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The Advancing Healthcare Awards UK 2024

How to create a winning entry

The Chamberlain Dunn team have organised dozens of awards programmes and ceremonies over 20 years. They have handled thousands of entries and watched the judges at work. So they know a thing or two about how to create and present a winning entry.

So the team have distilled their tips and hints to help you along the road to success.

Step one: choose your project

Entering an award takes time and energy (plus perhaps financial commitment from your employer in terms of travel costs) so it's worth pausing before you start to make sure you are maximising your chances.

Before you begin, ask yourself and your team these key questions:

1. Is the project that's engaging us at the moment the right one to enter?
2. Do we have enough evidence of outcomes? Can we provide a proper evaluation of this project?
3. Do we have an older project which we have forgotten about because its running along nicely, but which has now got loads of data about outcomes?

That older project may just be the right one to run with.

Step two: choose the category

Think carefully about the award category you enter. Avoid the obvious ones, the more general themes, and think how your project might fit into one of the less obvious, perhaps more specialised, ones. The number of entries that different categories receive varies widely so you stand a better chance of being shortlisted in one that receives fewer entries if you can guess that correctly.

Read through the details of all the categories where your project would be eligible. Take a close look at the criteria and the submission questions to ensure your project fits and has the evidence required.

You may enter as many categories as you like, but not with the same project.

Your director will have to sign off the entry so get their approval (and help) as soon as possible. It would be a shame to have done all the work only to be told by your director as the entry deadline approaches that you can't enter it.

Think about the work involved and, with colleagues, plot a timeline so you don't leave it all until the last minute. Remember to build in time for a review once the almost final draft is produced.

A colleague with experience as a judge or award wins (nationally or locally), not necessarily in your profession, is a good person to take a critical eye. It's good for networking and sharing your good practice within the organisation not to mention a source of challenging feedback.

Step three: get writing

Answer the questions carefully, sticking to the word counts. Give brief and clear examples of the 'what' and 'how' in the way you approached the project. Give clear evidence and examples of how you have measured the impact of your work and what you consider 'success' to be. Remember that word counts are short; try not to repeat points if you can avoid it.

We ask for a 200 word summary of your project. Spend time polishing this up and get it as succinct and punchy as you can. It must of course accurately summarise your work, but it is also a sales pitch that should get the reader engaged straight off.

The title is important too. It should be brief enough to work as a title but clear enough to capture what the project is all about. Beware of puns and ambiguity.

Thoroughly check your entry form before submission, and ask a colleague to take a look too.

And remember you can enter as many projects into the awards programme as you like.

Don't forget to call us if you have a query 020 8334 4500.

How to make your entry stand out

Remember that by the time the judges get to reading your entry, they may have already sifted through 40 others, so make yours stand out.

- Tell a good story: write your project summary with enthusiasm as though you are writing a really good story. The beginning should set out the objectives clearly. The middle should explain the strategy, and the end should reveal the results.
- Keep it simple: as many judges say: "less is sometimes more". Avoid jargon, explain abbreviations and avoid flowery language. Check for typos, grammatical mistakes and spelling.
- First impressions count: so make an instant impact with the summary and the title.
- Stick to the truth: don't exaggerate, lie or include spurious claims, as judges will see through them.
- Involve the whole team: make the entry a joint effort which will often produce a better, more comprehensive summary, as well as making the story more interesting.
- Be ruthless when redrafting: once you've written your rough draft submission, read it over several times and cut out superfluous information. This will make it much clearer. It's also a good idea to get someone who hasn't been directly involved to cast their fresh eyes over it to double-check clarity.
- If the entry system allows you to add attachments, be selective and don't use them to shortcut your entry.

Step 4: you've been shortlisted!

This means you are one of three or four that the shortlisters have selected to appear before the judging panel. So you are a finalist and will be mentioned at the ceremony, but you haven't won yet.

Pause for a moment or two and think about how you can turn a shortlisted entry into a winning entry.

- First put yourself in the judges' shoes: a whole day of listening to presentations. They could be doing 9 or even 12 during the day – that's hard work. So make their job a little easier:
- Be enthusiastic: if you can't, don't expect them to be.
- You will of course be nervous – everyone is. But find ways of turning nerves into adrenaline and energy; and rehearse endlessly so it looks effortless.
- Look again at the criteria for your category as that is what the judges will be marking you on.
- Make it as easy as possible for them to tick the boxes. Evidence of patient involvement needed? Tell them how you did it. Can the project be sustained? Tell them how it already has been and what's planned for the future.
- We avoid asking for powerpoint presentations at the judging stage. So be prepared to talk to your project and answer questions. If there was something you couldn't quite fit into your entry, now is the time to share it! What matters is what you have to say and how you say it.
- If you are asked to speak for no more than 15 minutes, that is what you must do. If you don't you will be cut off in mid-sentence perhaps when you haven't yet reached your carefully honed conclusion.
- Everyone has the preferred way of presenting – key notes, full script or something in between. Whatever your style, just make sure you don't read it straight off the page as the judges will find it hard to engage.
- Think about what the judges might ask you and prepare the answers. Some like to end with the question: and why do you think you are the winner? No time for false modesty here: rehearse a devastatingly good answer.

Five most common criticisms that judges make:

1. Not enough evidence of evaluation
2. Too soon to judge success
3. Lack of awareness of the bigger picture
4. Lack of patient involvement
5. Lack of awareness of the work of others in the field.

And here are some of the actual things judges have said about winning entries:

- The team's passion was amazing, they have lived and breathed this project. Their commitment was outstanding.
- We quickly realised the scale of the project's impact - unforgettable patient stories.
- Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration - this project crossed so many professional boundaries
- The team translated their vision into objectives at every level - and simply delivered.
- The organisation found room for the team to genuinely shape how things are done from the most junior level - exemplary good practice.
- The story of the project failures was gripping - a project team full of inspiring practitioners that just did not give up.

Step 5: Waiting for the results

After shortlisting and the judging day, there's an agonising few weeks when you are waiting for the results, announced at the celebratory lunch. Use the time to make the most of your status as a finalist – that's a strong place to be. You might not be a winner yet but neither are you a runner-up.

So brief your communication department about your finalist status so that they can spread the word internally and to their external media contacts. Use the *I've been shortlisted* logo that you will have been sent on your emails. Get Tweeting.

Step 6: the day arrives

All the finalists are special on awards day, whether it's a live event or virtual. They are featured in the presentations, mentioned in the script and in the Winners' Guide, published after the ceremony. So your project has gone public and your work has been recognised. When you are announced as the winner, it's a golden moment! Colleagues are tweeting and all eyes are on you. Make sure your communications people back at work know and get a photo and details promptly. When the excitement has died down a bit, back at the ranch, talk to colleagues about how to further spread the word. Can your work be written up as a journal article? An experience piece for something like the Guardian's From the front line feature? Conference or seminar presentations? Don't wait to be asked, offer to write or present. After all you are a winner. Congratulations!

**From the Chamberlain Dunn
events team, November 2023**