



Awards of Merit

The Awards of Merit program acknowledges outstanding programs and individuals who have made the state's museum community richer and more relevant. They reward the innovative efforts of staff and volunteers and they provide encouragement for the development of new and remarkable projects.

Eligibility: Any organization or individual is invited to nominate an organization, person(s) or project that was **completed in 2015** at a New York State museum or heritage organization. Nomination of oneself or one's organization is permissible and encouraged.

Award Categories: MANY Award of Merit program is organized into seven categories for nominations. These categories are:

- ◆ **The Rising Star Award:** Awarded to a museum professional, currently employed in an institution, aged 25-35, for his/her creativity and ability to tackle institutional/programmatic challenges in innovative and inspiring ways.
- ◆ **Anne Ackerson Innovation in Leadership Award:** This award recognizes board and staff leaders for creatively and effectively bringing their organization and its people through a significant challenge or opportunity.
- ◆ **Innovation in Collection Access:** Collections are the vital backbone of museums and heritage organizations forming the basis for new research, programs, exhibitions, publications and web content. Nominations for this category are exemplary projects that concern broadening intellectual or physical access to collections; outstanding or cutting-edge preservation, cataloging or care.
- ◆ **Innovation in Interpretation:** This award category recognizes outstanding interpretive methods that forge emotional and intellectual connections between audiences and the meanings inherent in objects, artifacts, landscapes and place.
- ◆ **Engaging Communities Award:** A critical element of any museum or heritage organization is the way that it interacts with its community. Nominations for this category should highlight efforts that engage your community or create new audiences for your organization. These projects could include interpretative exhibitions, lecture series, educational or public programs, focus groups, strategic planning, evaluation or other community engagement effort.
- ◆ **Excellent "Failure" Award:** Recognizing that innovation stems from taking risks and that risks often lead to unpredicted results this award pays tribute to those that have made the most of such 'failures'. Nominations should indicate the initial goal of the endeavor, what went awry and highlight what was learned/how the organization has benefited as a result.
- ◆ **Individual Achievement:** Any successful organization has the support of a devoted team of staff and volunteers.

Nominations in this category should be for those people who have played pertinent roles in moving their organizations forward over a sustained period. Nominations can be for an individual or a team of museum staff and/or volunteers.

Judging Criteria: A team of judges will use the following criteria to evaluate a nomination:

- ◆ **How did the project or persons work benefit the public?** The judges favor projects with an ambitious outreach and that improve upon current programs, over those that were intended mainly to benefit the members of the organization. An individual's nominated work should be above and beyond their usual assigned duties.
- ◆ **Does the project enhance the professionalism of the organization/individual?** Judges are looking for projects that reflect professional growth of an organization or individual, adhere to museum standards and best practices, calculated risk-taking, and enhance the organization's mission.
- ◆ **Does the project improve the organization's ability to serve the public?** Projects that reach new audiences, enhance current programs, and are part of a permanent commitment to improvement are favored.
- ◆ **What was the nominee's accomplishment relative to its resources or responsibilities?**
Organizations/individuals with access to greater/better resources will be held to higher standards than those organizations that are all-volunteer or have limited resources.
- ◆ **Is the project an outstanding example in its category?** Projects will be evaluated on the basis of relevancy, significance to the field, overall quality, and their unique or innovative character.

The judges will review the nominations on their own merit and will confer as many or as few awards as they feel are merited. Awards of Merit are given to institutions or individuals whose projects/work represent outstanding contributions in their category and excellence compared to similar activities throughout New York State.

Certificates of Commendation will be awarded for excellence within the context of available means and regional standards.

Nomination Procedure: A completed nomination will include the following:

- ◆ Completed Nomination form
- ◆ Nominated institution's Mission Statement and a brief description of the organization. For a nomination in the Individual Achievement category, please include this information for the employee's or volunteer's organization
- ◆ A 1-3 page description of the project or achievement addressing all of the above judging criteria
- ◆ A short description of the project or individual achievement for Award of Merit promotional materials. Not to exceed 75 words.
- ◆ **OPTIONAL:** project documentation such as copies of publications, photographs, slides, or images, audio or video tapes, press releases, newspaper articles, reviews, or other promotional materials may be submitted to augment the nomination.