



Spotlight on Excellence Awards: Your Questions Answered

Why is NRECA significantly changing the Spotlight on Excellence Awards for 2026?

In August of 2025, the vendor that NRECA had contracted with to manage the Spotlight on Excellence Awards elected not to renew their contract and sunset their involvement in the program. Given the short timeline, NRECA and CREC have decided to scale back the 2026 awards program in order to maintain program visibility and relevance while allowing time to strategize and rebuild the program for the future.

What's changing with the Spotlight Awards in 2026?

The Spotlight Awards are taking on a simpler format for 2026. Instead of many categories, we'll shine a light on one: **Best Strategic Communications Campaign**.

Ten winners will be recognized with a gold and silver award each from:

- Small cooperatives
- Medium cooperatives
- Large cooperatives
- G&Ts/Statewides
- Wholly owned subsidiaries

The overall top winner will receive the **Edgar F. Chesnutt Award**.

Why simplify the program?

We want to keep the Spotlight Awards active and meaningful in 2026, while giving ourselves the space to thoughtfully **redesign the program for 2027 and beyond**. This way, the program continues to celebrate excellence now—and positions us to build something even stronger for the future.

Who is managing the program?

NRECA will continue managing the awards in 2026, in partnership with the **Council of Rural Electric Communicators (CREC)** as we plan for the program's relaunch in 2027.

Who will judge the entries?

Judges will include **retired cooperative communicators** and experts from the CREC network. This ensures entries are evaluated by professionals who understand the cooperative communications field.

Will I receive feedback on my entry?

Yes, judges will still provide feedback on entries and it will be available for you to view in Award Force.

How much will it cost to enter?

Due to the scaled back awards program, we are reducing the entry fee to \$75. We will continue to offer a 20% early bird discount rate as well.

How will winners be celebrated?

Recognition will still be at the heart of the Spotlight Awards. Winners will not only be honored as part of the program but will also have opportunities to **showcase their award-winning work at Connect 2026**—through “show and tell” displays or dedicated sessions.

What’s planned for 2027 and beyond?

A full **Spotlight redesign** is coming in 2027. Over the next year, NRECA and CREC will work closely with communicators to shape the program. This will include:

- Focus groups and surveys
- Reviewing past participation and campaign data
- Gathering input from the CREC and members across the network
- Exploring new vendor options to make the program more cost-effective

Our goal is a refreshed Spotlight Awards program in 2027 that reflects the **full range of creative, strategic, and innovative communications happening across co-ops.**

How can I help shape the future Spotlight Awards?

Your voice is essential. You’ll see opportunities to participate in surveys, focus groups, and listening sessions throughout the remainder of 2025 and into 2026. We want to hear your ideas, your needs, and your vision for the program.

Bottom line

In 2026, the Spotlight Awards will still celebrate outstanding cooperative communications while we work together to build a stronger, more inspiring program for 2027 and beyond.