Ontario's best, recognized.

Enter your Festival, Event, or Attraction

Festival, Event, and Attraction Awards Award Criteria and Application Guidelines: Recognizing the 2026 Season

About the Awards

Attractions Ontario has recognized excellence in Ontario tourism since 1983. These awards celebrate the festivals, events, and attractions that give people a reason to explore the province, and the teams behind them who market, innovate, and build experiences visitors remember.

Winners are announced in March 2027 and promoted through Attractions Ontario's magazine, website, consumer newsletter, and social media channels.

These awards are only open to members of Attractions Ontario. Not yet a member? Contact Tine Elgsaether, Membership Coordinator at tine@attractionsontario.ca. ***Please note:*** first time members of Attractions Ontario can apply their membership fee as an advertising credit with Attractions Ontario. These awards are eligible for that credit.

Key Dates

Criteria and applications released	November 2026
Submission deadline	January 13, 2027 at 5:00 pm
Judging	February 2027
Winners announced	March 2027

Award Categories

Festival and event awards

Award	How it is awarded
Top 50 Festivals and Events	One list of 50, with the top five in each budget size highlighted
Top 10 Canada Day Celebrations	One list of 10
Top 10 Santa Claus Parades	One list of 10
Top 10 Christmas Markets	One list of 10
Top 10 Halloween Events	One list of 10
Best Festival or Event Series	One award; may be recognized by budget size where entries allow
Best New Festival or Event	One award; may be recognized by budget size where entries allow
Innovation Award	One award
Best Promotional Campaign	One award: Campaign budget under $25,000 One award: Campaign budget $25,000 or more
Best Social Media Campaign	One award: Paid social budget under $5,000 (includes free) One award: Paid social budget $5,000 or more

Attraction awards

Innovation Award	One award
Best Promotional Campaign	One award: Campaign budget under $25,000 One award: Campaign budget $25,000 or more
Best Social Media Campaign	One award: Paid social budget under $5,000 (includes free) One award: Paid social budget $5,000 or more

Festivals, events, and attractions answer the same questions for the Innovation, Promotional and Social Media awards but are judged and awarded separately.

How to Apply

- Complete one application form for each award you enter. You may enter more than one award, but each entry needs its own package.
- Answer all questions for the award in 10 pages or less, saved as a single PDF. Use a minimum 11-point font and 2.5 cm (1-inch) margins. Entries over the page limit may be disqualified.
- Email your complete package (application form, answers, and supporting materials) as one ZIP file to tine@attractionsontario.ca.
- Only Attractions Ontario members may enter. Your membership must be current when you submit.
- Your festival, event, or attraction must have operated in 2026 and be committed to operating in 2027, unless the award states otherwise.
- You may enter more than one festival, event, or campaign in the same award, except where an award sets a limit.
- Late entries will not be accepted. No extensions will be granted.
- Judges are not likely to be from your area. Tell your story clearly and give compelling details that relate directly to the award.

Supporting materials

Every entry should include the following. Some awards ask for additional materials, listed with that award.

- Up to five (5) high-resolution photos, submitted as individual files and labelled with your organization, award, and number (e.g. RiverFest-BestNew-pic1).
- Within your 10-page PDF, include screen captures of relevant ads, posts, or promotional material, and links to any video or audio you would like the judges to see or hear. Do not send video or audio files.
- Links must be open to view (not password-protected) and stay live and unchanged until March 31, 2027. AO will not follow up on broken or inaccessible links, and the entry may be disqualified.

Size Categories

All festival and event applicants must state their overall festival or event budget:

Small	Medium	Large
$100,000 or less	$100,001 to $500,000	$500,001 or more

Budget size is used to highlight the top five in each size within the Top 50. For Best Festival or Event Series and Best New Festival or Event, where entries allow, judges may recognize winners by budget size.

For the Attractions awards, the size is categorized by annual visitation numbers as follows:

Small	Medium	Large
50,000 or less	50,001 to 199,999	200,000 or more

Entry Fee

The entry fee is based on the budget size stated above. For all awards (both Festival/Event and Attraction) except for the Top 50 award, the fees are as follows:

Small	Medium	Large
$50	$100	$150

For the Top 50 Festivals, the fee is as follows:

Small	Medium	Large
$100	$200	$300

Campaign budgets

- Promotional campaign budget includes paid media, production, printing, and agency or contractor fees for the campaign. It does not include staff time.
- Paid social budget includes paid social media advertising and any agency or contractor fees for social media. It does not include staff time.

Economic impact

Entries for the Top 50, Top 10, Best Festival or Event Series, and Best New Festival or Event awards must include economic impact results, either from Ontario's Tourism Regional Economic Impact Model (TREIM), a free tool provided by the Province, or from an independent economic impact study completed within the past two years.

Optional evidence

You may also include other evidence of success, such as Net Promoter Score, survey results, social media followers, and engagement, or sample guest comments. This evidence is optional. Entries will not be penalized for not including it.

Judging

AO staff first screen every entry for eligibility and completeness. Entries that are incomplete or do not meet the eligibility requirements are disqualified and are not sent to the judges. AO will not contact entrants about missing items. If you would like to know why your entry was not judged, contact AO.

Eligible entries are scored by a panel of judges from the tourism and festival and event industries. Judges do not score entries where they have a conflict of interest.

Each award is scored out of 40, using the criteria listed with that award. For every award except the Top 50, five (5) of those points are for the quality of supporting evidence. Judges evaluate entries on content, not design or packaging.

Attractions Ontario may decline to present an award if entries do not meet the program standard. All decisions of the judges and Attractions Ontario are final.

Terms and conditions

1. By entering, you confirm that the information in your entry is accurate and that you have the right to use all photos, video, and other materials you submit.
2. You grant Attractions Ontario permission to use your organization's name, your festival, event, or attraction name, your story, photos, and other submitted materials to promote the awards and winners, without compensation.
3. Entry fees are non-refundable, including for entries that are disqualified or withdrawn.
4. Attractions Ontario may disqualify any entry that does not meet these rules or that, in its sole discretion, compromises the fairness of the awards.
5. Attractions Ontario is not responsible for lost, late, incomplete, or undeliverable entries, or for email or other technical failures.
6. Attractions Ontario may modify, suspend, or cancel the awards, or any award, at its sole discretion.
7. Attractions Ontario uses entrant contact information only to administer the awards and to communicate with entrants.
8. These rules are governed by the laws of the Province of Ontario.

Errors and Omissions

Attractions Ontario has made every effort to ensure the information in these criteria and on its website is accurate. Errors and omissions excepted (E&OE): Attractions Ontario is not responsible for errors or omissions in its awards materials, and may correct them at any time. Where an error is found, the corrected information applies. Attractions Ontario's interpretation of these rules is final.

Winner benefits

- Page dedicated to our Award Winners in our digital magazine (2 million+ circulation)
- Recognition on a dedicated awards page on attractionsontario.ca.
- Promotion through Attractions Ontario's consumer newsletter and social media channels.
- Promotion to media, Destination Ontario, and travel writers following the announcement.
- A template news release to support your own media relations.
- Use of the award logo and a digital toolkit of social media graphics.
- The right to call yourself an award-winning festival, event, or attraction.

Top 50 Festivals and Events

The Top 50 recognizes Ontario's leading festivals and events: those that deliver an outstanding experience, draw visitors and make a lasting contribution to their communities. The five highest-scoring entries in each budget size are highlighted within the list. Judges assess each entry on what it delivers, not on how many days it runs.

Eligibility

- Open to festivals and events of any length, including one-day events.
- Each applicant may enter up to three (3) festivals or events in the Top 50.
- Canada Day events, Santa Claus parades and New Year's celebrations are not eligible for the Top 50.

Questions

Uniqueness of the festival or event

1. Summarize the major objectives of your festival or event and its importance to your community.
2. List five popular or unique components of your festival or event, based on attendee feedback.

Audience appeal

3. Who is your target audience?
4. Who attends your festival or event? How many attendees are local and how many are visitors (from 40 km or further), and how do you collect this information?
5. Summarize the cost to attend, including free programming, ticket price ranges and premium experiences.

Impact on the community

6. Describe how your festival or event contributes to the community. Include two specific success stories from partners or local businesses.
7. Describe the economic impact of your festival or event on the region or province, using TREIM results or an independent study (see How to Apply).
8. How do you collect data and measure success?
9. Briefly describe your volunteer, vendor, and sponsorship programs, and any other ways your festival or event benefits the community.

Overall experience

10. Describe the most innovative or newest element that enhanced the visitor experience this year.
11. Describe how you plan to enhance your festival or event next year to keep attendees coming back.
12. Describe what makes your festival or event unique in its region, in Ontario or in the industry.

Scoring

Criteria	Points
Uniqueness of the festival or event (questions 1 and 2)	10
Audience appeal (questions 3 to 5)	10
Impact on the community (questions 6 to 9)	10
Overall experience (questions 10 to 12)	10
Total	**40**

Top 10 Canada Day Celebrations/Top 10 Santa Claus Parades

Two separate Top 10 lists recognize the best Canada Day celebrations and Santa Claus parades in Ontario: the events that bring their communities together, build local pride and create traditions people return to year after year.

Both lists use the same questions. Each celebration is judged only against others of its type.

Eligibility

- Open to Canada Day celebrations and Santa Claus parades. Select the list you are entering on the application form.
- Enter your most recent edition held since July 1, 2026.

Questions

1. Introduce your celebration/event, its history, and the date of the edition you are entering.
2. Describe its purpose and what makes it special to your community.
3. What was your attendance and number of participants (for example, parade entries, performers, and vendors), and how do you measure them?
4. Community impact: How does your celebration contribute to community pride, inclusion, and participation? Provide examples of partnerships, volunteer involvement, local business involvement, or charitable initiatives.
5. Visitor experience: Describe your programming, accessibility, and safety planning, and anything new in this edition.
6. Does your celebration draw people from outside your community? Include your economic impact results.
7. How will your celebration continue to grow and improve?

Scoring

Criteria	**Points**
Purpose and tradition (questions 1 and 2)	5
Attendance and reach (questions 3 and 6)	10
Community impact (question 4)	10
Visitor experience and growth (questions 5 and 7)	10
Quality of supporting evidence	5
Total	**40**

Top 10 Halloween Events

Top 10 Halloween Events recognizes the best Halloween experiences in Ontario: the events that deliver seasonal thrills and fun, bring families and communities together, and create traditions people return to year after year.

All entries, from haunted attractions to family-friendly events, are judged on the same criteria. Judges will assess each entry on how well it delivers for its intended audience, not on scare level or size.

Eligibility

• Open to Ontario Halloween events and attractions open to the public, including haunted houses, scream parks, family Halloween events, and harvest festivals with significant Halloween programming.
• Enter your 2026 Halloween season (events held between September 1 and November 15, 2026).

Questions

1. Introduce your event, its history, intended audience, and the dates of the edition you are entering.
2. Describe your theme, storytelling, and production design. What makes your event creative and immersive?
3. What was your attendance and number of participants (for example: sellouts, or capacity, and number of actors, performers, staff, and volunteers), and how do you measure them?
4. Guest satisfaction: What do guests say about your event? Share any evidence you have, such as online reviews, social media comments, survey results, or repeat visitation.
5. Visitor experience: Describe your programming, accessibility, and safety planning, including scare-level and age guidance, crowd and queue management, and actor conduct policies where applicable. What was new this season?
6. Does your event draw people from outside your community? Include your economic impact results.
7. How will your event continue to grow and improve?

Scoring

Criteria	Points
Creativity and immersion (questions 1 and 2)	15
Guest experience and safety (questions 4 and 5)	10
Attendance and draw (questions 3 and 6)	5
Growth (question 7)	5
Quality of supporting evidence	5
Total	**40**

Top 10 Christmas Markets

Top 10 Christmas Markets recognizes the best Christmas markets in Ontario: the markets that capture the spirit of the season, showcase local makers and vendors, and create traditions people return to year after year.

All entries, from one-day community markets to multi-week destination markets, are judged on the same criteria. Judges will assess each entry on what it delivers, not on its size or length.

Eligibility

- Open to Ontario Christmas markets open to the public, whether indoor or outdoor.
- Enter your 2026 market season (markets held between November 1 and December 31, 2026).

Questions

1. Introduce your market, its history, its intended audience, and the dates of your 2026 season.
2. Describe your market's atmosphere and design, including theming, décor, lighting, and programming such as music, entertainment, and activities. What makes your market festive and memorable?
3. How many vendors took part, and how do you select them? What share are local makers, artisans, or food producers?
4. What was your attendance, and how do you measure it? What do visitors and vendors say about your market? Share any evidence you have, such as reviews, social media comments, or the number of returning vendors.
5. Visitor experience: Describe your accessibility, amenities, and safety planning, including crowd management, weather planning, and transportation or parking. What was new this season?
6. Does your market draw people from outside your community? Include your economic impact results.
7. How will your market continue to grow and improve?

Scoring

Criteria	Points
Atmosphere and design (questions 1 and 2)	10
Vendor mix and local showcase (question 3)	10
Attendance, satisfaction, and draw (questions 4 and 6)	10
Visitor experience and growth (questions 5 and 7)	5
Quality of supporting evidence	5
Total	**40**

Best Festival or Event Series

This award recognizes a series that brings people together over a season, builds local pride and strengthens Ontario's reputation as a vibrant place to live and visit. Examples include theatre seasons, farmers' markets, concert or movie series in the park and waterfront concert series.

Eligibility

• The series must include at least four (4) weeks of programming, held weekly or over the course of a season.

Questions

1. Introduce your series and its background. Include all 2026 dates and times.
2. Describe the purpose and objectives of the series.
3. Who is your target audience, and what was your attendance or number of participants?
4. Community impact: How does your series contribute to community pride, inclusion, and participation? Provide examples of partnerships, volunteer involvement, or audience engagement.
5. Economic and tourism impact: How does your series support the local economy, tourism, or regional growth? How do you measure success?
6. Creativity and cultural value: How does your series show innovation, creativity, or cultural significance for your community and Ontario?
7. Sustainability and legacy: How will your series remain viable in the future, and what long-term benefits does it provide to your community?

Scoring

Criteria	**Points**
Purpose and audience (questions 1 to 3)	5
Community impact (question 4)	10
Economic and tourism impact (question 5)	10
Creativity and legacy (questions 6 and 7)	10
Quality of supporting evidence	5
Total	**40**

Best New Festival or Event

This award recognizes a new festival or event that fills a gap in its community or region and shows strong promise for the future.

Eligibility

• The festival or event must have completed at least one (1) and not more than three (3) years of operation and be committed to operating in 2027.
• A new festival or event may share a theme with, or be associated with, an existing festival or event, but cannot be part of it.

Questions

1. Introduce your festival or event, its background, and the duration of its programming.
2. Describe its purpose and objectives. What makes it unique and creative?
3. How was the idea conceived, and what gap does it fill in your community, region, or the province?
4. How was the festival or event funded in its first year?
5. Describe the involvement of sponsors, charities, volunteers, schools, or other groups, and how each benefited (if applicable).
6. What was the overall success of the festival or event? Provide measurable results such as attendance, visitor origin, and revenue.

Scoring

Criteria	**Points**
Concept and gap filled (questions 1 to 3)	15
Funding and partnerships (questions 4 and 5)	5
Results (question 6)	15
Quality of supporting evidence	5
Total	**40**

Innovation Award

Awarded separately to a festival or event and to an attraction.

This award recognizes a creative and effective solution that strengthened an organization, reached a broader audience or improved the visitor experience. Examples include new technology that increased sales or improved the guest experience; a new sponsorship activation or fundraising campaign; a public-private partnership; or another entrepreneurial approach.

Eligibility

• The innovation must have been introduced or substantially expanded in 2025 or 2026.

Questions

1. Introduce your festival, event, or attraction and its background, including your overall budget.
2. Describe the new initiative, program, or practice and how it changed your organization.
3. Describe how it was innovative within your community, region, or province.
4. What resources did the innovation require (budget, staff, partners)?
5. How did you measure the results of the innovation, and what were they?
6. Provide any other examples that show the innovation of your festival, event, or attraction.

Scoring

Criteria	**Points**
Originality of the innovation (questions 2 and 3)	15
Measured results (question 5)	15
Resources and context (questions 1, 4, and 6)	5
Quality of supporting evidence	5
Total	**40**

Judging note
Judges will consider innovation relative to the resources available to the applicant. A smaller organization that achieves more with less will be scored accordingly.

Best Promotional Campaign

Awarded separately to festivals or events and to attractions, in two budget categories each: campaign budget under $25,000, and $25,000 or more.

This award recognizes a promotional campaign that delivered measurable results. Campaigns may include social media as one element, but campaigns that are mainly social media should enter Best Social Media Campaign.

Eligibility

- The campaign must have run in 2026.

Questions

1. Describe the campaign: its objectives, target audience and timing.
2. Identify the marketing used (for example, print, radio, television, out-of-home, digital advertising, partnerships, promotional items, or your website).
3. What was the total campaign budget (see How to Apply for what to include)?
4. What were the results? Provide measurable results that link the campaign to attendance, ticket sales, or other outcomes, and examples of customer feedback.
5. Why should this campaign be recognized as the best in Ontario?

Scoring

Criteria	**Points**
Strategy and media mix (questions 1 and 2)	10
Measurable results (question 4)	20
Budget and case for the award (questions 3 and 5)	5
Quality of supporting evidence	5
Total	**40**

Best Social Media Campaign

Awarded separately to festivals or events and to attractions, in two budget categories each: paid social budget under $5,000, and $5,000 or more.

This award recognizes the effective use of social media to build an audience and drive attendance.

Eligibility

• The campaign must have run in 2026.

Questions

1. Which platforms did you use? Include your handle for each.
2. What strategies did you use on each platform (for example, text, photos, video, stories, influencers or user-generated content)?
3. What was your paid social budget (see How to Apply for what to include)?
4. How many people worked on the campaign, and how often did you post?
5. What were the results? Provide measurable results such as reach, engagement, follower growth, link clicks, and ticket sales or attendance.
6. Why should this campaign be recognized as the best in Ontario?

Scoring

Criteria	**Points**
Strategy and effort (questions 1, 2, and 4)	10
Measurable results (question 5)	20
Budget and case for the award (questions 3 and 6)	5
Quality of supporting evidence	5
Total	**40**

Additional supporting materials

• Your social media content calendar, if you used one.

Submission Checklist

Before you submit, confirm that your package includes everything below.

☐ Your organization is a current Attractions Ontario member.
☐ Your festival, event, or attraction operated in 2026 and is committed to operating in 2027, and meets any eligibility rules specific to the award.
☐ One application form is completed for each award entered, with one award selected per form.
☐ Your story is 100 words or less.
☐ Festivals and events: your overall budget size is selected.
☐ Your answers to all questions for the award are 10 pages or less, saved as a single PDF, with a minimum 11-point font and 2.5 cm (1-inch) margins.
☐ Screen captures and any video or audio links are included within the PDF. No video or audio files are attached.
☐ All links are open to view, not password-protected, and will stay live until March 31, 2027.
☐ Festival and event entries: economic impact results are included, from TREIM or an independent study completed within the past two years.
☐ Up to five (5) high-resolution photos are attached as individual files and labelled with your organization, award, and number.
☐ Any additional materials required by the award are included.
☐ The application form, PDF, and photos are combined into one ZIP file.
☐ Your package is emailed to tine@attractionsontario.ca by January 13, 2027 at 5:00 pm.

Contact

Tine Elgsaether, Membership Coordinator, tine@attractionsontario.ca
Attractions Ontario, attractionsontario.ca

Festival, Event and Attraction Awards Program FORM

Please ensure you fill out all of the requested information especially under the category of award you are applying for.
-**Only AO members are eligible** to enter for the awards and all applicants must pay the entry fee before their application is considered by judges.

Not a member yet? Join here! Your first yearly membership fee acts as a credit towards our other marketing programs, including our Awards.

All festival and event applicants must state their overall festival or event budget:

For Festivals and Events

Small	Medium	Large
$100,000 or less	$100,001 to $500,000	$500,001 or more

Budget size is used to highlight the top five in each size within the Top 50. For Best Festival or Event Series and Best New Festival or Event, where entries allow, judges may recognize winners by budget size.

For Attractions

For the Attractions awards, the size is categorized by annual visitation numbers as follows:

Small	Medium	Large
50,000 or less	50,001 to 199,999	200,000 or more

Entry Fee
The entry fee is based on the budget size stated above. For all awards except for the Top 50 award, the fees are as follows:

Small	Medium	Large
$50	$100	$150

The application must be in before the submission deadline January 13, 2027 at 5:00 pm, otherwise it will not be included.

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Festival Event and Attraction Awards Submission Category

Select One Award Category Per Entry Form Submission

For Festivals and Events

Overall Budget Category for Festivals and Events

- ◯ $100,000 or less
- ◯ $100,001 to $500,000
- ◯ $500,001 or more

Awards Based on Budget Categories (indicate which category you are submitting for):

- ◯ Top 10 Canada Day Celebrations
- ◯ Top 10 Santa Claus Parades
- ◯ Top 10 Christmas Markets
- ◯ Top 10 Halloween Events
- ◯ Best Festival or Event Series
- ◯ Best New Festival or Event
- ◯ Innovation Campaign
- ◯ Best Promotional Campaign (Campaign budget under $25,000)
- ◯ Best Promotional Campaign (Campaign budget $25,000 or more)
- ◯ Best Social Media Campaign (Paid social budget under $5,000)
- ◯ Best Social Media Campaign (Paid social budget $5,000 or more)

For Attractions

Attraction awards

- ◯ Innovation Award
- ◯ Best Promotional Campaign (under $25,000 budget)
- ◯ Best Promotional Campaign (budget of $25,000 or more)
- ◯ Best Social Media Campaign (paid social budget under $5,000)
- ◯ Best Social Media Campaign (Paid social budget $5,000 or more)

APPLICANT INFORMATION (REQUIRED)

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Name

First Name Last Name

Organization Name:

Festival or Event:

Address

Street Address

Street Address Line 2

City State / Province

Postal / Zip Code

Phone Number

Area Code Phone Number

Email

example@example.com

FESTIVAL EVENT AND ATTRACTION AWARDS INFO

Festival/Event Name:

Festival/event Location:

Festival/Event Website:

Is this an annual event?

- YES
- NO

How long has the event been operating?

Overall Budget Category for Attractions

- 50,000 or less
- 50,001 to 199,999
- 200,000 or more

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What is your RTO?

Event Duration:

○ 1 Day ○ 2-3 Days ○ 3 Days ○ 4+ Days

Briefly tell us the story of your Festival or Event (Judges are probably not from your area, and would benefit from some history)

In 100 words or less, give us an overview of your event. This may be used on our website and potentially other promotional materials.

For more info contact: Tine Elgsaether at tine@attractionsontario.ca,
P.O Box 48003, 3001A Novar Rd. Mississauga, ON L5A 1W0. Web: attractionsontario.ca

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