

Crafting an award-winning nomination

Created as a resource to aid nomination writers for the **Governor's Outstanding Leadership Awards Program**

This feedback was created using responses to a survey questionnaire sent to the individuals listed as nominators for the top scoring candidates for the 2023 Governor's Outstanding Leadership Awards. By providing the advice contained in this resource, we do hope it helps to demystify the process of crafting an award-winning nomination. These statements do not reflect the opinions of the judging panel, the program administrator, or the Office of Financial Management in any way, nor are they suggestive of the scoring process.

What key elements do you believe are crucial for a successful nomination?

- Focus on the impact and breadth of the nominee's contribution. Be concise and choose words carefully. Connect the person's impacts to the mission. Show how it is relevant to what is going on at that specific time and how they made a difference.
- It starts with the basics - the examples of real-life successes.
- Specific detailed information and alignment with the nomination criteria.
- I believe you have to be thoughtful and detailed in your observations of the nominee long before putting words on the page. In the example of the nomination I submitted, once I recognized the person was deserving of the award, I closely observed the intentionality of their work and impact created to others.
- It's important for nominations to describe how the nominee demonstrates or demonstrated the behavior being sought from the question. The way to do that is through examples or story-telling. Think of it like one going into an interview. For example, it's not enough to say "Jane is a great collaborator". Describe an event that "Jane" successfully collaborated on and describe the results from that collaboration. It's important to show results or the impact from the behavior exhibited.
- Speaking with the people who work most closely with the nominee. Provide a variety of data points that illustrate the nominee's awesomeness: success metrics, qualitative feedback, etc.
- Top priority is a truly deserving candidate. In support of that candidate, it's vital to be able to tell that person's story in a clear way, showing the value and extent of the person's influence, and also simply explain the work and outcomes. Internal jargon, even common 'government-ese' and bureaucratic lingo, acronyms, and such make it harder for the info to be relevant to someone outside that work group. Evaluators are outsiders, in that regard, so it's key to talk TO them about the candidate.

- The ability to showcase leadership with tangible, measurable impacts or improvements
- Identifying an accomplishment that is above and beyond their normal job duties. For example, a few years ago we had a lot of nominations about people helping staff with teleworking during the pandemic such as getting laptop, monitors, etc. It was an extraordinary circumstance but they did their job at the end of the day.

How do you typically gather information and evidence to support your nomination?

- I reach out to their staff, peers, and also outside stakeholders who may have other valuable perspectives to share.
- I gather it from performance appraisals, the supervisor, a peer, trusted direct report, and a customer.
- I normally have first hand knowledge or I'll offer (suggest, beg, plead) to partner the individuals supervisor or close peers and ask them to create specific bullet point examples etc. and then I'll draft a narrative around the bullet points. the more people who partner with me on a nomination the better it ends up being (in my opinion).
- I wrote their specific nomination myself and based my writing on my observations and the impact I knew was happening for others.
- Interview or have short discussions with others the nominee has interacted with to get examples/stories/events on what the nominee has done over that past year. I also ask for data to back up the stories.
- Look at past intranet articles, winning nominations, and award criteria to compile evidence. Speak with people close to the project or person.
- A team meets with the director to consider candidates and discuss their accomplishment as leaders. We generate a list of candidates and ask the communication consultants who provide divisional communication support to the program/division where the candidate works, and ask supervisors and colleagues to provide the needed evidence.
- It depends based on the situation, but typically we work with staff to gather data to highlight the results of the leader.
- Showing the above and beyond normal job duties. Something that distinguishes the person from the others. Sometimes qualitative information can be difficult to gather but showing the impact of the accomplishment as a benefit and a contribution to the culture of the organization.

Can you share any strategies for effectively framing achievements or contributions within a nomination?

- It helps to focus on a couple of key contributions rather than trying to cover everything that person does in their day to day work. Clearly explain the benefits of the work to the populations we serve. Show the impact they have on their staff whether it's mentoring, growth, EDAI, promotions etc.
- It is as easy as a sandwich - You have a foundation that sets the reader, the examples for the insides that speak to who the person is like you have never met them, and a fluffy piece at the end to seal in all the goodness.
- Use a thought partner and second (or third) set of eyes.
- I typically categorize the information I know on the nominee's work and review the award criteria to ensure what I know of the person's work aligns with the award. I follow their approach to ensure I am honoring the intent of the award and can write a nomination from a place of authenticity.
- I strive to ensure that the nominee's impact has tangible results that can be shared.
- Luckily, the nomination form has good framework. Pull these into a word doc and make your template.
- Yes. I can. And I will. We write in a newswriting style, telling a story that captures the accomplishments and roles of the candidates, and most importantly, the reason that it matters. We try for candidates whose leadership made a DIFFERENCE in some meaningful way, then explain the reason that meaningful difference is valuable. Impact on customers or staff, improved processes for efficiency or cost savings, improved inclusion, and so on. We try to show that the person's impact made things better.
- Clear and concise descriptions of the work achieved based on data driven information
- I try to develop the story prior to writing the nomination. I think it is important to tell a story of the individual, the accomplishment, the circumstances under which the accomplishment was achieved, and its contribution to the culture of the organization.

How do you ensure that your nomination stands out amidst competition?

- Understand the key initiatives that the Governor, the legislature, and the public are interested in and ensure the nomination reflects that. For example, concerns around food cliffs and hunger post-pandemic were big in the news and my nominee had done a lot of work around senior nutrition and implementing investments by the legislature in addressing hunger.
- You leave the day to day out and focus on what makes the person stand out. Above and beyond just the day to day is what is stellar.
- Aligned with criteria, concise where possible and specific in details.
- I write to provide detailed and honest information in nominations. I feel that it's my responsibility to provide the selection committee with the information needed to make informed decision for award selection with inflated language.
- Write out the stories first without regard to word count. Then go back (or perhaps have someone else) and read the story to see if it is compelling in response to the question. Make sure the key points are there. Finally, shape the response to fit the desired number of words.
- Link the leadership competencies to results. Their is particularly hard for supporting role (back office type) positions like human resources, information technology, legislative, budget, etc. so the nomination needs to be creative in describing the indirect benefits of their work.
- Write from the heart. Get feedback on your writing from trusted sources.
- Solid storytelling and clear language in the writing — once we've chosen candidates whose work made a difference or led to improvements. We aim to make the story relevant to a broad audience, so anyone can understand the effect, even if they know nothing about the candidate's line of work. Make it clear, simple, strong, and relevant.
- I really didn't focus on that too much. To me it's more about the work and the results and hopefully framing them in a way that they stand out.
- Think beyond the current moment. For example, the winners that came immediately following the pandemic didn't focus on what they did to manage moving staff to teleworking. The winners focused on other accomplishments while still managing during the pandemic. Also, when lean was popular, everyone focused on that, but most winners came from managers utilizing lean principles.

How do you strike a balance between providing sufficient detail and keeping the nomination concise?

- Be specific and focus on the key points you want to make to support the nomination. Show how their person models our values.
- Have a trusted colleague read over the nomination - someone who may not know the person as well as you do. Someone from your Communications team, etc.
- Editing over and over again.
- I always write a lot and work to condense what I have written. It's important to capture the reader's attention and to get to the point quickly.
- Write out the stories first without regard to word count. Then go back (or perhaps have someone else) and read the story to see if it is compelling in response to the question. Make sure the key points are there. Finally, shape the response to fit the desired number of words.
- The framework helps. Start with high-level, then move into something concrete that you can back up with data and that fits the criteria.
- Simple language and getting to the point saves on word count. A short intro to set the stage, a staccato approach to providing details in clear words, and a strong conclusion. It's not that tough for skilled writers.
- Edit, edit, edit and then have others review so you get different perspectives and make sure you haven't edited out something that is impactful.
- It comes down to storytelling and being able to concisely explain the person's effectiveness. Don't be overly technical and pretend as if you were explaining it to the coffee stand person.

What advice do you have for tailoring a nomination to resonate with the values or criteria of the award program?

- The award program is for recognizing leadership, so tailor the nomination to really showcase their person's leadership skills and the impact of those skills on the success of others, along with the breadth of the impact to the populations we serve.
- When collaborating with others ask their supervisor, peers, colleagues provide questions that draw out the values or criteria. If low response rate via email schedule a think-meeting to talk about it.
- Write the nomination first and then compare what you have written to the award criteria. Their approach will make it clear if the person should or should not be nominated.

- John Doe implemented XYZ program that resulted in the reduction of XX by XX or improved compliance by XX%.
- You could repeat the values back in an agency or project-specific way. Similar to how you might answer a job interview question.
- Two main pieces of advice. Make the writing relevant, by showing how people (customers, staff, et al) benefit. Avoid restating the criteria, get right to telling the story that illustrates the criteria.
- Look for leaders with results that tie as directly as possible to the values or criteria. The more direct the connection the stronger the nomination.
- Focus on the culture. We all make improvements every day, why did their particular improvement separate the person from the others.

Could you share examples of language or phrasing that you've found particularly impactful in past nominations?

- Pull up your agency values, mission, and vision statements, and start small with what you see they are doing that is exceptional, and the story blossoms from there. If it is not there, it might not be the right person that year, and that is ok, their time will come.
- John Doe implemented XYZ program that resulted in the reduction of XX by XX or improved compliance by XX%.
- On fostering teamwork, their excerpt: "The nominee also is willing to come to agency leadership asking for guidance or help to achieve the result that is needed. Their humble character trait allows the nominee to be very effective communicating with leadership and staff."
- A Herculean Effort.

How do you approach highlighting the unique qualities or contributions of the nominee?

- I keep them simple, and clear, and easy for anyone to understand who may not know out agency business.
- Just do it!
- Talk about "how" they exhibit the leadership competencies. What do they specifically do?
- I listen to them. And then try to emulate their voice, and/or bring their values to the forefront. Have you heard a leader speak passionately about collaboration? Then make sure that's a focal point in your writing - it will become more authentic.

- Directly list specific examples of influence, decisions, actions, and when appropriate, contrast those things with the ways issues in the example had been handled previously, and less successfully.
- Connect the language used to explain the results with supporting data.
- Again, it is about the story and the angle. Think about how to separate and create a unique story. What is special? What is different? How did they do their job, achieve the accomplishment, and under what circumstances?

Can you discuss the role of storytelling or narrative in crafting a compelling nomination?

- Storytelling is helpful to set the stage and provide context to the nomination. It can help make the impact of the work resonate with the reader, and creates empathy.
- It all starts with a story, and we love stories, especially the ones that have long last impacts.
- I think storytelling is compelling and makes nominations flow well and easy to read.
- My approach to storytelling is pretending I'm describing a work-related topic, which they know nothing about, to one of my next door neighbor and providing them with the detail to fully understand.
- Very important.
- If there is an anecdote someone shares related to the nomination, write it down. It may end up in the nomination, or at least some component of the story will shine through. How would you talk about their person to a friend or co-worker?
- It's the top approach: We tell the story in simple words that create a reaction by showing that the person's influence has helped a group of people, whether customers, peers, or staff; their makes it relevant to an evaluator who has little to no knowledge of the candidate's work. Using quotes or attributions from peers can be effective.
- Being able to illustrate through words the impact of the results/improvement helps create a connection and a foundation for the nomination.
- Our most recent award winner was less about a single accomplishment and more about accomplishments across a career. When righting the nomination, we focused on both accomplishment and their impact to the culture of staff. In their particular situation, the award winner grew staff in a deliberate and conscientious manner that was different and stood out when closely examined.

What strategies do you use to ensure that your nomination is clear, persuasive, and error-free?

- Ask others to review it for errors, edits or different perspectives. Follow the instructions and don't exceed the character limit. Spell check or review multiple times.
- Ask for help from a trusted peer or someone in your leadership team that is an exceptional writer and that person that can always find errors.
- Editing over and over again and using multiple views once a draft is complete... I think it's easier for folks to respond to something than to create something from scratch.
- I do ask others to proofread my writing.
- Read it multiple times and have someone else also read it.
- Read out loud. Readability checker. Second (or third) set of eyes.
- After the research to gather evidence, the communication consultant who supports that program/division writes in a creative news style. The draft then goes to the internal communication director for a thorough edit/review.
- Write freely first without focusing too much on how short it needs to be at time of submission, edit frequently to look for clearer ways to share the story while including data elements, have others review and provide suggestions.
- I have a few people peer review.

How do you address any potential weaknesses or challenges in the nominee's candidacy within the nomination?

- Their has not been an issue generally. I think if it was I would focus on their strengths or their response and the attitude they have about addressing any identified challenges.
- I look at them as an opportunity, if they are working on the weakness.
- I just keep it real. If there are weaknesses or challenges or characteristics that don't align with the values or criteria I don't try to force it and will likely leave that info off a nomination. As many nominations as I've successfully had awarded I've had just as many mentioned but not awarded and sometimes that's the right thing.
- I remain factual in my nominations. I don't work to address weaknesses in particular award criteria as it would feel disingenuous. However, it is my hope that providing detail in the candidates areas of strengths will offset the areas that may appear weaker.

- Great question. I'm not sure I've consciously done ttheir, but I can see the power of grace and humility in describing these opportunities.
- If apropos, we describe ways the candidate grew and/or improved on that aspect, though ttheir hasn't come up often in our nominations.
- Focus on the strengths and address the areas as clearly as possible.
- Not focus on them.

Can you share any insights on the importance of including supporting documentation or testimonials?

- Yes, a testimony from a staff member speaks volumes, because it is real, and has impacted them personally and professionally.
- I don't usually do supporting documentation but testimonials are helpful in framing the specifics and can help me ask for more details when collaborating with others.
- I believe it is beneficial to provide as much information as possible to support the impact of a nominee's work.
- Not sure of supporting documentation but data and results are important. It shows the impact of their work/contributions.
- Yes, as mentioned above. Get quotes! Hear the stories! It's much easier than coming up with all the words on your own, anyway.
- Quotes or attributions from peers, supervisors, customers, and direct reports can lend additional credence to the accomplishments listed. Anything that is exemplary helps.
- The data helps support the information being shared. They validate the information in an objective way.

How do you incorporate quantitative data or metrics effectively within a nomination?

- I think metrics are important to help quantify the effect of the person's contribution. If there is valid data that supports the nomination, it would be important to connect it in a way that clearly demonstrates positive outcomes.
- I try to stay away from too many numbers in my nominations. If I do include them, they are minimal.

- I'm not a big data/spreadsheet person so if data is in my nominations it's in narrative and simplistic form.
- The quantitative data plays an important part of the storytelling aspect of the nomination.
- Bullet points, subheads, or other formatting help make quantitative data easier to digest. Then back it up with friendly/Plain Talk words if you can.
- When possible/appropriate, we weave it inside the narrative.
- Use it as backup for the story about the results and the process to get to the results. The story/results is the foundation and the data is an accompanying element.
- It can be hard to get to the data but I try to come up with the story then support it the best I can with data.

Any last thoughts that would be helpful to consider when writing a nomination?

- The more involved the better, collaboration and editing is the key, and the more you talk to others about the person being nominated the easier it gets to frame why they are the right one for the award.
- Give yourself enough time. Write in Word first. Don't forget to talk to people.
- Remember the audience: evaluators don't know your nominee, your agency (necessarily), or the work the nominee does, so tell a story that puts the reader in the middle of the action. Show a result — describe the things that made a difference to someone or some process. Avoid jargon, acronyms, uncommon abbreviations. Make it about the person, and about the people affected.