

RSA

Accredited

**IMPROVING YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING
HOW TO ENTER ENVIRONMENT AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AWARD SCHEMES**

A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE



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INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to assist those, who plan to enter an environment or sustainable development award scheme. It is written with the aim of maximising the chances of winning an award and is based on the experience of those, who have sponsored, organised, entered, judged and won awards.

Unless a large number of award entries have been examined and judged it is difficult to appreciate the information, which will appeal to and help a juror to reach a favourable conclusion. The most frequent errors made in entries to awards are;

Providing too much information, particularly largely irrelevant supporting documents, so obscuring the important information;

Failing to describe the circumstances which existed at the time when the activity, product or process, which is the subject of the entry, was developed so obscuring the effect and benefits of the entry;

Providing descriptive statements of uncertain validity rather than clear verifiable information based on quantitative data about the entry;

Failing to understand the aims of an award and so not matching the entry details to the judging criteria;

Failing to indicate how the entry is wholly innovative or is an extension of previous published work to a new area of business activity, which may also be innovative and important;

Failing to show whether the entry is an idea yet to be tested, is a piece of research or development, has reached the market place and is commercially successful, is educational, or has some other status;

Failing to mention that the entry organisation has been sanctioned or fined for regulatory or legal lapses and that this was the stimulus, which, caused the organisation to change its practices, and led to the entry activity.

Failing to indicate who were the prime movers behind the entry, and whether it has the full support of senior staff;

Failing to indicate the life expectancy of the entry and whether further development is planned to keep the initiative effective in future.

These and other deficiencies will detract from an entry and reduce the chances of success. On many occasions where further investigation has been carried out on an initially promising entry many of the deficiencies have been found to be avoidable by more thorough preparation of the material, including summary performance records, on the entry form.

The present Guide should be supplemented by reference to the RSA Guide to Good Practice: Organising and Sponsoring Environment and Sustainable Development Awards which sets out the elements of good practice for the sponsorship and organisation of environment and sustainable development awards.

The key points in this Guide have been distilled from consideration of the arrangements, and experiences gained, from a large number of award schemes. It has been developed and edited by many people with first hand knowledge of schemes who have been sponsors, organisers and entrants themselves. It has also had input from those wishing to stimulate and achieve higher standards of environmental performance and sustainable development.





UNDERSTANDING AWARD SCHEMES

The first important step is to obtain as many details as possible of the award scheme to be entered. Understand the award scheme before you enter.

To do this you need to know;

- The aims of the scheme;
- The criteria and method of judging;
- The experience and interests of the jurors;
- Limitations on entry (check a. eligibility of your organisation; b. any geographical requirements and; c. restrictions on previous winners or entrants of this or other award schemes);
- The method and dates of entry;
- The type and nature of information about your entry sought by the judges;
- The benefits of entering; and
- Details of previous winners to gain a better appreciation of what the judges are seeking.

For a well managed scheme these pieces of information should be readily available. If they are not, do not hesitate to contact the organisers to obtain a full understanding of the scheme.

At this stage, and with full understanding of the award, decide whether your entry stands a good chance of winning and whether the not inconsiderable effort of preparing a worthwhile entry will be justified if you win.



STATEMENT OF AIMS

The aims of award schemes are not always clearly stated. For instance an award may be given for a product which contributes to environmental improvement or an activity which advances the aims of sustainable development. Such broad-based aims allow for a very wide range of entries and much scope for judges to exercise their own views on the environment and sustainable development in determining the winners. It is much more difficult to judge whether it is worth entering and how

to prepare the entry in these cases than where the aims of the award are much more specific.

At the other extreme are awards for very specific contributions such as the best new village pond or for a new building design, which makes a major contribution to saving energy.

These examples emphasise the importance, at the outset, of obtaining the clearest statement of aims of the scheme to be entered so that the entry can be prepared very specifically to meet the entry requirements:



STATUS BEFORE ACTIVITY BEGAN

In order to give a clear impression of the context and consequences within which the entry activity was set it is important to state concisely, and as far as possible with supporting quantitative records, the circumstances before the activity began.

Thus set out;

- The attitudes and responsibilities of staff involved to the environment and sustainable development issues.
- The amounts of resources (water, energy, paper) used and the types and amounts of waste generated.
- The commercial viability of the activity if appropriate.
- The attitude and response of customers, or of persons to whom a service is being provided.
- Any relevant legislation and regulatory requirements.
- A brief SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the pre-development situation.

By setting out the starting point for any development it is much easier, subsequently to describe the effects of the development, using the same sets of headings.



ENTRY ACTIVITY

Describe the entry activity in concise clear and so far as possible non-technical language. Remember the judges may not be well versed in your special area of expertise. The judges will need to be guided carefully through the innovation and the changes to practice you have made. Try to avoid providing this information as voluminous technical supporting documents as they may not be read.

The judges want a short explanation of your activity but one, which stands alone, and can be understood by people with some general scientific, managerial or technical experience.

It is usually helpful to explain what stimulated the new development- was it staff enthusiasm, was it commercial or regulatory pressure, or did some research produce the new ideas? This sort of detail in an entry helps to bring the activity to life and to convey a sense of interest. Also it is indicative of how the organisation may respond in future to change and the likelihood that the change will lead to further innovation and evolution.



OTHER KNOWN SIMILAR ACTIVITIES

The entry should indicate the extent to which the activity is original or is the application of some existing activity to a new field. It is supportive to show that the entrant is well aware of existing good practice and can support a claim that what has been entered is an advance on previous practice. Briefly presenting examples of what has been done before or in other fields helps to indicate how the entry activity has taken practice forward.

Ignorance, or professed ignorance, of existing practice standards will not help an entry. Nor will ignoring this aspect on the entry form help the cause of the entry.

Judgement as to how far an entry has advanced the cause of the environment or sustainable development is generally an important element in assessing the merit of an entry.



ACCREDITATION AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

On occasion entrants are asked to indicate whether they or their organisation has already achieved regulatory compliance or holds relevant accreditation standards.

Appropriate BS, ISO, European or International accreditation recognition is sometimes, but not always, a necessary requirement for an entry to be acceptable. Whether or not required for entry, such accreditation, if held, should be mentioned in the entry form and is useful supporting indication of the quality of an entry.

It has to be acknowledged that achieving an accredited or regulatory standard is the starting standard for a field of activity and awards are seeking to recognise the entry that goes beyond such standards. Development beyond current accreditation and regulatory standards provides the evolutionary stimulus for the next upward revision of standards.

Some award schemes will wish to know if an entrant has been subject to any sanctions for not meeting regulatory standards. It is wise, if an entrant has any history of sanctions, such as successful insurance claims made or fines imposed in court, to briefly summarise these events and to indicate why they should be ignored or how they should be considered by the judges. Attempts to hide such information will usually not be successful and will then lead to mistrust of other information in the entry to the dis-benefit of the entrant.



IMPACT OF ENTRY INNOVATION

The effects of the entry innovation should be summarised in quantitative terms wherever possible. The effects on staff, use of resources and production of waste, customers and other stakeholders, and commercial viability should all be summarised. By using the same subject headings as were used to describe the original context for the development the impact of the change is more clearly demonstrated.

For example the introduction of some new technology should be demonstrated to have the effect on resource use, waste reduction or working conditions and staff efficiency claimed for it. Records collected before and during the introduction of the new technology should be presented to show the impact. Similarly the effect of an information campaign to make people aware of what they can do to reduce resource use and waste, or to encourage them to take a greater interest in their local ecology should be supported by test of recipient awareness before and during the campaign. It should be accompanied by suitable measures of the use of resources and of awareness. Many times organisations have spent time and money on such campaigns with no associated measure of the impact. Just to run such a campaign does not mean that it was effective or justified the effort.

General qualitative statements which do not give specific impacts of the entry innovation and which are not supported by data collected over the period of the introduction and use of the innovation are unlikely to impress the judges.

It is worth using endorsements by third parties to support an entry. These can be particularly valuable if they have been unsolicited and provide clear details of the impact on the third party's activities.



OPPORTUNITY FOR ADOPTION BY OTHERS

An important aspect of all award entries is whether there will be an effect, not just on those directly involved, but on third parties. Clearly some innovations such as the creation of some new ecological facility or the clean up of a particular site is unlikely to have an effect beyond those involved directly or those who visit the site.

Other developments, such a particular novel industrial process or piece of technology, may well have applications in other commercial activities. Whilst an award may be justified for the entry innovation in its specific field of activity it is also valuable as an inspiration to others. Where an entrant can see the opportunity for wider application this should be spelt out in the entry. Only examples need be mentioned but this does show the likely wider impact of the development and the entrants appreciation of what may be achieved in due course.



FUTURE COMMITMENT AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Where there is the intention to take the development forward this should be mentioned in the entry. The way in which further innovation or activity is planned shows a continuing commitment to improvement. It is recognised that for reasons of commercial secrecy it may not always be possible to give full details but sufficient should be revealed to make clear to judges that the entry does not represent the end of the story.



CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

It is always essential to provide clear contact information for the entry. This should be someone who was involved in preparing the entry and who knows where the answers to further questions can be easily and quickly obtained. A person who knows the organisation well, and who is sufficiently responsible to obtain full and rapid responses to supplementary requests for information and clarification, is the ideal contact to put on the entry.

On occasion the judges may wish to pay a visit to the entrant's premises to gain first hand experience and to understand the detail of the entry activity. Visits by judges can be very illuminating for judges but also offer an excellent opportunity to exhibit the entrant's knowledge, skills and experience.

Judges visits have been known to both promote and destroy entrant's chances of winning. Such visits need to be carefully planned and managed by the hosts. Make sure that all premises are fit for inspection and that any staff, likely to come in contact with the judges, are suitably and fully briefed. Also make sure that if the judges seek more information on the spot it can be supplied or, less desirably, sent later.



PROMOTION TO DATE

It is beneficial to indicate in the entry the extent it has received recognition and promotion up to the time of entry. Whilst a previous award for the entry may militate against another award this is not always the case. Award schemes have different aims and one entry may meet the aims of several different award schemes.

However an entry must be designed for each particular scheme and the same entry to several awards is not a good idea. Some judges are involved with more than one scheme. If they see the same entry for more than one scheme, with no special features for the particular award, they may judge it as not innovative on the second or subsequent occasion.

It pays to be clear about the status of the entry and to indicate whether it has already received accolades and why re-entry to another scheme is justified..



PROMOTION TO DATE

The following entry forms are taken from RSA Accredited Award Schemes and are good examples of the suggestions made above.

- Green Apple Awards
- VIBES
- Rushlight
- Biffawards
- Edie Awards
- Sustainable City Awards
- Green Awards
- BCE Awards
- Living Wetlands Award
- Green Business Awards
- Northwest Business Awards for the Environment



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