



2026-27

AWARDS CRITERIA & SELECTION
PROCESS

STATEWIDE OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT & RECOGNITION AWARDS

STUDENT EXCELLENCE 4

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

FACULTY EXCELLENCE 8

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

STAFF EXCELLENCE 10

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

COLLEGE OF THE YEAR 12

Selected from all community and technical colleges

ADVISOR OF THE YEAR 13

Selected from all community and technical colleges

PARTNERSHIP 15

Selected from all community and technical colleges

VIRTUAL ART COMPETITION 16

Selected from all community and technical colleges

HONORS CHOIR SELECTION 18

Selected from all community and technical colleges

Application can be found online at
tbr.edu/soar

STATEWIDE OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT & RECOGNITION AWARDS



GENERAL TIMELINE

Aug. 21, 2026: Revised applications will be available on the SOAR website: tbr.edu/soar

Oct. 9, 2026: Applications will be due to TBR for Student/Faculty/Staff Excellence Awards and Advisor of the Year.

Jan. 29, 2027: Applications will be due to TBR for Partnership Award, Virtual Art Competition and Honors Choir.

REGIONAL COMPETITION DATES

Nov. 6, 2026: Student Interviews, All Regions

Nov. 13, 2026: Faculty Interviews, All Regions

Nov. 20, 2026: Staff Interviews, All Regions

March 30–31, 2027: 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.

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.
The state is divided into three regions (West, Middle, and East)
 - **West:** Columbia State, Dyersburg State, Jackson State, Southwest TN
 - **Middle:** Chattanooga State, Motlow State, Nashville State, Volunteer State
 - **East:** Cleveland State, Northeast State, Pellissippi State, Roane State, Walters State
- **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 (22 total).
- **LEVEL 2:** Institutional nominees complete a virtual interview done by region.
The state is divided into three regions (West, Middle, East)
 - **West:** Crump, Dickson, Henry/Carroll, Hohenwald, Jackson, Memphis, Northwest
 - **Middle:** Hartsville, McMinnville, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Pulaski, Shelbyville, Upper Cumberland
 - **East:** Athens, Chattanooga, Elizabethton, Harriman, Jacksboro, Knoxville, Morristown, Oneida/Huntsville
- **LEVEL 3:** Three regional finalists attend the final interview round the day before the awards ceremony.

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STUDENT EXCELLENCE AWARD SELECTION PROCESS



Deadline to submit nominations is Oct. 9, 2026.

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.

Eligibility Requirements

- Currently enrolled Tennessee Board of Regents students graduating between December 2026 and August 2027 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 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 2026 and August 2027.
- 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.
- Students 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 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.

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- Exhibit exemplary service at institution and throughout community
- Exhibit exemplary academic accomplishment during enrollment

Student Essay Framework

The student's 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 themselves. 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 Regents' 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 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.

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 their 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



Deadline to submit nominations is Oct. 9, 2026.

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 2026–27 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 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 in 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 the 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.

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- Nomination form (to be completed by nominator)
- Curriculum vitae (supplied by the nominee's department chair)
- Three letters of support (not to exceed two pages, 12-point 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.

STAFF EXCELLENCE AWARD

SELECTION PROCESS



Deadline to submit nominations is Oct. 9, 2026.

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 2026–27 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, including 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-point 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.

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- 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.

COLLEGE OF THE YEAR AWARD



Deadline to submit nominations is Oct. 9, 2026.

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 the institution.

Criteria

- Has developed a comprehensive, bold and strategic completion plan with a particular focus on addressing existing gaps in student success.
- 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.

ADVISOR OF THE YEAR AWARD



Deadline to submit nominations is Oct. 9, 2026.

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:

- Currently serve as a professional academic or faculty academic advisor with three years of advising experience at the institution.
- Have completed at least three years of employment at the institution at the time of nomination.
- Be a non-exempt or exempt employee who is employed full-time during the 2026–27 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 Advisor of the Year Award is overall excellence in academic advising and will be evaluated on the evidence of qualities and practices that distinguish the nominee as an outstanding professional academic advisor or faculty academic advisor including:

- Strong interpersonal skills
- Availability to advisees, faculty, or staff
- Frequency of contact with advisees
- Appropriate referral activity
- Use and dissemination of appropriate info sources
- Evidence of student success rate, by advisor, or department
- Meeting advisees in informal settings
- Monitoring of student progress toward academic and career goals
- Mastery of institutional regulations, policies, and procedures
- Ability to engage in, promote, and support developmental advising
- Evidence of advising in an academic advising program that supports **NACADA's core values**
- Evidence that the advising program reflects the standards of good practice in the **CAS Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising**

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- Participation in and support of advisor development programs
- Perception by colleagues of nominee's advising skills
 - Institutional recognition of nominee for outstanding advising
- Participation in and support of intrusive advising to build strong relationships with advisees

Advisor of the Year 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.

- A summary of the Nominee's Qualifications. In this key piece, the nominator should summarize the extent to which the nominee meets the award criteria, citing letters of support, data, or other materials illustrative of exemplary performance as an advisor. How does this nominee consistently go beyond expected job duties to provide outstanding advising?
- Curriculum vitae or resume (supplied by the nominee's department chair or director). Please limit entries to material that pertains directly to academic advising, presenting relevant information from the nominee's overall resume/vitae. Please include a current position description with a list of job responsibilities and the percentages of time spent in each area of responsibility.
- A personal statement that includes the nominee's advising philosophy. **See resources on creating your advising philosophy.**
- Appendices (not to exceed 40 pages) should include representative materials and letters of support and be submitted through the online application as one PDF file.
 - Representative materials developed by the nominee such as articles published, resources and tip sheets created for students, training materials for faculty/staff, presentations given, etc. These materials should show how the nominee has gone above and beyond regular advising job duties to meet a level of outstanding work.
- Three Letters of Support (not to exceed two pages, 12-point font).
 - One letter from an advisee.
 - One letter from an administrator.
 - One letter from a colleague.

PARTNERSHIP AWARD



Deadline to submit nominations is Jan. 29, 2027.

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



Deadline to submit is Jan. 29, 2027.

All institutions are required to submit their artists' information to the TBR System office through an electronic web-based form found online at tbr.edu/soar.

AWARDS ARE OPEN TO FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME STUDENTS

Eligibility Requirements

- Currently enrolled Tennessee Board of Regents students graduating between December 2026–August 2027.
- 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, students may be a recent graduate.
- 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.
- Students 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.
- 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.

Award Submission Requirements

- Artist name
- Title of work
- Art medium
- Original artwork size

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- Artist Release Form
- College Certification Form
- Uploaded image of artwork (requirements below)

Artwork Image Upload Requirements:

- JPG or PNG file format
- Images should be high-resolution
- 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

Submissions should be art created within the 2026–27 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

Submissions will be excluded from the contest if they:

- Are not in a digital format and submitted electronically
- Have 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
- Have 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.

TBR HONORS CHOIR SELECTION PROCESS



Deadline to submit nominations is Jan. 29, 2027.

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

TBR is seeking to assemble an Honors Choir of up to 26 student singers, with alumni eligible to serve as alternates. Each community college will identify two (2) singers (a combination of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) and up to two (2) alternates to perform in the TBR Honors Choir. Alternates can be alumni to ensure the full choir has all SATB voice parts filled. Singers will learn and prepare the music with their home choir/choir director. One of the pieces will be "The Star-Spangled Banner." Singers will perform 1-2 additional pieces selected by the director.

The campus faculty will select nominees through their own campus-based selection process.

Nominees must be available to fulfill the following requirements to serve in the choir:

- Nominees must be currently enrolled students at the time of nomination.
- Performers need to travel to Nashville the night before; the college will arrange lodging.
- Performers must be available on March 30–31, 2027, to participate in rehearsals and performances. Further details of rehearsal times and locations will be shared with selected choir members.
- Singers should wear all black clothing (dress up like you are going to church or a wedding) and bring a black folder.