding Park or Facility

Outstanding Park or Facility Award

The IPRA Outstanding Park and Facility Award is presented to public agencies for outstanding and unique achievements in the design and development of new or renovated recreation parks and facilities.

Award Categories

- Facility Award – new or renovation of a facility for specific use, multiple use or aquatics (1 per Division, if applicable)
- Park Award – new or renovation of a park, athletic field complex, playground, trail system, etc. (1 per Division, if applicable)

Divisions

- Agency's operating budget is LESS than \$5 million dollars.
- Agency's operating budget is \$5 million dollars or GREATER.

Criteria

- Agency must employ a current IPRA Member.
- Project must have taken place during 2025
- Nominator must provide supportive documentation to a Dropbox file by the deadline. Documentation must be in one PDF file and limited to 5 pages (maximum 5MB), and it should include the following:
 - Budget
 - Architectural drawings or site plans
 - Before and after photos
 - Promotional materials

2026 IPRA Section Distinguished Award

Section Distinguished Member of the Year Award

Award is presented to an *active* member of an IPRA Section that exemplifies the qualities of a leader, a collaborator, and an advocate. The nominee can be a co-worker, colleague, mentor, sponsor, or vendor; someone that is a trusted volunteer, influential leader, or a valuable contact within an IPRA Section.

This is a standing award, meaning each of the eight (8) sections present this award to one person in their section each year. Awards are presented at section meetings/functions prior to Conference.

Criteria

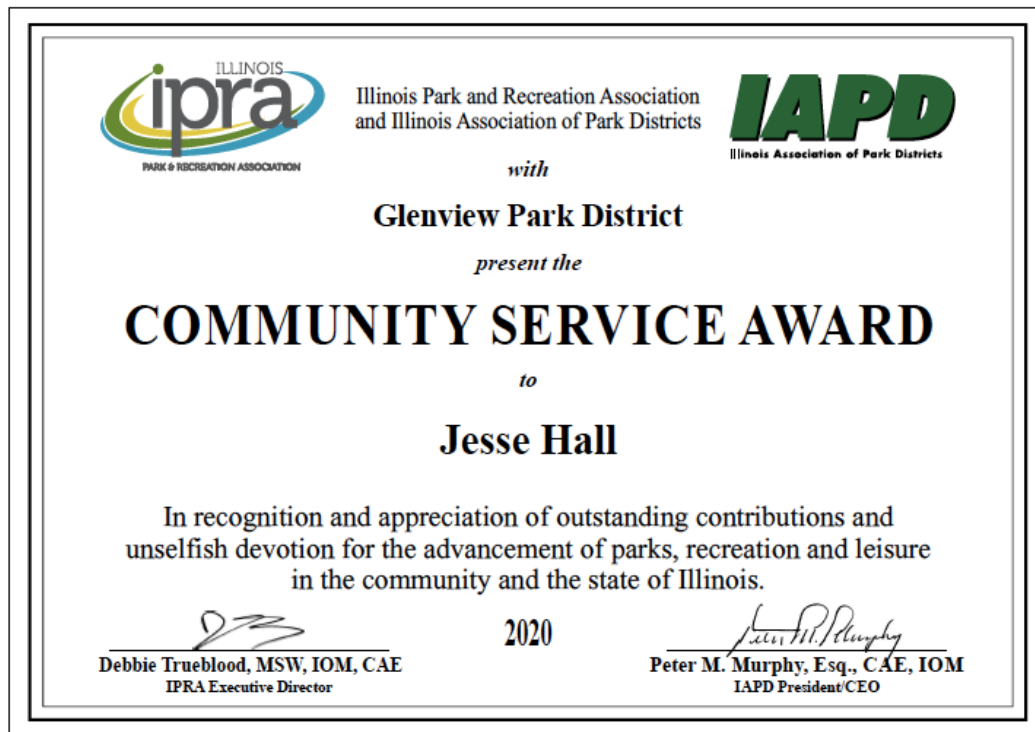
- Current IPRA member.
- Be an active member of a section.
- Current IPRA Board of Directors are not eligible to receive IPRA professional recognition awards.
- Additional criteria can include (but not limited to):
 - Attend section/committee meetings during the current year
 - Hold a position within the section/committee
 - Volunteer for an event
 - Provide useful resources (host venue, in-kind donation/sponsorship, marketing, photography)
 - Make a major contribution, past or present (time invested, creation of a school/event, take on a new responsibility)

2026 IPRA Community Service Award

Community Service Award

Looking for a special way to say “THANK YOU” to individuals, volunteers or organizations? Look no further than the IAPD / IPRA Community Service Award, which is designed to help you and your agency celebrate and recognize the efforts and contributions of *those in your community* that make recreation a vital part of everyone lifestyle.

Application fee is \$55 and includes the making and delivery of the original plaque; duplicate plaques may be ordered for \$30.00 each.



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What are some tips for submitting a nomination?

- Research the nominee and give yourself time to get accurate information before the deadline
- Don't waste your words on "fluff"
- Proof-read before submitting

Where do I submit my nomination?

- www.ilipra.org > Member Center > Awards & Recognition