



READY, SET, SUBMIT:
YOUR GUIDE TO THIS YEAR'S

CUPPIE AWARDS

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 7
1:00 PM ET

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Today's Conversation

Whether this is your first CUPPIE entry or your fifteenth, we want to make the process easy to understand.

Today, we'll cover:

- Who can enter + important dates
- CUPPIEs by the numbers
- What's new for 2027
- Choosing the right category
- How judging works
- What makes a strong entry
- What happens after you submit
- The CUPPIE Awards Dinner

And, of course, your questions!

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Who Can Enter?

The CUPPIE Awards recognize outstanding work in higher education marketing and communications.

CUPPIE entries are open to CUPRAP member institutions and organizations.

Entries may showcase work produced by your internal team or in partnership with outside agencies/vendors, provided the work was created for the member institution and meets the eligibility requirements.

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Mark Your Calendar

Date	Details
October 1	Entries Opened!
October 7	Ready, Set, Submit Webinar
December 10	Entry Deadline
December 18	Judging Begins
Late January	Judging Finalized
By February 1	Notified of CUPPIE Status
March 23, 2027	2027 CUPRAP Conference

Pro tip: Don't make Dec. 10 the first day you think about your entries.

CUPPIES by the Numbers

- **\$50** remains the cost to enter a project in the CUPPIE awards, compared to costs ranging from **\$140 to more than \$350** for other professional organization awards
- **405** of entries from our **100+ CUPRAP** member institutions
- **33** entry categories across **nine** distinct areas: Digital Media, Executive Communications, Marketing/Advertising, Outreach, Print, Public Relations and Communications, Visual Communication/Design, Writing, and Wild Card
- ~**20** Judges lend their time to our CUPPIE Awards process each year.
- This spring will mark the **20th** year of the CUPPIE awards.

Where Are We Seeing the Most Entries?

OUR HIGHEST-VOLUME CATEGORIES

- Magazines
- Long & Short Form Stories
- Long & Short Form Video

AND CATEGORIES WE'D LOVE TO SEE MORE OF...

- Postcards, Poster, and Flyers
- Illustration and Mixed Media
- Promotional Item
- Outdoor Advertising

There is outstanding work happening across every area of higher education communications and marketing.

Don't overlook a category simply because your institution hasn't entered it before.

What's New for 2027?

This year, we've made several updates to the CUPPIEs

CATEGORY UPDATES

- Admissions Viewbooks are now included in the “Admissions Communications” subcategory in “Outreach”
- Posters are now included in the expanded “Postcards, Posters and Flyers” subcategory in “Print.”
- Blogs are now under the parent category “Executive Communications” and have been merged with Opinions and Op-Eds to form the “Opinion/Op-Ed/Blog” subcategory.
- We've sought greater clarity within the “Marketing/Advertising” parent category to provide distinction between “Comprehensive Brand Campaign” (establish, evolve or strengthen an institution, unit, program or initiative's brand) and “Digital Advertising Campaign” (paid advertising created for digital channels).

What's New for 2027?

CATEGORY UPDATES (continued)

- The “HTML Email” subcategory has been updated as “Email Design/Campaign” to reflect existing terminology and technology.
- “Digital Experience” has been updated to “Interactive” media to more accurately reflect entries that fit the category description.
- In the “Visual Communication/Design” parent category, we have expanded Illustrations to form “Illustrations and Mixed Media.”

GOLD AWARDS

- Bringing back trophies for GOLD level honors!

SUBMISSION Deadline

- December 10, 2026

What's New for 2027?

- **Expanded and additional opportunities to provide context in Award Force**
- **Thumbnail image required for each entry**
- **Project/Campaign Description *required***
 - *Briefly describe the project, campaign, or piece.*
 - *Recommended: 75–150 words.*
- **Optional Fields**
 - Objectives: What were you trying to accomplish?
 - Target Audience: Who was this created for?
 - Results & Impact: Share measurable outcomes whenever possible (engagement, enrollment, attendance, media coverage, fundraising, web traffic, etc.).
 - Agency/External Support: Did an external agency, consultant, or freelancer contribute to this project?

Before You Submit: Take Inventory

Don't start with the categories. Start with your best work.

Think back over the 2026 calendar year and ask:

- What work are you especially proud of?
- What solved a real communications or marketing challenge?
- What generated meaningful results?
- Where did your team do something particularly creative or strategic?
- What work do you want CUPRAP peers to see?

Then find the CUPPIE category that best fits it.

Choosing the Right Category

Category fit matters.

- **Before submitting:**
 - Read the full category description
 - Pay attention to what the category is designed to recognize
 - Consider the primary purpose of the work, not just its format
 - Don't force an entry into a category simply because it's available
 - Introducing: the Wildcard category

Ask yourself:

If I were judging this category, would I immediately understand why this entry belongs here?

Questions? info@cuprap.org

Think Like a Judge

The judges:

- Weren't part of your project
- Don't know your institution
- Don't know your audience
- Don't know your internal constraints
- May be reviewing several entries in the same sitting

Your job isn't to make them figure it out.

Your entry should give them enough context to understand why the work is strong.

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What Judges Are Looking For

Criteria	The question behind the score
Audience & Purpose	Is it clear who this was for and what it needed to accomplish?
Message & Persuasion	Does the message connect with and move the intended audience?
Content	Is the content relevant, effective and appropriate?
Creativity	Does the work demonstrate thoughtful or distinctive ideas?
Design Elements	Does the execution support the communication goal?
Overall Impression	Taken together, how effectively does the work deliver?

CUPRAP is always seeking additional individuals to judge!

A Note About Budgets & Resources

CUPRAP institutions and teams come in all shapes and sizes.

Judges aren't simply looking for the biggest campaign, largest budget or flashiest production.

Help them understand:

- Your goals
- Your audience
- Your strategy and your constraints
- Your execution
- Your results

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Resourcefulness can be part of the story.

Context Changes Everything

Imagine a judge who is reviewing an Admissions Communications entry...

Entry A:

“Viewbook created for our 2026 recruitment cycle.”

Entry B:

“Research showed that prospective students understood our academic offerings but struggled to picture themselves on campus. We redesigned our viewbook around student experiences and belonging, with the goal of increasing campus visits among admitted students.”

Same piece. Very different judging experience.

Give judges the why behind the work.

Build the Story of Your Entry

A strong entry generally answers five questions:

- **1. The Challenge**
 - What problem or opportunity were you addressing?
- **2. The Audience**
 - Who did you need to reach?
- **3. The Strategy**
 - What approach did you take and why?
- **4. The Execution**
 - What did you actually create or do?
- **5. The Results**
 - What happened?

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Results: Use What You Have

Not every project has a perfect ROI calculation. Example results include:

- Applications, deposits or enrollment data
- Event registrations or attendance
- Web traffic or conversions
- Email performance
- Social engagement
- Media coverage
- Fundraising results
- Survey, audience or colleague feedback
- Performance compared with previous years

When possible, give judges numbers and benchmarks rather than adjectives.

Instead of: “Engagement was incredibly strong.”

Try: “Engagement increased 38% compared with the previous campaign.”

SUPPORTING MATERIALS: MORE ≠ BETTER

Be intentional about what you upload.

Include materials that:

- Show the work clearly
- Help judges understand the complete campaign or project
- Demonstrate important creative elements
- Connect your narrative to the execution

Avoid uploading materials simply because you can.

Pay attention to naming conventions!

Curate the experience.

Common Entry Pitfalls

Some aspects of a submission can make excellent work harder to judge:

- Choosing a category that doesn't quite fit
- Providing too little context
- Describing *what* you did without explaining *why*
- Assuming judges know your institution or audience
- Uploading an overwhelming number of supporting materials
- Waiting until the deadline to assemble everything
- Forgetting to verify links and permissions

Make it easy for the judge to see what makes your work award-worthy.

Before You Click Submit

Your CUPPIE Entry Checklist:

- ✓ Correct category
- ✓ Clear project title
- ✓ Audience identified
- ✓ Purpose/challenge explained
- ✓ Strategy articulated
- ✓ Results included where available
- ✓ Supporting materials curated (*please check naming conventions!*)
- ✓ Links tested
- ✓ Entry proofread
- ✓ A colleague who wasn't involved can understand it

What Happens After You Hit Submit?

Your entry moves into the CUPPIE judging process.

- Entries close on **December 10, 2026**
- Entries are reviewed and prepared for judging
- Entries are assigned to judges
- Judges independently review and score their assigned entries
- Scores are compiled
- Award levels are determined
- Winners are notified by **February 1, 2027**

Then in March...

We celebrate!

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And What About Best of Show?

THE BEST OF THE CUPPIES

- The CUPPIE Best of Show recognizes the most exceptional entry in the annual competition. Following category judging, the highest-performing Gold Award recipients across all categories advance to a final round of consideration by a separate panel of senior judges.
- Finalists are evaluated across disciplines for exceptional strategy, creativity, execution and impact. One entry is selected as the year's Elizabeth "Betty" Hanson Best of Show award recipient.
- Last year, just five CUPPIE entries from a field of 400+ entries competed for this honor, **the highest recognition of the CUPPIE Awards.**

Don't Forget: CUPRAP Marquee Awards

- **The Arthur V. Ciervo Award** honors a college or university president, higher education advocate, public official, or distinguished faculty or staff member who exemplifies CUPRAP's fundamental purposes of supporting and advancing the understanding of higher education.
- **The Don Hale Award** honors a CUPRAP member whose sustained contributions have made a meaningful and lasting impact on the association.
- **The Joseph W. Donovan Rising Star Award** honors an emerging professional who has already demonstrated exceptional promise and leadership early in their career, is under 40 years old and who has worked in higher education for fewer than five years.
- **The CUPRAP Student Catalyst Fellowship** helps support the entry of traditionally underrepresented professionals into marketing and communication professions and recognizes promise and potential in writing, social media engagement, video and audio production, graphic design, journalism, and related fields.

IMPORTANT DATES

Entry Deadline

Thursday, December 10, 2026

Judging

December 2026–January 2027

CUPPIE Awards Celebration + 2027 CUPRAP Conference

March 22–24, 2027 | Lancaster, Pennsylvania

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