Winning awards help sheet

Many not-for-profits have it in their DNA to shirk the limelight for accolades, and likewise, many volunteers and board members do the same. They say: we are here for the cause not the glory.

Applying for awards for inspiring work executed by the organisation, or for the impact an individual board member, staff leader or volunteer has done does not discount the commitment to the cause. Successful shortlisting and winning awards can propel a cause into the spotlight, on the coattails of the person or organisation you have nominated.

Applying for awards can take some time, just like applying for funding, but there is a positive impact to doing so. You can share the great news of shortlisting or winning on your socials, website, email signature and even an energetic email to stakeholders.

Some top tips for applying for awards:

1. Choose the right award.

Match the award criteria closely to the strengths of the organisation, person or program. A strong fit matters more than prestige, and choosing the “right” award.

2. Read the criteria carefully.

Address every question directly and in the order asked, just like a funding application. Assessors score against the criteria, not against effort or goodwill.

3. Tell a great story.

Explain the problem, the action taken and the impact achieved. Where possible include short quotes, references and links that show the work in action.

4. Be clear about impact.

Use evidence to show what changed as a result of the work. Numbers, outcomes and clear examples help assessors understand scale and significance, just like a funding application.

5. Show leadership and values.

Highlight how the organisation or individual demonstrated leadership, good governance, innovation or community benefit in line with sector values in general, and specifically the values shared by the awarding body.

6. Keep it plain and simple.

Avoid jargon and internal language. Write for someone outside your organisation who may know nothing about your work.

7. Use examples, not claims.

Instead of saying the work was innovative or inclusive, show how it was innovative or inclusive through specific actions and decisions.

8. Get an external perspective.

Ask someone friendly but not involved in the work to review the application. If they understand it clearly, assessors are more likely to as well.

9. Respect word limits and format.

Concise, well structured applications are easier to read and score higher than long or unfocused ones.

10. Apply even if you think you will not win.

Shortlisting alone can raise profile, boost morale and create material for communications, funding and stakeholder engagement.