

RULES FOR THE 2026 GOVERNMENTAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION ANNUAL AWARDS COMPETITION

Deadline for submission is Thursday, June 11, 2026

ABOUT THE AWARDS

The Governmental Research Association (GRA) Awards recognize exceptional research and educational efforts regarding state, regional and local governmental issues performed by members of the association. The awards competition, judged by fellow GRA members, offers staff of member organizations and individual GRA members the opportunity to showcase their work and learn from their peers, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the overall quality of the GRA's contribution to the field of governmental research.

AWARD CATEGORIES

Research and Education

- **Most Distinguished Research.** This award recognizes an outstanding research effort by a governmental research agency or individual GRA member. The award is based on the challenge of the subject matter, the degree to which the study is ground-breaking, and how well the basic purpose of the report is carried out. Other criteria include: the use of new and/or innovative research methods, or new and/or innovative uses of existing methods; usefulness of the study to other states and/or municipalities; and whether or not the subject is one of critical national, regional, or local concern or costs.
- **Outstanding Policy Achievement.** This award recognizes tangible improvements in public policy, management, service delivery, and/or cost savings resulting from the research and recommendations of a governmental research agency or individual GRA member. The award may also take into account the qualitative characteristics of the relevant research.
- **Most Effective Education.** This award recognizes research, communication, and educational activities by a governmental research agency or individual GRA member that are intended to educate the public and/or public officials on governmental matters, without necessarily making a recommendation(s) for change. Award entries should demonstrate how the publication(s) and/or educational activities expanded public awareness of an important government issue and how the work contributed to more informed discourse and public decision-making. Consideration will be given to how the original written research was used in various communication and educational methods, including short-form and journalistic-style publications and materials. Entries should highlight the most effective presentation methods used to achieve a greater public awareness of the matter.

Communications

In recognition that GRA members are finding new ways to engage the public, the Communications Awards will honor outstanding creative efforts by governmental research agencies and individual GRA members to deliver high-quality information, data analysis, and/or research findings. Each member organization or individual may submit no more than one entry per category:

- **Best Digital Communication.** A graphical or audiovisual presentation of data that communicates information clearly and efficiently. Examples of acceptable formats include, but are not limited to, infographics, interactive maps and charts, dashboards, podcasts or video. Consideration will be given to both aesthetics and functionality.
- **Best Short-Form Writing.** A short-form article, column, or blog post of no more than 2,000 words, published on the member's website or an external website, that explains, analyzes, and/or comments on a governmental issue in a clear and accessible manner. Consideration will be given to form, style, and content.

ELIGIBLE ENTRIES

To be eligible for this competition, entries must meet the following guidelines:

Basic Eligibility Guidelines

- A governmental research agency or individual GRA member must be, and have been at the time the research was performed, a current dues-paying member of the Governmental Research Association.
- Entries shall deal with governmental problems or issues and may be in the form of a single report or series of reports dealing with a single subject, or a single educational activity or series of activities.
- No one may enter more than one report in each category.
- No report, article, or commentary may be entered unless the planning, supervision, research, and/or editing was primarily performed by the submitting agency or individual GRA member.

Additional Eligibility Guidelines

- **Entries for Most Distinguished Research, Most Effective Education, and Communications Awards** may include qualifying reports issued or activities conducted at any time during the preceding calendar year and at any time prior to the cutoff date for the current year's competition. If a series of materials or activities is entered, the series may have been commenced prior to the previous calendar year but must have been concluded within the time limits for the current competition. No report or educational activity, or series of reports or activities, may be entered in more than one annual GRA competition for these awards.
- **Entries for Outstanding Policy Achievement** may include qualifying reports issued at any time, since the award is based on the results that follow from the research. Results may include, but not be limited to, cost savings in operations or personnel, or quantifiably improved delivery of government services or programs. However, the tangible governmental improvements and/or cost savings resulting from the research must have occurred during the preceding calendar year or in the current year prior to the cutoff date for the competition.
- **Entries for Communications Awards** must be planned, designed, supervised, researched, written, and/or edited by the submitting agency or individual GRA

member. Either in-house or outsourced expertise for production and audio/visual editing is acceptable.

SELECTION PROCESS

- **There shall be four awards committees:** Distinguished Research Awards Committee; Effective Education Awards Committee; Outstanding Policy Achievement Awards Committee; and Communications Awards Committee.
- **Each committee shall consist of current, dues-paying members of GRA appointed by the President of GRA.** The number on each committee shall be not less than three or more than seven, of whom one shall be designated chair.
- **Each entry submitted through the online entry form (see “How to Enter” below) is deemed eligible, unless determined by committee review that the submission fails to meet one or more eligibility criteria.** The designated chair of each committee shall notify any entrant whose entry is disqualified. The committee chair, after consultation with the GRA President or designee, may allow any member of the committee to postpone submitting an entry until the following year or excuse himself/herself from voting, if it is felt that consideration of such report(s) or activities by the committee would create a conflict of interest.
- **Each awards committee shall consider the entries submitted to it and shall determine whether to make an award.** An awards committee may, at its discretion, make awards in specific focus areas based on the type of issues the entries cover: (1) state government issues, (2) local government issues, and/or (3) regional or multi-jurisdictional issues. An awards committee may also decide that entries other than the winning entry or entries are deserving of special recognition. If so, the committee may, at its discretion, award a “Certificate of Merit” to no more than two noteworthy entries per focus area.
- **Committee members should carefully consider all eligible entries on the basis of the award criteria that appear in the descriptions of the award categories on pages 1-2 of these rules.** The questions posed to each entrant on the entry forms reflect the criteria. The diverse missions of GRA members will produce entries that vary widely in their subject matter and impacts, such as populations assisted, cost savings, fairer services, or increased accountability. Some impacts may be difficult to quantify. Where impact is important to the award decision, such as policy achievement, committee members should consider each entry’s impact relative to the subject matter and jurisdiction, rather than simply ranking impacts by size or amount.
- **Upon completion of the committee’s work, the chair shall inform the Secretary of GRA in writing of the results of the committee’s work.** The committee report shall contain a list of entries for each award; any disqualifications, with reasons therefore; the committee’s choices for awards and certificates of merit; and any recommendations the committee may wish to make about future awards competitions.
- **The committee chair or a representative shall present the awards at the GRA Annual Conference.**

HONOREE NOTIFICATION AND AWARD PRESENTATION

Winners will be notified by July 8, 2026. Awards shall be in the form of certificates presented at the GRA Annual Conference, July 19-22, 2026. The GRA Secretary shall arrange for the production of the certificates. The certificates shall refer to the award category and be presented to the employees of the submitting agency or the individual GRA members who were directly responsible for the direction, research, writing, production, and administration of the report(s) and/or activities. Honorees will be invited to make a presentation at the GRA Annual Conference, in a format determined by the GRA Board. The GRA may also recognize the winners on its website.

INTERPRETATION AND APPEALS

The GRA President, or a designee, shall have the authority to make appropriate interpretations of these rules and respond to any problems encountered by the awards committees in the course of carrying out their responsibilities. Any decision to declare an entry ineligible may be appealed in writing by the entrant to the GRA Board of Trustees, whose decision on the matter shall be timely and final.

HOW TO ENTER

Complete the online entry form for the category you wish to enter, using the following Google Form links:

- [Most Distinguished Research](#)
- [Outstanding Policy Achievement](#)
- [Most Effective Education](#)
- [Communications](#)

To help you prepare your entry, the basic information request and questions for each category are provided on the following pages.

**GOVERNMENTAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
2026 AWARDS COMPETITION ENTRY INFORMATION AND CATEGORY QUESTIONS**

Enter the following information in the online entry form for each category, using the links above.

Use these pages to help you prepare your entry.

YOUR INFORMATION

Organization / Individual	
Title of Entry	
Contact Person	
Address	
Telephone	
Email	

CONTRIBUTORS

Please list all persons directly responsible for the entry (for example, project director, principal researcher, research assistant, publications coordinator, etc.)

Name	Title	Responsibilities

YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Please be specific in answering the questions to give the awards committee a clear understanding of your accomplishments.

Most Distinguished Research

1. Provide an overview of the research project you are entering. Describe your project's purpose, goals and objectives; summarize your research methodology; and summarize your key findings.
2. State the date(s) when the qualifying research was published.
3. Describe the challenge of the subject matter and its importance to national, regional, or local concerns or costs.
4. In what ways, if any, would you consider the research to be groundbreaking? Describe how you innovated new research methods or found innovative uses of existing methods.
5. Describe the potential usefulness of the study to other states and/or municipalities.
6. Describe why you think your research is exceptional and merits an award.
7. Upload a single PDF containing hyperlinks to, or copies of, your reports, articles, website posts, social media posts, and any other supporting materials that you think are relevant to your entry and support its case for winning an award. Be sure to include your organization in the file name.

Outstanding Policy Achievement

1. Provide an overview of the policy achievement and the research that supported it. Describe the specific research recommendations that informed the policy change.
2. State the time period during which the tangible governmental improvement(s) and/or the cost savings resulting from the research occurred.
3. What was the significance of the problem that previously existed?
4. How did you promote your research recommendations and work toward their implementation?
5. How have the policy changes improved the quality, quantity, or timeliness of governmental services and/or reduced costs for the public?
6. Describe why you think your work is exceptional and merits an award.
7. Upload a single PDF containing hyperlinks to, or copies of, your reports, articles, website posts, social media posts, and other materials explaining your recommendations, as well as any materials documenting your influence or demonstrating results/savings, such as public documents, media reports, or comments from the public and/or public officials. Be sure to include your organization in the file name.

Most Effective Education

1. Provide an overview of the research project and/or educational activities you are entering. Describe your project's purpose, goals, and objectives; and summarize your key findings.
2. State the time period during which the report and/or activities were conducted.
3. Describe the importance of the governmental issue that was the subject of your work.
4. How did your research add value to the public discourse or decision making on the issue?
5. How did you communicate your findings? Describe which methods proved most effective at increasing awareness or understanding of the issue and enabling informed discourse and decision making among the public and/or public officials, especially non-print and/or multimedia presentations.
6. Describe why you think your work is exceptional and merits an award.
7. Upload a single PDF containing hyperlinks to, or copies of, your reports, articles, website posts, social media posts, or other materials documenting how your research, educational activities, or advocacy effectively informed the public and/or public officials regarding an important issue(s). Examples from successful entries in past years have included information on your public appearances and/or events, communications/social media results, or feedback from the public and/or public officials. Be sure to include your organization in the file name.

Communications Award: Best Digital Communication

1. Briefly describe the project for which you created the digital communication.
2. Briefly describe how you created the digital communication, including the software or app used.
3. Briefly describe how you communicated the digital communication.
4. Provide the URL to the webpage displaying the digital communication.

Communications Award: Best Short Form Writing

1. Briefly describe the context for the entry, including any broader project to which it relates.
2. Provide the URL to the webpage displaying the article or commentary.