



2027 NOMINATION GUIDE

Recognition Begins with a Nomination

You've taken the first step by choosing to recognize someone who makes a difference. Thank you for helping us celebrate excellence in aging services. Every nomination shines a light on the people and programs that enrich the lives of older adults across Minnesota.

This guide provides the information you'll need to prepare and submit a strong nomination, including award descriptions, eligibility requirements, selection criteria, required supporting materials, and helpful writing tips.

When you're ready to begin, visit <https://www.leadingagemn.org/get-involved/stars-among-us/> and click "Nominate."

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before starting your nomination, we recommend gathering the following information and materials:

- **Award category.** Review the award descriptions and eligibility requirements to determine which category best fits your nominee or program.
- **Nominee information.** Name, title (if applicable), organization, and contact information.
- **Specific stories and examples.** Think about one or two memorable examples that demonstrate why this individual or program deserves recognition.
- **Supporting evidence.** Gather examples, outcomes, quotes, or measurable results that demonstrate the award criteria.
- **Letters of support.** Identify the people who will write the required support letters and allow enough time for them to do so. They should be written by people other than the person submitting the nomination.
- **Photo (optional).** A high-quality photo of the nominee or program may be submitted and may be used if the nomination is selected.

- **Time to complete the nomination.** Plan approximately 30–60 minutes to complete the nomination once you have gathered your information.

Tip: We recommend drafting your narrative responses in a separate document before completing the online nomination form. This allows you to save your work, collaborate with others if needed, and proofread before submitting.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT AWARD

Not sure which award best fits your nominee? Use the guide below to identify the most appropriate category before you begin writing.

If you're recognizing...

An exceptional caregiver or support person
A new employee
A volunteer
A board member or trustee
An inspiring older adult
A leader at any level
An innovative program or initiative

Consider...

Caregiver of the Year
Rising Star
Volunteer of the Year
Board Trustee of the Year
Spirit of Aging
Outstanding Leadership
Excellence in Practice

INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

CAREGIVER OF THE YEAR

LeadingAge Minnesota's Highest Honor

Recognizes direct and support service caregivers who go beyond expectations to greatly enhance the quality of life for seniors and their communities.

Caregiver awards are given at the state level and for each LeadingAge MN district. Each caregiver award recipient receives a monetary gift from the Gayle Kvenvold Commitment to Caregivers Fund of the LeadingAge Minnesota Foundation.

Eligibility

Any employee who provides direct care or serves in a role that supports resident care. Caregiver is defined broadly: universal/blended worker, nursing assistant, nurse, personal attendant, care manager, resident assistant, home health aide, health and wellness aide, social worker, activities assistant, rehabilitation/physical therapy, spiritual care, dietary/culinary services, laundry/housekeeping, environmental services, activity management.

Award Criteria

The committee evaluates nominations based on:

- Demonstrates exceptional commitment to those entrusted to their care and/or operational functions of the organization that support direct caregivers.
- Specific actions that go above and beyond normal care delivery to enhance and enrich the quality of life and/or living conditions of aging persons.
- One or more stories that illustrate this person's exceptional caregiving.

Required Supporting Materials

- One supporting letter from the site manager.
- One or more additional letters of support from team members, residents, families, or community members. (Minimum one; up to three)

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Recognizes a volunteer or volunteer group whose commitment and dedication enhance the quality of life for seniors and their communities.

Volunteer awards are given at the state level and for each LeadingAge MN district.

Eligibility

Any person or group who has volunteered at a member provider organization during the nomination year.

Award Criteria

The committee evaluates nominations based on:

- Exceptional commitment to older adults through volunteer service at a member community.
- Specific actions that go above and beyond the volunteer activity to enhance and enrich the quality of life and/or living conditions of aging persons.
- One or more stories that illustrate this person's/group's exceptional volunteerism.

Required Supporting Materials

- One supporting letter from the site leader.
- One or more additional letters of support from team members, residents, families, or community members. (Minimum one; up to three)

RISING STAR

Recognizes the commitment, contributions, and impact of a person in their first three years at their organization/community.

Eligibility

Person in any role or level in their first three years at a member organization/current work location.

Award Criteria

The committee evaluates nominations based on:

- Exemplary commitment and passion for their work serving older adults and/or supporting those who do.
- How this person has made a significant impact on the organization and/or its residents/clients.
- One or more stories that explain how/why this person is a rising star in their organization and the field of aging services. Explain the unique characteristics of this person that demonstrate why they are being nominated over others.

Required Supporting Materials

- One supporting letter from the nominee's supervisor, site leader, or a board member.
- One or more additional letters of support from team members, residents, families, or community members. (Minimum one; up to three)

OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP

Recognizes a person whose leadership is demonstrated through vision, servanthood, mentoring others, and commitment to older adults.

Eligibility

Regardless of title, role, or tenure, the leadership award is open to people in any service setting, at any level of the organization.

Award Criteria

The committee evaluates nominations based on:

- Leadership expressed through vision, integrity, and courage to improve the lives of older adults.
- Actions that demonstrate characteristics of a strong mentor and motivator for others.
- One or more stories that illustrate this person's exceptional leadership in action.

Required Supporting Materials

- One supporting letter from the nominee's supervisor, site leader, or a board member.
- One or more additional letters of support from team members, residents, families, or community members. (Minimum one; up to three)

BOARD TRUSTEE OF THE YEAR

Recognizes a board member of a provider organization whose service, commitment, and actions have supported the organization in its mission and service to older adults.

Eligibility

Any board member serving a LeadingAge Minnesota member organization during the nomination year.

Award Criteria

The committee evaluates nominations based on:

- Specific evidence of leadership in helping achieve the organization's goals and objectives during their board service.
- Exceptional commitment and actions to enhance and enrich the lives of aging persons served by the organization.
- One or more stories that illustrate this person's commitment to good governance.

Required Supporting Materials

- One supporting letter from the organization's board chair, board member, or site leader.
- One or more additional letters of support from other board members, team members, residents, families, or community members. (Minimum one; up to three)

SPIRIT OF AGING

Celebrates an older adult who embodies vibrant aging.

Eligibility

Any resident, tenant, client, or participant of a LeadingAge Minnesota member community.

Award Criteria

The committee evaluates nominations based on:

- Engagement in their community
- Making a positive difference in the lives of others.
- One or more stories that illustrate this person's spirit of aging.

Required Supporting Materials

- One supporting letter from the site leader.
- One or more additional letters of support from team members, residents, families, or community members. (Minimum one; up to three)

ORGANIZATIONAL AWARDS

EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

The Excellence in Practice Awards recognize outstanding programs, practices, and initiatives that improve quality, strengthen organizations and enhance the lives of older adults. They serve as a platform for recognizing and sharing promising programs and initiatives with other LeadingAge Minnesota members to help advance and transform the way we serve older adults.

Eligibility

These awards are available to any provider organization and are intended to be self-nominated in any of the categories listed below. An organization may submit multiple nominations.

Required Supporting Materials

- **Executive Summary** of the program/initiative, why it was developed, specific purpose and goals, and financial implications for development, implementation, and ongoing operations.
- **Evaluation** – how you will measure or have measured the progress, impact, or success of this initiative.
- **Replicability** – how this initiative can be replicated or adapted by other partners.
- **Partners** – list any community or vendor partners, and how that organization was involved in the initiative. (optional)

SHARING YOUR SUCCESS

Award recipients are expected to share their winning programs during a 20-minute educational session at the 2027 Institute & Expo. Presentations should focus on lessons learned and practical ideas that other organizations can adapt or replicate.

CATEGORIES

Select the category that best fits your program or initiative.

INNOVATION

The committee evaluates nominations based on:

- A new or unique approach to a challenge or opportunity
- Clear purpose and measurable outcomes
- Creative thinking that advances aging services
- Potential for replication by other organizations

QUALITY OF LIFE

The committee evaluates nominations based on:

- Programs or practices that improve resident or client well-being
- Demonstrated positive outcomes and impact
- Meaningful enhancement of daily life and engagement
- Ideas that other organizations can learn from and adopt

RESIDENT SAFETY

The committee evaluates nominations based on:

- Effective strategies that improve or ensure resident safety
- Evidence of measurable results
- Thoughtful implementation and evaluation
- Practical approaches that can be replicated elsewhere

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The committee evaluates nominations based on:

- Successful efforts to recruit, retain, or engage staff
- Positive impact on workplace culture
- Measurable outcomes related to workforce goals
- Strategies that could benefit other providers

OPERATIONS

The committee evaluates nominations based on:

- Process improvements that solve a meaningful challenge
- Increased efficiency, effectiveness, or organizational performance
- Clear outcomes and demonstrated results
- Practical ideas that can be adapted by other organizations

Hints & Tips for Writing a Strong Award Nomination

The following suggestions come from members of the LeadingAge Minnesota Awards & Recognition Committee, who review nominations and select award recipients each year.

- **Tell stories, not just accomplishments.** The selection committee doesn't know your nominee. Help us understand who they are by sharing meaningful stories and specific examples of their impact.
- **Show, don't just tell.** Avoid general statements like "they always go above and beyond." Instead, describe what they did, why it mattered, and the difference it made.
- **Explain what makes your nominee stand out.** Why is this person or program deserving of recognition? What makes them exceptional?
- **Include multiple perspectives.** Quotes or stories from residents, families, coworkers, volunteers, or community members help bring your nominee's impact to life.
- **Photos are encouraged.** A great photo helps us put a face with the story and may be used if your nominee is selected.
- **Make support letters meaningful.** Letters should be written by people other than the nominator and should provide additional stories, examples, or perspectives—not simply repeat the nomination narrative.
- **Answer each question completely.** Keep your responses focused and concise while fully addressing what the question is asking.
- **Demonstrate the award criteria.** Throughout your nomination, provide clear examples and evidence that show how your nominee meets the award's specific criteria.

And finally,

Think about one story the selection committee will remember. The strongest nominations often include one memorable example that captures why this person or program deserves recognition.

NOMINATION CHECKLIST

Before submitting, make sure you have:

- ☐ Confirmed eligibility
- ☐ Completed all narrative questions
- ☐ Attached the required support letters
- ☐ Included examples and outcomes
- ☐ Submitted by the deadline

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can I nominate more than one person? Yes! You and your organization may submit as many nominations as you like.

Can someone be nominated multiple years? Yes.

Why do I have to create a separate account before I can submit a nomination? Award nominations are submitted through a separate application portal, so you'll need to create a free account the first time you log in.

Who reviews nominations? The LeadingAge Minnesota Awards & Recognition Work Group, populated by individuals working in member organizations.

When and how are recipients notified? Award recipients are selected in mid-November. To preserve the surprise, LeadingAge Minnesota notifies the nominator first. The nominator is then responsible for informing the award recipient. Nominators of non-winning nominations are notified via email.

What happens if my nominee isn't selected? The nominator will receive an email notification accompanied by a digital certificate of recognition that may be printed and presented to the nominee.

When's the deadline? All nominations must be submitted online by midnight on Monday, Sept. 28, 2026.

Who do I contact if I have more questions? Awards@LeadingAgeMN.org.

Thank you for taking the time to recognize excellence in aging services. Every nomination celebrates someone who is making a difference.