



2025-26

**AWARDS CRITERIA & SELECTION
PROCESS**

STATEWIDE OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT & RECOGNITION AWARDS

STUDENT

- Student Excellence Award (Community College)
- Student Excellence Award (TCAT)

COLLEGE OF THE YEAR

Selected from all community and technical colleges

FACULTY

- Faculty Excellence Award (Community College)
- Faculty Excellence Award (TCAT)

PARTNERSHIP

Selected from all community and technical colleges

STAFF

- Staff Excellence Award (Community College)
- Staff Excellence Award (TCAT)

Application can be found online at
tbr.edu/soar

GENERAL TIMELINE *(timeline of event will follow the existing state skills competition)*

Aug. 18: Revised applications will be available on the SOAR website: tbr.edu/soar

Oct. 10: Applications will be due to TBR.

REGIONAL COMPETITION DATES

Nov. 7: Student Interviews, All Regions

Nov. 14: Faculty Interviews, All Regions

Nov. 21: Staff Interviews, All Regions

March 4-5, 2026: Final SOAR Competition and Awards Ceremony, Nashville, TN.

Key Considerations

- You may resubmit past candidates, but letters and support materials should be updated accordingly.
- You are not required to submit a candidate for every category for your institution.
- Please ensure your candidates meet the minimum criteria posted.
- Do not use generic recommendation letters. The letters are a key component that regional judges use for scoring the written materials.
- Prepare your nominees for their interviews in advance. Judges notice clear differences in candidates who had been adequately prepared. Nominees should:
 - Be familiar with the TBR System and workforce development initiatives.
 - Demonstrate on-campus experience outside of the classroom.
 - Be familiar with the selection criteria and why they were nominated.
 - Dress professionally for their interviews.

STUDENT EXCELLENCE AWARD SELECTION PROCESS



Campuses may use their own internal processes to select their institutional candidate. All institutions are required to submit their nominee's information to the TBR System office through an electronic web-based form found online at tbr.edu/soar.



COMMUNITY COLLEGE

- **LEVEL 1:** Each community college selects one finalist for each award (13 total).
- **LEVEL 2:** Institutional nominees complete a virtual interview done by region.
- **LEVEL 3:** Three regional finalists attend the final interview round the day before the awards ceremony in Spring 2026.

TECHNICAL COLLEGE OF APPLIED TECHNOLOGY

- **LEVEL 1:** Each TCAT selects one finalist for each award (24 total).
- **LEVEL 2:** Institutional nominees complete a virtual interview done by region..

The state is divided into three regions (West, Middle, East)

- East: Chattanooga, Athens, Upper Cumberland, Harriman, Oneida/Huntsville, Jacksboro, Knoxville, Morristown, Elizabethton
- Middle: Hohenwald, Pulaski, Dickson, Shelbyville, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Hartsville, Livingston, McMinnville
- West: Henry/Carroll, Memphis, Jackson, Northwest, McKenzie, Crump

- **LEVEL 3:** Three regional finalists attend the final interview round the day before the awards ceremony.

Eligibility Requirements

- Currently enrolled Tennessee Board of Regents students graduating between December 2025 and August 2026 who have been nominated by a faculty or staff member qualify for SOAR awards.
- Students must recognize Tennessee Board of Regents' critical impact on Tennessee's overall workforce readiness and economic future, must have a strong work ethic, a dedicated sense of loyalty and a healthy enthusiasm for promoting education throughout Tennessee.
- Students must be in good standing with their colleges and free from any academic or other "holds" on their

Continued on next page

college accounts. "Good standing" refers to the student's academic standing, conduct, professionalism on campus and in the community and an outstanding member of the community with good moral character. Each college independently determines specific standards for this requirement. "Holds" refer to any BANNER or other "holds," such as for outstanding parking tickets, advisement requirements, etc., which keep the student from being in good standing with the college.

- Students must be currently enrolled during the college nomination/selection process or be a recent graduate for the state-level finalist interviews. Students' graduation date must be between December 2025 and August 2026.
- Students must have completed at least 12 semester hours at the nominating community college at the time of nomination or 450 (earned/projected) clock hours at the nominating TCAT by the regional finalist interviews. Note: If they have 12 hours from a previous semester and are only taking one class the spring semester, they are eligible to be nominated.
- Student must be at least 18 years of age.
- Full-time employees of the college or any system office employees who are also enrolled as a student are not eligible for nomination in the awards program.
- Students who otherwise meet eligibility requirements and working part-time (20 hours or less) as work study, lab assistants and tutors or students participating in internships are eligible to participate in the awards program.

Award Specific Requirements

- CC/TCAT Student Award
 - The student's overall cumulative GPA must be at least a 3.3 average to qualify for nomination and must maintain a 3.3 average throughout the state competition.
 - Exhibit exemplary service at institution and throughout community
 - Exhibit exemplary academic accomplishment during enrollment

Student Essay Framework

Student two-page essay should be typed in 12-point font, double spaced and uploaded as a PDF to the online web form.

Essays should be based on these three criteria:

- 1. Career Goals and Commitment to/Knowledge of Occupation** – The student has established career goals and can articulate those goals. The student has a passion for his or her field and is knowledgeable about the skills and characteristics that one must possess to be successful in that field.
- 2. Commitment to/Knowledge of TBR's Education Options** – The student understands the value of an education from a TBR institution, both economically and personally. The student speaks on a TBR institution's potential to both meet the economic needs of the 21st century and better the lives of those receiving it, in either personal or hypothetical terms.
- 3. Commitment to/Knowledge of the TBR system** – The student understands TBR's vision: raise the education and skill levels of Tennesseans through quality programs and services, while providing students with the education and training needed to develop the knowledge and skills to be competitive in the world economy.

STUDENT AWARD DEFINITIONS OF CRITERIA



Attendance – The student attends class, arrives/leaves on time; notifies instructor in advance of planned absences; makes up assignments punctually. The student should have excellent attendance with minimal excused absences, since a student's attendance is an indication of their dependability.

Attitude and Self Confidence – The student demonstrates a positive attitude, appears self-confident and assured of his/her abilities and has high expectations of his/her self. A positive attitude should be reflected toward the college, other students, instructional staff, administration, career and work. The student should take his or her training seriously and should treat fellow students and college faculty/staff respectfully.

Career Goals and Commitment to/Knowledge of Occupation – The student has established career goals and can articulate those goals. The student has a passion for his or her field and is knowledgeable about the skills and characteristics that one must possess to be successful in that field.

Commitment to/Knowledge of Tennessee Board of Regent's Education Options – The student understands the value of an education from a TBR institution, both economically and personally. The student speaks on a TBR institution's potential to both meet the economic needs of the 21st century and better the lives of those receiving it, in either personal or hypothetical terms.

Commitment to/Knowledge of the Tennessee Board of Regents system – The student understands TBR's vision: raise the education and skill levels of Tennesseans through quality programs and services, while providing students with the education and training needed to develop the knowledge and skills to be competitive in the world economy.

Communication – The student displays appropriate verbal and non-verbal skills. The student would be a good choice in advocating on TBR's behalf to the state legislator, governor, business and industry, civic and community organizations. The student is well spoken, confident and clear/concise in his/her communication.

Enthusiasm – The student is willing, passionate and wholehearted about promoting TBR's institutions as the best option for postsecondary education.

Extracurricular Activities – The student is involved in school activities, such as the student council, clubs/organizations, athletics and community projects as part of a well-balanced life. Extracurricular activities refer to those not required in college. They relate to school, occupational or community involvement.

Good Moral Character – The student displays loyalty, honesty, trustworthiness, dependability, reliability, initiative, self-discipline and self-responsibility.

Leadership/Leadership Qualities – The student should show initiative in the classroom and other college activities. The student should be one who does more than what is expected and goes the extra mile on an assignment or a project. The student should be highly regarded by other students and be a good role model/influence on fellow classmates.

Personal Appearance – The student displays appropriate dress, grooming, hygiene and etiquette.

Presence – The student displays charisma, charm, personality and magnetism that would appeal to a wide variety of audiences (community, civic, student, business and industry, legislators).

FACULTY EXCELLENCE AWARD SELECTION PROCESS



Campuses may use their own internal processes to select their institutional candidate. All institutions are required to submit their nominee's information to the TBR System office through an electronic web-based form found online at tbr.edu/soar.

AWARD IS OPEN TO FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME FACULTY. TO BE ELIGIBLE, A NOMINEE MUST:

- Have completed at least one year of employment at the institution.
- Be a faculty member who is full-time or adjunct during the 2025-26 academic year.
- Be of any rank (adjunct, lecturer, instructor, assistant, associate, or full professor) and any track (tenure, tenure-eligible or contingent) if applicable.

Criteria

The foremost criterion for the Excellence Awards is an overall excellence in the responsibilities of a faculty member's specific appointment including teaching, scholarship, service and/or professional activity.

- 1. Teaching:** Teaching excellence remains at the heart of our institutions. Excellent teaching is consistent and sustained, although pedagogies vary from discipline to discipline and school to school. Such diversity teaching enriches our campuses.
- 2. Scholarship:** The Boyer Model is one model used to embrace various forms of quality scholarship, including, but not limited to, scholarship of discovery, integration, application, teaching, and artistic endeavor.
- 3. Service:** Service is also recognized on many levels including service to the department, school, college, profession and community.

Candidates should be able to demonstrate distinction specific to their appointment requirements or beyond if appropriate, reflecting excellence in those area(s). Areas of distinction could also include, but are not limited to:

- Supporting student success initiatives
- Innovations in teaching
- Experiential learning initiatives
- Sustainability initiatives
- Effectively incorporating scholarship into the classroom
- Bringing national recognition to institution or TBR
- Exemplary service to the college, the larger community, and/or discipline

Faculty Excellence Award Submission Requirements

It is the responsibility of the nominator to gather and submit all required documents. A student nominator, however, may request that this responsibility be given to a faculty member or administrator/staff member. Self-nominations are not eligible.

- Nomination form (to be completed by nominator)

Continued on next page

- Curriculum vitae (supplied by the nominee's department chair)
- Three letters of support (not to exceed two pages, 12 pt. font)—all letters submitted through online applications as PDF files.
 - One letter from the nominator; any faculty member, administrator/staff member, or student from the college community may nominate an individual for an excellence award.
 - One letter by the nominee's department chair; it is requested that the department chair highlight the specific appointment requirements or expectations (teaching, scholarship, and/or service) of the nominee to enable the committee to adequately review the individual on this basis. If the nominating letter is from the nominee's department chair or the nominee is the department chair, another support letter is required.
 - One letter from an additional individual who supports the recommendation of the nominee for an excellence award; faculty member, administrator/staff member, alumnus/a, student from the college community, or external colleague.



COMMUNITY COLLEGE

- **LEVEL 1:** Each community college selects one finalist for each award (13 total).
- **LEVEL 2:** Institutional nominees complete a virtual interview done by region.
- **LEVEL 3:** Three regional finalists attend the final interview round the day before the awards ceremony.

TECHNICAL COLLEGE OF APPLIED TECHNOLOGY

- **LEVEL 1:** Each TCAT selects one finalist for each award (24 total).
- **LEVEL 2:** Institutional nominees complete a virtual interview done by region.

The state is divided into three regions (West, Middle, East)

- East: Chattanooga, Athens, Upper Cumberland, Harriman, Oneida/Huntsville, Jacksboro, Knoxville, Morristown, Elizabethton
- Middle: Hohenwald, Pulaski, Dickson, Shelbyville, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Hartsville, Livingston, McMinnville
- West: Henry/Carroll, Memphis, Jackson, Northwest, McKenzie, Crump
- **LEVEL 3:** Three Regional finalists attend the final interview round the day before the awards ceremony.

Continued on next page

STAFF EXCELLENCE AWARD SELECTION PROCESS



Campuses may use their own internal processes to select their institutional candidate. All institutions are required to submit their nominee's information to the TBR System office through an electronic web-based form found online at tbr.edu/soar.

AWARD IS OPEN TO FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES. TO BE ELIGIBLE, A NOMINEE MUST:

- Have completed at least one year of employment at the institution.
- Be a non-exempt or exempt employee who is employed full-time during the 2025-26 academic year.
- Be employed at the institution at the time of the final selection.
- In the organizational structure, be at or below the level of associate/assistant vice president (or equivalent).

Criteria

The foremost criterion for the Excellence Awards is an overall excellence in the responsibilities of a staff member's specific appointment service and/or professional activity.

- Service is also recognized on many levels including service to the department, school, college, profession and community.
- Candidates should be able to demonstrate distinction beyond normal job responsibilities, reflecting excellence in those area(s). Areas of distinction could also include, but are not limited to:
 - Experiential learning initiatives
 - Sustainability initiatives
 - Effectively supporting student success inside and outside the classroom
 - Bringing national recognition to the institution or TBR
 - Exemplary service to the college, the larger community, and/or professional field

Staff Excellence Award Submission Requirements

It is the responsibility of the nominator to gather and submit all required documents. A student nominator, however, may request that this responsibility be given to an administrator/staff member. Self-nominations are not eligible.

- Nomination form (to be completed by nominator)
- Resume (supplied by the nominee's supervisor) — upload as a PDF.
- Three letters of support (not to exceed two pages, 12 pt. font) — all letters submitted through online applications as PDF files.
 - One letter from the nominator; any faculty member, administrator/staff member, or student from the college community may nominate an individual for an excellence award.
 - One letter by the nominee's supervisor; it is requested that the supervisor highlight the specific appointment requirements or expectations of the nominee to enable the committee to adequately review the individual on this basis.
 - One letter from an additional individual who supports the recommendation of the nominee for an excellence

Continued on next page

award; faculty member, administrator/staff member, alumnus/a, student from the college community, or external colleague.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE



- **LEVEL 1:** Each community college selects one finalist for each award (13 total).
- **LEVEL 2:** Institutional nominees complete a virtual interview done by region.
- **LEVEL 3:** Three regional finalists attend the final interview round the day before the awards ceremony.

TECHNICAL COLLEGE OF APPLIED TECHNOLOGY:

- **LEVEL 1:** Each TCAT selects one finalist for each award (24 total).
- **LEVEL 2:** Institutional nominees complete a virtual interview done by region.

The state is divided into three regions (West, Middle, East)

- East: Athens, Chattanooga, Elizabethton, Harriman, Jacksboro, Knoxville, Morristown, Oneida/Huntsville, Upper Cumberland
 - Middle: Dickson, Hartsville, Hohenwald, Livingston, McMinnville, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Pulaski, Shelbyville
 - West: Crump, Henry/Carroll, Jackson, Memphis, Northwest
- **LEVEL 3:** Three regional finalists attend the final interview round the day before the awards ceremony.

Continued on next page

COLLEGE OF THE YEAR AWARD



The College of the Year award recognizes the college that has demonstrated, through evidence, a sustained commitment to and proactive advancement of the causes of student success and workforce development at their institution.

Criteria

- Has developed a comprehensive, bold and strategic completion plan with a particular focus on addressing existing equity gaps.
- Has achieved measurable and significant increases in:
 - On-time degree completion
 - Certificate completion
 - Transfer rates to either a 2-year or 4-year institution (as applicable)
 - Underrepresented student progression and completion
- Has developed innovative programs that support student success and workforce development in areas such as developmental education, student support services, K-12 partnerships/collaboration, workforce readiness and partnerships.
- Has substantially contributed to the integration of state completion goals and system strategic priority areas across the institution.

Selection Process

The chancellor, in consultation with members of the system office senior leadership team, will make nominations for the College of the Year Award based on identification of institutions that meet the minimum qualifications listed above. System staff will assess data on the criteria listed and other factors. Finalists will then be discussed by the senior leadership team with a final recommendation made to the chancellor.

PARTNERSHIP AWARD



The Partnership Award recognizes a TBR institution that has demonstrated, through evidence, a new and innovative approach of working across sectors to solve a regional or local problem.

Criteria

- The partnership must be between at least one TBR institution and at least one other partnering organization including, but not limited to, sister TBR institutions, other higher education institutions, business, industry, civic organizations, etc.
- Application demonstrates equal contributions of all parties to identifying solutions to a clearly defined problem.
- The partnership has developed innovative programs that support student success and workforce development.
- The partnership has achieved measurable and significant outcomes that address the defined problem as demonstrated by:
 - Data on improvement in performance of participating institutions, students, and/or graduates
 - Public relations, media and marketing attention to success of the partnership
 - Documented collaboration with community and business leaders
 - Successful application and receipt of grant or external funding

Selection Process

The partner organizations must individually complete the online application form that includes a letter of support from each institutional president and/or organizational head explaining the intent of the partnership and outcomes achieved. In support of the application letters, supporting evidence in the form of data, news releases, media coverage, grant acceptance letters, or third-party recommendation letters must be submitted as part of the application packet. The chancellor, in consultation with members of the system office senior leadership team, will review applications for the partnership award and review all evidence and documentation submitted with the application.

VIRTUAL ART COMPETITION



Awards are open to FULL-TIME and PART-TIME STUDENTS.

Deadline to submit is JAN. 9, 2026.

Eligibility Requirements

- Currently enrolled Tennessee Board of Regents students graduating between December 2025 - August 2026.
- Students must be in good standing with their colleges and free from any academic or other “holds” on their college accounts. “Good standing” refers to the student’s academic standing, conduct, professionalism on campus and in the community and an outstanding member of the community with good moral character. Each college independently determines specific standards for this requirement. “Holds” refer to any BANNER or other “holds,” such as for outstanding parking tickets, advisement requirements, etc., which keep the student from being in good standing with the college.
- Students must be currently enrolled during the college nomination/selection process; however, student may be a recent graduate for the state-level awards.
- Students must have completed at least 12 semester hours at the nominating community college at the time of nomination or 450 (earned/projected) clock hours at the nominating TCAT by the regional finalist interviews. Note: If they have 12 hours from a previous semester and are only taking one class the spring semester, they are eligible to be nominated.
- Student must be at least 18 years of age.
- Full-time employees of the college or any system office employees who are also enrolled as a student are not eligible for nomination in the awards program.
- Students who otherwise meet eligibility requirements and who are working part-time (20 hours or less) as work study, lab assistants and tutors or students participating in internships are eligible to participate in the awards program.

Award Submission Requirements

Class submissions will be accepted. If a class submission is chosen as a winner, the prize money will be given to the instructor to hold a class party.

- Artist name
- Title of work
- Art medium
- Original artwork size
- JPG or PNG file format.
- Images should be high-resolution

Continued on next page

VIRTUAL ART COMPETITION



- The minimum image dimension for height and width is 1500 px.
- Three dimensional art should be no larger than 36" x 12".
- Max file size per image: 5 MB.
- You must name your file in this format to be accepted:

FirstName_LastName_Institution_Title-Medium-Dimensions

Example: Jane_Doe_JacksonState_Blackbird-Oil-16x20

- Artist Release Form
- College Certification Form

Submissions should be art created within the 2025-26 academic year. Students are encouraged to express their creativity freely and submit any type of artwork they wish, without the need to adhere to a specific theme. All styles and forms are welcome. Submissions will be judged, and winners chosen based on the following criteria:

- Originality
- Composition and design of the work
- Overall presentation
- Creativity in expression

Exclusions

Art will be excluded from the contest that:

- Is not in a digital format and submitted electronically
- Has been significantly retouched or altered with software
- Contain obscene, provocative, defamatory, explicit, or otherwise objectionable or inappropriate content
- Infringe on copyrights or misrepresent the work of others
- Include watermarks, time or date stamps, or logos
- Has not met all submission requirements

All eligible submissions will be placed into a virtual online gallery.

Three winners will be chosen and will also win cash prizes. Winners will be invited to attend the SOAR Awards ceremony as well as have their art showcased at the event. By submitting to the virtual gallery, the artist declares that the artwork submitted is the artist's original interpretation of a topic/subject and is not a derivative or transformative artwork based on another person's copyrighted artwork.

Please select one **High Impact Practice (HIP)** to focus on for your institution's poster. The goal is to highlight a specific institutional effort related to a high impact practice. You may choose to showcase either:

- A particular HIP that is being scaled across the campus, or
- An innovative application of a HIP within a specific course.

This will allow each institution to show how they are driving impactful change through a focused HIP initiative. College winners for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place will receive a plaque to display on their campus.

Criteria

Poster Dimensions:

- Each poster must be 3 feet by 4 feet (36" x 48") to fit the designated display areas properly.

Printed Format:

- Posters should be printed and ready for display. Please ensure all submissions are in physical form, as digital-only entries will not be accepted. Bring finished poster to the SOAR Awards event and submit it at check in.

Design and Layout:

- The overall design of the poster should be visually engaging, well-organized and easy to follow. Consider using a clear structure, balanced use of color and readable font sizes to enhance the presentation of information.

Content Requirement – Evidence of Impact of HIP:

- Each poster should showcase evidence of the impact of the chosen HIP within your respective school. This could include data, testimonials, case studies or other relevant indicators of success and engagement.
- Clearly note the specific HIP being featured by the institution.
- Clear demonstration that students engaged in meaningful reflection, real-life applications, open discourse and public demonstration of knowledge gained through use of the HIP.

For HIPs scaled across the campus:

- a. Why was this particular HIP used? Was it selected to address a particular learning objective at the institution? What commitment has the institution made to scale this practice campus wide?
- b. Explain how this HIP is suited for the institution's unique context/community. Is it addressing a particular objective of the institution in its mission or strategic plan?
- c. In what ways have students benefited from the HIP?

d. What formative or quantitative assessments demonstrate increases in student outcomes?

If used in a specific course:

a. Why was this particular HIP included?

b. Explain how this HIP is suited for the course. Was there a particular problem or issue that students invested time and effort using the HIP?

c. Which of the course objectives are influenced by inclusion of the HIP? In what ways did students utilize methods of investigation, discuss findings, or determine solutions?

d. How do the course objectives align with the HIP's minimum definition of practice in TBR's HIP taxonomy?

e. What student outcomes from the course can be attributed to the inclusion of the HIP? Are there course artifacts that can be shared to illustrate impact?

School Participation:

- We encourage 100 percent participation from all schools. It is our goal for each school to be represented in the session by submitting one poster.