BE EXCELLENT! HOW TO PREPARE A SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION FOR THE AITD EXCELLENCE AWARDS

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Since 2001 AITD's Excellence Awards have recognised achievement in learning and organisational development. Over the years the awards have evolved and grown, the calibre of entrants has increased, the competition is greater and the awards are coveted by leading companies in Australia.

The AITD Excellence Awards attract diverse companies from non-profits, government bodies, small businesses and large multi-nationals. Nominees come from all industries and all parts of Australia.

There are eight Excellence Awards categories in 2017 – six for organisations and two for individuals. This article will focus on the organisational awards and provide you with tips on how to create a competitive awards entry.

Eligibility

In order to be eligible for the AITD Awards, the person who submits the entry must be a current, financial AITD member (either an individual member or a person specifically covered through a corporate membership).

Where an application is jointly submitted (e.g. submitted by a consultant/solutions provider for work with an organisation), it is expected that at least one person from the main organisation who contributed to the learning initiative is an AITD member. For the Best Learning Organisation Award, if the company has more than 200 employees, it is expected that the company will be an AITD Corporate member.

Work associated with submissions must have been substantially designed within or for Australasia. The work must have been completed within the last two years from the date of the lodgement of the submission.

Timeframes

The 2017 Awards program opened in April and will close at 5pm AEST on Friday 28 July 2017. This deadline is final and no extensions will be given. All applications are lodged electronically through the online awards portal. Do not leave the application to the last minute as it will take time to complete.

How to Apply

You are encouraged to visit the online portal early, become familiar with what is required, and to start building your application early. After you have created an account on AITD's Awards Platform, you can begin completing your application.

The *General Info* tab is where you place information such as the organisation submitting the award, and supporting organisations to be named if your entry wins. Generally, if you are a consultant/solutions provider submitting on behalf of a client, the client organisation is named first.

The *Background Info* tab is where you place information about your organisation to provide contextual information to the judges, such as the size of your company and the year it was founded.

AITD EXCELLENCE AWARDS CATEGORIES 2017

Best Implementation of a Blended Learning Solution
Best Use of Gamification/Simulation for Learning
Best Learning Organisation
Best Use of Collaborative Learning
Best Talent Development Program
Best Use of Technology for Learning
The Dr Alastair Rylatt Award for L&D Professional of the Year
The Mark Pompei Student Scholarship

The *Scope* tab is where you place information about the learning program, such as the implementation timeframe and number of people impacted by the learning initiative. This helps the judges to understand the size and scale of your program.

Then you move on to the *Specific Award Criteria* tab, the most important section of your entry, where you explain everything about your learning initiative. You need to write your responses in the fields provided (not just say 'see attachment') and you need to be mindful of the word limits.

You will then be asked to list the *Project Contributors,* including staff and/ or external contributors (e.g. consultants, partners, contractors) that were involved in developing and implementing the learning initiative. You are encouraged to credit all participants of the team that contributed to the learning initiative in this entry. Where an entry is awarded Finalist, Highly Commended or Winner status, all project contributors listed will be personally issued with a Digital Badge for their achievements.

The *Video Summary* is a brief (less than 90 seconds) video which provides an overview of your Awards entry. It need not be a professionally produced, polished video – it can be as simple as a video of you presenting into your phone. The Video Summary will not be seen by judges during the assessment process, but if you are a Finalist it may be shown at the Awards ceremony, and/or made available as part of an Awards show reel on the AITD website or elsewhere.

Finally, you are asked to add *Attachments* containing evidence to support your application. This might include training materials, feedback reports, or other documents. You can also add videos, links to websites, or other resources. Use your attachments wisely to ensure you can back up claims you make in the Specific Award Criteria stage.

Specific Award Criteria

The criteria for all organisational award categories are the same.

Business Needs - In this section you are asked to describe the business needs or situation that led your organisation to develop the solution. What was the impetus for this learning initiative? This sets the context for the judges.

The judges are looking for a succinct, clear description of why your organisation embarked on this project. Ask yourself, is there evidence of a tangible need? For example, there might have been a stakeholder survey, research or a consultation process which demonstrates the need for this initiative.

Strategic Alignment – How does the solution address organisational learning objectives and strategy? Consider how this solution fits within the broader strategy of your organisation. Explain the alignment between this learning initiative and your business strategy.

The judges will want you to support this with evidence of alignment to and integration with organisational strategy, business goals, individual development or other strategy.

Design – Here you describe the scope, nature and design of the learning initiative. How does the design of the learning initiative support individual learning objectives and organisational strategy?

The judges are looking for you to explain specifically why you chose to design your learning initiative in the way that you did. Were there any design considerations, constraints, innovations or limitations? Back up your design choices with attachments of evidence such as manuals, materials, tools and aids - including instruction for their use, as well as samples of or access to learning technology.

Delivery – In this section you describe the process for assessing and deciding upon delivery options. Explain how the learning initiative was delivered to meet participant and organisational needs. Detail any delivery considerations,

constraints, innovations or limitations.

The judges are keen to hear why you chose to deliver your learning initiative in the way that you did. Provide evidence of how the delivery of the learning is accessible and engaging. Consider what evidence you have from learners that the delivery of the initiative is meeting their needs.

Measurable Impact – This section is where you describe the measurable impact resulting from the learning initiative for both learners and the organisation. You will need to explain how the impact was evaluated, what metrics were chosen and why, as well as detailing any unexpected findings.

The judges are looking for a thoughtful consideration of how the impact of the initiative has been measured. You should be able to demonstrate an understanding of different evaluation methodologies and a conscious decision about how and what to evaluate. You will also need to attach evidence of the impact, such as stakeholder surveys, feedback, evaluation reports, return on investment, impact, quality improvements, and/or financial implications.

AITD does not dictate what methodology or metrics you should use to assess your learning. You need to decide what and how to measure, and be able to explain why you chose to evaluate in that way.

Sometimes entrants will apply for an award too early, when they haven't yet evaluated their program. If you have not yet been able to measure the impact of the learning, it may be better for you to wait and submit your entry in 2018.

What makes a great awards entry?

If you want to be a Finalist in the AITD Excellence Awards you need to have an innovative, learner-focused, strategically-aligned learning initiative.

Your application should be well written, succinct and clear. It should be

well presented and professional.

Allow enough time to re-read your application before applying. Make sure you spell check your application and that you have used professional language. Double check your attachments to ensure they are correct (not draft).

Make sure you have submitted your entry in the right category. You can copy your entry to submit in multiple categories, but make sure you have read the criteria in the context of the category. For example, you may have created an innovative talent development program that you want to submit in the talent development category, the blended learning category and the technology for learning category.

Finally, make sure you give yourself enough time to get your application in on time – 28 July 2017.

This article is based on a presentation delivered by Elizabeth Robinson and Dr Anne Bartlett-Bragg at the AITD2016 Conference.

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