

CPRS TORONTO 2026 ACE AWARDS CATEGORIES AND SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES

CAMPAIGN ENTRY CATEGORIES

- 1. Brand Development Campaign of the Year**
Recognizes outstanding success in brand development, re-positioning, or re-branding of an established brand (either a product, service, or corporation) through the use of strategic public relations.
- 2. Community Relations Campaign of the Year**
Recognizes community campaigns related to local projects, public meetings, special interest group program(s) or ongoing community programs that are designed to establish and maintain mutually satisfactory relationships or shift community opinions.
- 3. Crisis or Issues Management Campaign of the Year**
Recognizes effective crisis and/or issues management work through the use of strategic public relations.
- 4. CSR or Cause-Related Campaign, Best**
Recognizes exemplary CSR or cause-related campaigns that successfully engage with target audiences to launch/raise awareness of causes, help an organization reach its CSR goals or help a cause reach its financial or other goals.
- 5. Digital Communications Campaign of the Year**
Recognizes exemplary digital campaigns that successfully engage with target audiences to create engaged communities, launch/raise awareness of products, or manage issues and/or crisis.
- 6. Employee Engagement / Internal Communications Campaign of the Year** Recognizes exemplary employee engagement and/or internal communication programs that improved employee-management relations, strengthened employee communities and/or successfully administered change management.
- 7. Government Relations / Public Affairs Campaign of the Year**
Recognizes the most effective use of government relations and/or public affairs to change/enlist public opinion in order to influence government policy and/or regulations.
- 8. Investor / Financial Relations Campaign of the Year**
Recognizes outstanding communications work targeted toward investors, shareholders and other financial audiences.
- 9. Marketing Communications Campaign of the Year**
Recognizes outstanding strategy development and implementation of integrated communications programs, including but not limited to media relations, digital media, paid media and creative material development.
- 10. Media Relations, Best Use of (Over \$50,000)**
Best Use of Media Relations (over \$50,000) recognizes effective and creative use of media relations to execute or support a public relations campaign with a budget over \$50,000.
- 11. Media Relations, Best Use of (Under \$50,000)**
Best Use of Media Relations (Under \$50,000) recognizes effective and creative use of media relations to execute or support a public relations campaign with a budget under \$50,000.

12. New Product or Service Launch Campaign of the Year

Recognizes a new product or service launch that generated awareness and product/service recognition through the use of strategic public relations planning and execution.

13. Publication, Best (digital or print)

The Best Publication Award Recognizes outstanding publications of any kind, including annual reports. The publication will be evaluated on the writing, the visual elements and the publication's contribution to the success of the overall campaign. In addition to the executive summary, please submit the entire publication.

14. Social Media Campaign, Best, and/or Influencers, Best Use of

The Best Social Media Campaign/Best Use of Influences award recognizes a strategic campaign that is solely or primarily executed on social media.

15. Special Events or Experiential Marketing, Best Use of

Best Use of Special Events or Experiential Marketing recognizes effective and creative use of an event or experience to execute or support a public relations campaign.

16. Writing, Best

The Best Writing award recognizes outstanding public relations writing in any form to execute or support a public relations campaign. In addition to the executive summary which provides the context for the campaign, please submit a sample of the writing. The award will be granted to the writer or writers of the winning piece(s).

17. Canadian Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Campaign of the Year

This award recognizes a campaign or program aimed at building a culture of inclusion for an organization, with internal and/or external stakeholders. Campaigns or programs can include specific topic-based initiatives, special events or wider strategies to advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion goals.

18. Audio or Video production, Best Use of

This award recognizes the most effective and creative use of audio (e.g. podcast or other audio production) or video in a public relations strategy. Please submit the video as well as adhere to requirements for creative award submissions.

19. Artificial Intelligence in a PR Campaign, Best Use Of

This award recognizes outstanding AI use within a PR strategy, department or campaign to foster innovation, creativity or efficiency.

STUDENT AWARD CATEGORIES

CPRS Toronto student awards are designed to attract, encourage and reward future talent. Students may enter a campaign or plan that was produced at any point during their post-secondary experience, provided the entrants (or, in the case of a group project, the majority of the entrants) are still students in good standing at a recognized post-secondary institution. Campaigns or plans produced in the Spring of each year may still be entered the following year even if the students have graduated (i.e., a student plan written in May 2025 can be entered in the 2026 student awards but may not be entered in the 2027 awards).

All student awards must include:

- A letter from the course instructor endorsing the entry and attesting to the eligibility of the students named in the submission
- An executive summary of the project/campaign
- Work samples or photos (for executed campaigns or events)

20. Student Public Relations Campaign or Event of the Year, Executed

Recognizes a student or student group for excellence in communications planning and execution.

21. Student Public Relations Communications Plan of the Year

Recognizes a student or student group for excellence in communications planning. The entry should focus solely on the communications plan following the RACE formula*, regardless of whether the plan has been implemented.

CPRS Toronto Public Relations Student of the Year

Please see details below in "Leadership award categories."

*See Guidelines below

LEADERSHIP AWARD CATEGORIES

The CPRS Toronto Leadership Awards are designed to honour the outstanding individuals who contribute to the strength and development of our profession. There is no charge for leadership award entries.

22. CPRS Toronto Public Relations Student of the Year

Individuals may enter themselves or be nominated by others. This award will be presented to a CPRS Toronto full or part-time student graduating this year with a solid academic record and who has demonstrated leadership and a commitment to ongoing professional development. The winning entrant will be awarded a one-year membership as well as entry into five selected CPRS Toronto professional development and networking events.

Entry requirements:

- Resumé= (maximum two pages)
- A one-page endorsement from a faculty member or other professional mentor detailing the entrant's suitability for this award
- Up to two additional one-page endorsement letters (these are optional)

23. CPRS Toronto New Public Relations Professional of the Year (less than 5 years' experience)

This award recognizes an individual, with less than five years' PR work experience (as of December 31, 2025), who has made significant achievements in their career. Individuals may enter themselves or be nominated by others.

Entry requirements:

- Nomination from employer(s) detailing nominee's career history and professional qualifications (maximum two pages)
- A 250-word statement from the nominator outlining why this individual should be awarded this special recognition. Judges will look for evidence of outstanding achievement in supporting clients and/or senior-level staff, development of public relations / communications strategies, business savvy, creativity, knowledge of public relations tactics, and contributions to business objectives and to the overall profession.

24. CPRS Toronto Public Relations Professional of the Year

An individual may enter themselves or be nominated by others. The award recognizes outstanding personal achievement within the public relations industry over their career, with particular focus on the past year.

Entry requirements:

- Resumé= (maximum two pages)

- A 250-word statement from the nominator outlining why this individual should be recognized
- Two reference letters from past or present clients or employers

25. CPRS Toronto Mentor of the Year Award

Candidates must be nominated by someone other than themselves. The award recognizes a volunteer who has served as a mentor to public relations professionals or students. This award recognizes work performed in 2025/2026 OR may recognize a lifetime of mentorship provided the entrant has not been recognized before.

Entry requirements:

- A brief description that outlines the nominee's volunteer involvement as a mentor within and outside CPRS (Toronto) and explains why this nominee should be honoured (maximum one page)
- Names and testimonials from individuals mentored by the volunteer
- Resumé= (maximum two pages)

26. CPRS Toronto Volunteer of the Year Award

Candidates must be nominated by someone other than themselves for the award. The award recognizes a volunteer within CPRS Toronto during the previous calendar year (2026).

Entry requirements:

- A brief, one-page outline of the nominee's volunteer/committee involvement in CPRS Toronto that explains why this nominee should be honoured with this award
- List of the CPRS Toronto committees in which this person was involved
- Resumé= (maximum two pages)

27. CPRS Toronto Educator of the Year Award

This award recognizes an outstanding professional committed to enhancing education. The nominee must have a minimum of five years of cumulative experience as a PR educator at a recognized college or university in the Greater Toronto area (full time, part time and sessional instructors may be nominated). The nominee must be actively teaching public relations courses during the year they are nominated and must have at least 10 years of experience as a professional communicator.

Entry requirements:

- Resumé= (maximum two pages)
- Three letters of support: two must be from prior students, one must be from a fellow public relations/communications educator. **(Letters from existing students cannot be considered.)**

Lois Marsh Award*

The Lois Marsh award is presented annually at the ACE Awards to recognize exemplary service provided by an individual to CPRS Toronto. The award is named after Lois Marsh, who was the first recipient of the Award. In her management of the secretariat duties related to CPRS Toronto, Lois has been a solid pillar of the Society, providing outstanding service to members, continuity of information in a volunteer-based organization, and counsel to its Board of Directors.

Lois continues to carry out these duties today in the same extraordinary fashion that saw her win the Award that was created in her name and first presented in 2011.

***Note: This award is not open for public nominations**

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES

Executive Summary (Submission Document)

- The executive summary is the primary submission document. This document is the most important component of the submission, which judges use to mark the overall campaign.
- Within the executive summary document, provide a compelling overview of the program/campaign following the RACE (Research, Analysis, Communications, Evaluation) formula:
 - **Research**
 - Include a fact-based description of the current program-related knowledge that exists
 - Outline use of research to identify the communications insights / opportunities
 - Demonstrate understanding of the audience characteristics such as demographics, attitudes, opinions and motivations
 - Cite all research methods used
 - **Analysis and Planning**
 - Show how relevant factors derived through research influenced communications. How did the research affect your planning?
 - Clearly articulated analysis of research (e.g., SWOT or other interpretation)
 - Communications goal is clearly stated, and communication plan objectives are measurable (quantifiable objectives) and align with business needs
 - Provide a summary of the tactical execution plan including audience (identify target audiences), tactics and timeline
 - **Communications Plan Implementation**
 - Illustrate how communications tools are appropriate and implemented effectively
 - Show that the execution of the communications plan resonates with intended audiences
 - Identify challenges faced and how they were overcome (e.g., how did you achieve results within the time and budget constraints?)
 - State the campaign / program budget and / or a high-level overview of allocations
 - **Evaluation**
 - Ensure measurement is aligned with stated communications objectives; did your results meet your objectives?
 - Demonstrate results that measure increased volumes and/or outcome-based results to measure influence or awareness, etc.
 - Clearly show that quality evaluation and measurement criteria was used
 - Identify lessons learned (key learnings)
- Further to the above, the executive summary should demonstrate the use and understanding of the RACE formula and include a brief description of the research conducted and attained, how the research and findings were analyzed and used to shape the project/campaign, strategy, quantifiable objectives, audiences, plans and tactics, budget and restraints, and the results.
- If you are entering a category that represents part of a campaign/project rather than an entire campaign (such as Best Writing, Publication or Video) clearly illustrate how this component fits into the overall campaign and how it helped achieve success.
- The judges will also evaluate the award submissions on the overall quality of the entry (e.g., the submission is well written, easy to read and follow, has appropriate balance between all RACE formula elements, etc.)
- **Please identify the award submission name, category and submitting organization(s) within the executive summary document. Failure to do this may result in reduced marks.**

- **Maximum two pages typed. No less than 10-point font. Executive summary submission documents that exceed two pages will be automatically disqualified. A simple cover page (only) is permitted as a third page.**
- **Note for student entries:** Executive summary must be accompanied by a letter of endorsement from the course instructor.

A note on Research (and the “R” in RACE)...

For the submission, please consider ‘research’ in the broadest sense of the word. The definition of research includes any gathering of data, information and facts for the advancement of knowledge in support of the program or campaign. Research could therefore include not only “research” in the traditional sense of doing a study, but also talking to key opinion leaders, the thought that is part of how your media list is compiled, etc. Thus, this section can be thought of as two “Rs” – Research and Rationale.

Timing

Each campaign or project submitted must be planned, produced and completed within a period of two years prior to the entry deadline – and cannot have been previously submitted for a CPRS Toronto Award.

Supporting Documents (Work Samples)

Supporting documents/work samples should support the executive summary and bring the full campaign to life for the judging team. Supporting documents might include:

- Research
- Work product/communications materials
- Multimedia content (e.g., video, audio, graphics)
- Metrics, media coverage clippings, measurement of results (e.g., media coverage, community engagement)

Supporting documents must be uploaded as PDFs. Video files are also permitted (MP4 and QuickTime). A maximum of four supporting document files can be submitted per entry. Individual file size must not exceed 10MB.

Award Levels

The ACE Awards recognize three levels of achievement. The award levels are:

- Bronze: 75 – 79
- Silver: 80 – 89
- Gold: 90 - 100

For the communications products awards (audio, video, writing, publication), the levels are:

- Bronze: 50 – 59
- Silver: 60 – 69
- Gold: 70 - 80

Best in Show Awards

- Each year, CPRS Toronto designates two entries as “best in show” – Best Creative and Best Overall Campaign. Entry into these categories is based on high scores in other categories.

- Campaigns strategies that implemented unique solutions and tactics to a communications challenge will be marked in the rubric as “creative.” The highest scored campaigns marked as “creative” will be eligible for a Best in Show Award (Creative) presentation to the full judging panel.
- The overall highest marked campaigns will be eligible for the Best in Show Award presentation to the judging panel.
- Eligible campaign teams will have 15 minutes to present their campaign to the judges. This presentation is a blank slate and should be presented as though the judges have no background information.
- Best in Show finalists will be contacted by the ACE Awards Committee to coordinate the presentations to the judging panel.