IECA Laurel Awards

Innovation in Admissions Award

College/University · Application Guide

About this award

The Innovation in Admissions Award recognizes colleges and universities (or programs, departments, and schools within colleges and universities) reimagining admissions to be more transparent, student-friendly, and better at matching the right students to the right educational options. It celebrates practices others in the field can learn from.

Eligibility & how to enter

This award is open to organizations that work with IECA members, in the United States and internationally. Entries are submitted by the organization (self-application) and supported by one or more letters of recommendation from IECA member consultants. There is no fee to apply, and the full scoring rubric is published below detailing how your entry will be evaluated.

Key dates

- **Applications open:** November 2, 2026
- **Applications close:** January 31, 2027
- **Winners selected:** February 2027
- **Winners recognized:** IECA Annual Conference, May 2027
- **Withdrawal of any individual example:** by March 1, 2027

What you'll need to prepare

- A clear description of your admissions innovation and the problem it solves
- Evidence of how it improves transparency, student experience, and fit
- Outcome data over time from more than one source
- IEC and/or applicant feedback
- One or more IEC letters of recommendation (here is a template)

Your application, step by step

1. **Innovation & problem (up to 600 words).** Describe the admissions innovation and the problem it addresses.
2. **Transparency, friendliness & fit (up to 500 words).** How does it improve clarity, the applicant experience, and matching students to the right options?
3. **Evidence & outcomes (up to 500 words).** Share results over time, ideally from multiple sources.
4. **IEC/applicant feedback (up to 300 words, optional).** Summarize what IECs and applicants say.

5. **Attach evidence.** Upload up to five supporting files or provide links, including to an IECA member letter of support.

Protecting privacy: anonymization & consent

Winners are named and celebrated publicly, but students and families are always kept anonymous and personally identifiable information is not included.

How your entry is scored

Every entry is screened for eligibility and then scored by the IECA Board of Directors against the rubric below. Three board members score each entry independently on a 1–5 scale; scores are calibrated and one winner is selected per award at the board's February meeting. Conflict-of-interest recusals apply, and IECA may choose not to grant an award if no entry meets the bar.

Scoring rubric — Innovation in Admissions Award

Criterion (weight)	Score	What this level looks like
Distinctiveness / innovation 35%	**5**	A genuinely novel, well-conceived practice that meaningfully departs from convention and could set a sector example.
	4	A clearly innovative practice that goes beyond standard approaches.
	3	A useful improvement with some novelty.
	2	A minor tweak to conventional practice.
	1	Standard practice presented as innovation.
Transparency & student-friendliness 20%	**5**	The practice markedly improves clarity, the applicant experience, and the match between students and the right educational options, with evidence students find the process more transparent and humane.
	4	Clear gains in transparency, student experience, and student–option fit.
	3	Some improvement to transparency or friendliness.
	2	Marginal effect on the applicant experience.
	1	No improvement, or it reduces clarity.
Evidence & outcomes 20%	**5**	Robust data over time from multiple sources substantiate the results.
	4	Solid evidence from more than one source.
	3	Some supporting data, early or partial.
	2	Thin, mostly anecdotal evidence.
	1	No supporting evidence.
IEC & applicant feedback 20%	**5**	Enthusiastic, specific feedback from IECs and applicants confirming the benefit.
	4	Clear, positive feedback from IECs and/or applicants.
	3	General positive feedback.
	2	Minimal feedback.
	1	No feedback provided.
Story & profile-raising potential 5%	**5**	A forward-looking, quotable story that positions the institution and IECA as leaders.
	4	A compelling story with clear PR value.
	3	A usable story that needs shaping.
	2	Limited appeal.
	1	No compelling narrative.

Score scale: 5 = exceptional / national model; 4 = strong; 3 = solid, meets the bar; 2 = developing; 1 = does not yet meet the bar. Weighted total = sum of (criterion score × weight), out of 5.

Tips for a strong entry

- Lead with evidence, not adjectives — specific examples and data beat general claims.
- Show, don't tell: concrete stories and structures score higher than mission statements.
- Anonymize carefully and secure consent early; incomplete or unconsented entries are not considered.
- Mind the word limits, and use your IEC letter(s) to add firsthand, credible endorsement.

Questions? Contact info@IECAonline.com. Ready to apply? Complete your entry online before January 31, 2027.