

In this Edition:

- How to Write a Winning Awards of Excellence Nomination: An Insider's Guide

Page 1

- Q&A: CSSEA's E-Learning Hub

Page 3

- CSSEA at the Bargaining Table

Page 4

HOW TO WRITE A WINNING AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE NOMINATION: AN INSIDER'S GUIDE

By Doris Sun



For those who have attended one of CSSEA's Community Social Services Awards of Excellence, you would have experienced the emotional and uplifting stories of those working in community social services. Incredible work is routinely being carried out in our sector, and after what has been an especially trying two years, many of you may be thinking it's time to show your appreciation for someone who is an extraordinary representation of the sector. For those who have never written a nomination and don't know where to start in crafting an eye-catching submission, read on.

Now into its seventh year, the Awards of Excellence has seen hundreds of nominations flow through, with some striking a magical balance of weaving an individual's accomplishments with masterful storytelling; the nominations that lack clarity, detail and a strong narrative, however, inevitably fade into the background. CSSEA's judges have spent hours over the years poring through nominations and have sharpened their definition of what it takes to craft an award-winning nomination. For the first time, we tap the expertise of both our member shortlisting committee and external judges to gather their insights on how nominators can make their submissions sparkle.

Examples Examples Examples- Those reviewing your submissions want to get to know your nominee. And while reading a list of autobiographical achievements is helpful, judges are usually looking for how those achievements make a broader organizational impact. "As judges, we want to recognize the efforts and accomplishments but do not have the same experiences witnessing your nominee," says Christian Codrington, judge and Principal Consultant at Forum HR. "It would be most helpful to highlight with specific outcomes and examples, in addition to the heartfelt narrative, their accomplishments in each of the five criteria we use." That means judges are depending on nominators to both introduce them to the individual, as well as explain how they leveraged their role to excel on the job. "Provide compelling examples that paint a clear and complete story

STAY IN TOUCH

We welcome all suggestions and comments. Feel free to send your feedback to Doris Sun, Director of Communications, at: dsun@cssea.bc.ca.

that convince each judge how amazing the nominee is and why they deserve to win,” adds Tammy Khanna, Executive Director of Independent Living Housing Society and longtime member of the shortlisting panel. In short, simply lavishing praise on a nominee without providing objective context is a lost opportunity, as judges are unable to use subjective comments as a criteria for evaluation. “There have been nominations received where the nominator knows so much about the person they put forward that they praise the nominee and may overlook that the committee doesn’t have the same examples to draw similar conclusions,” says Christian. “Please err on more specifics.”

Weave a story- Related to the tip above, an effective way to provide compelling examples of nominees is to relay stories that demonstrate their excellence. As Shari Mahar, Executive Director at Community Integration Services Society and member of the shortlisting panel says, “Submissions that were told like a simple story enabled me to fully understand the individual’s contributions and the impact on the people who benefit from that person’s work. In amongst the submissions you can see those shining stars in the stories.” It is important to note that individuals reviewing awards nominations, particularly those involved in the shortlisting process, spend hours reading through dozens of nominations and those that stand out often provide a narrative. “Write the nomination in a way that tells the whole beautiful story of the nominee’s impact on the organization and the people supported,” suggests Tammy.

Honour the word limit- While nominators may feel inclined to sing the praises of their nominee through pages of examples and poetic prose, it is important to keep in mind that both shortlisting panelists and judges are observing the 500-word limit for each question. In recent years, CSSEA implemented a character count limit in its online nomination form, as many nominations went substantially long, making difficult to fairly evaluate those nominations against the ones that adhered to word count limits. Simply put, “Writers need to be concise, brief and to the point,” says Doug Campbell, Consultant and member of the external judging panel. “Make the submission easy to read by using lots of white space. Nothing is more difficult to read than a 20 to 30 line paragraph.” So, on top of brevity and the need to honour the word limit, nominators are well advised to organize their thoughts into succinct, digestible paragraphs.

The basics also matter - This almost goes without saying but it is crucially important to put an organization’s best face forward, and that includes making sure the nomination is well written and grammatically clean. Randi Mjolsness, retired Assistant Deputy Minister and member of the external judging panel, recommends that individuals “read the nomination form in its entirety and outline what you will use in each category to prevent repetition, checking off those examples and attributes that you have already written about or contributed.” All too often, nominators repeat examples, using up word count that could otherwise support other examples and frustrating judges who are looking for a varied mix of accomplishments to consider. Randi suggests that nominators detach themselves from their applications and assume they are the decision maker when editing their application. “Get a new set of eyes to edit and amend the application after you have completed your version and prior to submission,” she says. The more technically critical a nominator can be, the stronger a nomination will read.

Overall, we want above and beyond - While the first question in the Awards of Excellence nomination form asks for introductory biographical information, the rest of it specifically seeks to ascertain why and how a candidate can be seen as excellent. This means judges are usually looking for evidence on how an individual performs over and above the duties of their job descriptions. “Support any comments with evidence that clearly highlights differentiators from what should be regular good performance,” says Doug. Members of the shortlisting panel all work in the community social services sector so are keenly aware of the responsibilities of different jobs and understand when a nominee is described as simply doing their job well versus taking it to the next level. In order to maximize your nominee’s chances of moving past the shortlisting phase, it is strongly recommended that nominators focus on the “above and beyond.” As Tammy so compellingly suggests, “I want to be overwhelmed by the nominee’s contributions to their organization and honestly, jealous they don’t work for mine!”

Nominations are now being accepted at awards.cssea.bc.ca until April 22. We encourage everyone who knows an outstanding member of the community social services sector to consider submitting a nomination and wish all those who have been nominated the best of luck. CSSEA will be presenting the awards with event sponsor TELUS in Vancouver at the Marriott Pinnacle Hotel on October 26.



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CSSEA'S E-LEARNING HUB: YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED



It's now been four months since CSSEA first launched its new leadership and labour relations e-learning hub. In that time, we have registered over 100 learners in a mix of both quarterly and annual subscriptions. As we get set to launch our second LEAD cohort, we've compiled some of the most commonly asked questions about this new web-based learning tool.

Q – How do we register on the learning hub and/or join a LEAD cohort?

A – To register individuals on the learning hub, simply visit <https://cssea.myleadershiphub.com/membership/cssea-membership/>. To register 5 or more people and receive the group discount, please email cssea@myleadershiphub.com. Once you register, email cssea@myleadershiphub.com to indicate if you'd like to join the next LEAD cohort and you will be added to the next group.

Q – When does the e-learning hub next LEAD cohort start?

A – The next cohort starts April 1. Members of the learning hub can join the group anytime in the first two weeks of April as the kick-off call will be held April 13.

Q- What's a cohort anyway?

A – A unique aspect of the the learning hub includes the option to participate in collaborative learning, meaning registrants join a cohort of other students in a 6-month guided learning process that will include a group coaching call and assigned courses each month. Some students engage with content better in interactive settings and the cohort model encourages that. Those who prefer independent learning are always welcome to complete any of the courses at their own desired pace.

Q- What can participants of the second cohort expect?

A – Each month participants are assigned one or two courses to complete at their own pace. The course material takes 2-4 hours to complete each month. Additionally, there is a group coaching call each month that participants are encouraged to attend. These calls include a discussion on various leadership topics, the course material that was covered that month and time for open questions. There is also a private discussion forum where cohort participants can chat with each other and their coach about any topics.

Q – I want to register multiple people from my agency. Can we all share one login?

A – The e-learning hub is designed to be used by single individuals. One of the key features in measuring your progress is to keep an eye on your personal dashboard, which tracks the progress of each course and provides personalized certificates of completion for each course that is completed.

Membership Comings and Goings

CSSEA is pleased to welcome the following agencies into its membership:
 First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo
 Island Crisis Care.

Also, Cranbrook Society for Community Living and Creston and District Society for Community Living have merged and is now called NEXUS Community Support Society.

The John Howard Society of Pacific Region is now Connective Support Society.

CSSEA AT THE BARGAINING TABLE

Your CSSEA Bargaining Team is hard at work negotiating amendments to our three sectoral collective agreements. We look forward to productive and collaborative discussions with the Community Social Services Bargaining Association and will keep members apprised of important updates via e-mail as they arise.



Many thanks to everyone on the Bargaining Team who are volunteering their time and taking on heavier workloads to contribute to the bargaining process. The membership thanks you!

Indigenous Services

Melanie Hudson, Island Metis Family and Community Services
Adam Calvert, Metis Family Services

General Services

Ann Kutcher, Westcoast Family Centre Society
Sanjeev Nand, Langley Community Services Society
Judy Valsonis, Touchstone Family Association

Community Living Services

Fernando Coelho, posAbilities Association of British Columbia
Tammy Khanna, Independent Living Housing Society of Greater Victoria
Tanya Sather, Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion (BACI)
Anita Sihota - Delta Community Living (alternate)
Dawn Hein - Mission Association for Community Living (alternate)