



KTIA

KENTUCKY
TRAVEL INDUSTRY
ASSOCIATION



2026

TRAVERSE AWARDS

FOR EXCELLENCE IN
KENTUCKY TOURISM

APPLICATION

Celebrating the Kentucky Tourism Industry's creativity, innovation, forward-thinking & leadership

Each year, the Kentucky Travel Industry Association invites members to enter the Traverse Awards for Excellence in Kentucky Tourism competition, where tourism businesses and organizations are honored and recognized for creative accomplishment, innovation and effectiveness in marketing and destination enhancement.

For recipients, the awards represent a way for hard working individuals and teams to receive the recognition they deserve; and for the communities in which recipients are located to better understand and appreciate the work of the travel and tourism industry and the professionals who comprise it.

IMPORTANT DATES

FIRST SUBMISSION DEADLINE

Wednesday, August 5, 2026

FINAL SUBMISSION DATE (LATE FEE INCURRED)

Wednesday, August 12, 2026 by 5:00 p.m. EST

KEY INFORMATION

ELIGIBILITY

The Kentucky Travel Industry Association invites members to participate in the 2026 Traverse Awards for Excellence in Kentucky Tourism. Entries may be submitted by industry organizations, advertising agencies or by other communication firms. However, entries must be submitted in the name of the KTIA member organization for which the work was produced.

There is no limit to the number of entries a member can submit but the same entry can only be submitted in one category.

All entries must have been initiated for the first time between March 1, 2025 and July 31, 2026.

FEES

Single Entry: \$65

Late Fee (August 6-12): Additional \$30 per entry

AWARD LEVELS

In addition to Gold, Silver, and Bronze awards, Awards of Distinction will be given to the top scoring entry in each division to highlight the diverse segments of the industry and to ensure that the most deserving entry from each of the divisions will receive one of the highest award recognitions. “Best in Show” rewards the most unforgettable and impressive entry while “Most Innovative” rewards the most unique entry.

WINNER ANNOUNCEMENTS

2026 Traverse Award winners will be announced throughout the day and evening on Thursday, November 12 during the 2026 Kentucky Travel Industry Annual Conference in Lexington at the Central Bank Center. Bronze award winners will be announced during the Opening Breakfast and Silver award winners will be announced during the Commissioner & Awards Luncheon. Gold, Awards of Distinction, Most Innovative and Best in Show winners will be presented during the Gala Dinner.

DIVISIONS & CATEGORIES

DIVISIONS

- A) DMO
- B) Attraction, Tour Operator or Event
- C) Lodging or Restaurant
- D) Supporting (does not include Industry Suppliers but does include any KTIA member not represented in division A, B, or C)
- E) Multi-Partner (projects that include 2 or more partners)

CATEGORIES

1 DESTINATION ENHANCEMENT

Entries in this category can include the development or enhancement of a destination's visitor experiences including new festivals and events and new or enhanced experiences at an existing attraction, hotel or restaurant. Also eligible are entries that show how you demonstrate your value to local stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and government entities.

NOTE: This category does not include capital development such as new construction or major renovation of attractions, hotels or restaurants.

2 DIGITAL

Includes digital display ads, native ads, social media advertising, e-blasts, etc.

3 MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Entries must encompass two or more platforms e.g. TV with social media, etc.

4 OUT-OF-HOME

Physical embodiments of marketing efforts that can include traditional billboard advertising, wallscapes and mural advertising, arena signage, bus shelter wraps, etc.

CATEGORIES

CONTINUED

5 PR INITIATIVE

Strategic communication efforts related, but not limited to, an event, program, entity, destination or overall tourism promotion. These initiatives focus on earned media coverage and can include influencer and curator ads as well.

6 PRINT

Includes print advertising and printed collateral including, but not limited to, newspaper, magazine, booklet, guide, annual report, group travel guide, meeting planner, visitors guide, rack brochure, event materials, etc.

7 RADIO OR TV ADVERTISING

Entries in this category include event, destination, message or entity advertisements that aired on radio and/or tv and should be no more than :60 seconds.

8 SPECIALTY ITEMS

Includes specially produced items such as posters, t-shirts, pins, or other merchandise type items related to your entity.

9 VIDEO OR POD-CAST

Entries in this category include specifically produced video(s) or podcast(s) that highlight an event, destination, message, or entity.

10 WEBSITE

Includes websites that cater to a user's needs with innovative tools, site features, sharp design, content and technology as well as creatively presenting the entity's unique brand identity.

NOTE: When submitting entries in this category, please be sure to include images from the site rather than just a link.

HOW TO COMPILE & SUBMIT YOUR ENTRY

1 Determine your division, and for each entry, it's category.

2 Complete the Official Entry Form for each entry you wish to submit and gather all corresponding documents and images relevant to each individual entry.

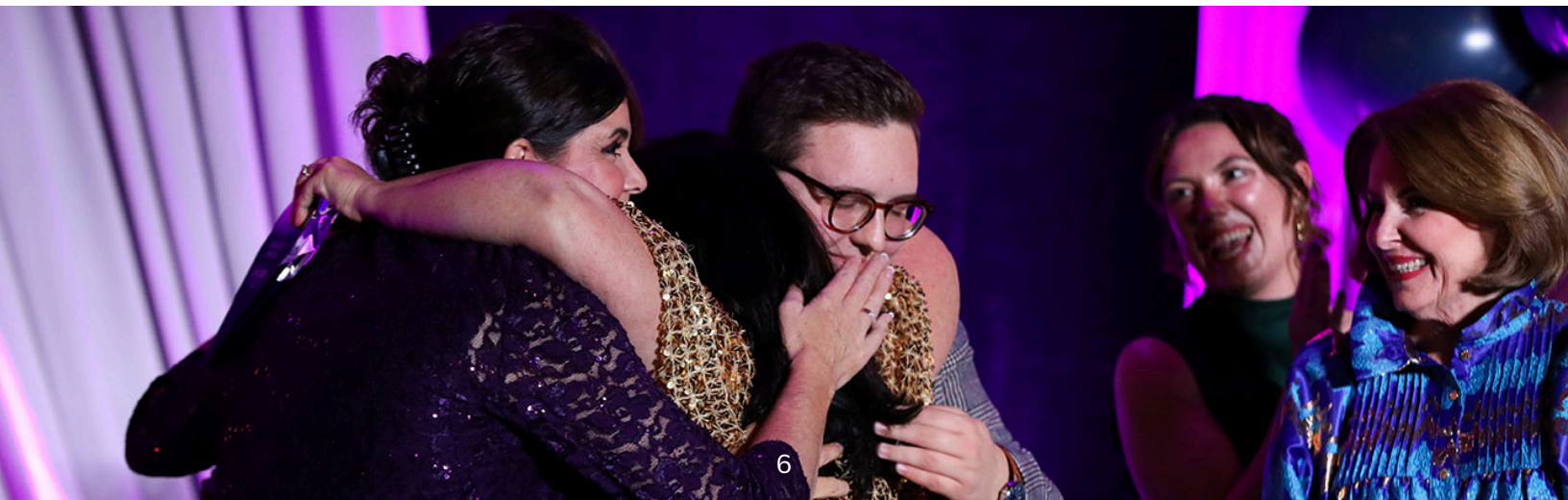
NOTE: The same entry can only be submitted in one category.

3 Once you have determined how many entries you wish to submit, complete a Summary of Entries form and include ALL of the Traverse Awards entries you are submitting. Please ensure that the name of the entries on the Summary of Entries form matches the exact entry name on your Entry form.

4 Upload entry form(s) and corresponding material(s) to a Dropbox folder. Please note that all entries MUST be submitted electronically via Dropbox. See below for specific instructions for labeling your Dropbox files.

NOTE: If links, files or additional information are embedded in your application, please clearly indicate the location of information.

5 Send the shareable link with your entries to Katherine Bowman at katherine.bowman@ktia.com **and** Sarah Brock at sarah.brock@ktia.com. You will receive confirmation when your submissions have been received and an invoice for your entries will be sent shortly thereafter.



HOW TO ORGANIZE YOUR DROPBOX FOLDER(S)

- 1 Create a main folder to house all of your organization's entry forms and images and label that folder with your Organization Name and Division. (Example: Kentucky Travel Industry Association | Division D)
- 2 Within your main folder, upload your Summary of Entries form and label it with your Organization Name and Division. (Example: Summary of Entries | Kentucky Travel Industry Association | Division D)
- 3 Within your main folder, create separate folders for each individual entry and include the Official Entry Form (to be labeled with your Form Name | Organization Name | Entry Name) and High-Resolution image(s) of your entry. Label each subfolder with the Category Number and Name (for example: Category 1. Print Advertising). Label each photo file with your Organization Name and Entry Name.

NOTE: TV spots and video should be delivered in the highest possible format. Radio spots should be delivered as a wave or mp3 file type.

- 4 Your folders should follow this example: Your Organization Name and Division > Category Number; and so on. Example: Kentucky Travel Industry Association > Category 1.

HELPFUL REMINDERS

- The entry name you provide will be announced during winners' videos so we encourage you to be as descriptive as possible when determining the name of an entry.
- Proofread each entry for spelling/grammar and check links and images before submitting.
- Be sure to fully address all questions on the entry form. If you do not have quantifiable results to share in the results/impact section, be sure to summarize the impact with a written description so the judges can gauge whether the project was successful or not.
- Be clear and concise when compiling your entries. Remember this is the information the judges will see in determining your scores.



HOW ENTRIES ARE JUDGED

The following is a summary of the process through which Traverse Award recipients are selected.

- Six volunteer judges are selected who are highly respected professionals within the tourism industry with extensive industry experience. Each judge is located outside of Kentucky to maintain full objectivity. Their names are not disclosed, nor do they disclose that they are Traverse judges. That confidentiality allows them to be 100% objective even if they happen to know organizations or individuals who have submitted entries.
- Following the submission deadline, judges are sent information and guidance about the process along with entry forms, supporting collateral, summary of entries forms and a score sheet. Throughout the judging process, the KTIA management team is available to answer judges questions.
- The entries, as sent to the judges, are organized by the 10 categories and within the categories, they are organized by division.
- Judges do not arrive at their scores by comparing entries to each other. In other words, as they review entries, they are not attempting to identify the best entry, second best, etc. (Ranking entries comes later in the process). Instead, within the category and division groupings, the judges evaluate and score each entry on its individual merits in relation to the judging criteria.
 - This is comparable to a teacher evaluating students' work on an essay assignment, with the teacher telling the students the key points – criteria – the essays need to address. In the scoring process, the teacher doesn't evaluate each essay in comparison to the others, but rather on the extent to which and quality with which each essay addressed the key points.

HOW ENTRIES ARE JUDGED

CONTINUED

- The criteria for judging entries are as follows with scoring based on up to 25 points for each criterion for a total of 100 points possible:
 - **CONCEPT:** What is the underlying concept and what are the goals and objectives it is intended to achieve? (Submitters will need to explain the concept and goals of the project.)
 - **CREATIVITY:** How contextually and visually creative and innovative was the project? What distinguishes the entry and makes it unique? (Submitters will need to describe the project in creative terms regarding project design, development, implementation and as applicable, include elements of originality, innovation, graphic creativity.)
 - **RESULTS/IMPACT:** Was the project successful? What was the impact of the project, particularly in relation to the goal(s)? (Submitters will need to describe as specifically as possible what the project achieved and include quantified results to the extent possible. If the project does not have quantifiable results, be sure to include what impact was derived.)
 - **OVERALL PROJECT IMPRESSION:** Judge's overall assessment of the project based on the combination of concept, creativity and results/impact.
- By the pre-determined deadline, judges submit their scores to the management team. The judges' scores are then averaged for each entry and the averages for all entries are ranked from highest to lowest.
- From the total list of ranked scores, Gold Awards are received by the top 10% highest scores, Silver Awards are the next highest 20% and Bronze are the next 20%. That means that 50% of entries receive an award and that 50% do not.
- To continue with the essay analogy, this is the same as grading on a curve where after the teacher gives each essay a numerical score, the scores are then ranked and wherever each essay is within the ranking determines its letter grade.
- Note that the percentages shown above are targets rather than absolutes because it is not unusual for there to be multiple entries that receive the same average score, and sometimes these "ties" can include a relatively large number of entries. The most reasonable break point, i.e., as close as practical to the target percentage among groups of ties, is determined, which can result in the stated percentages not being exactly met. There is never a case where ties are split in which, for example, some entries receive a Gold and others a Silver, even though their averaged judges' scores were the same.
- The highest scores within each division are awarded the Awards of Distinction.
- A conference call is held with the judges during which they discuss and determine selections for Most Innovative and Best in Show.

Frequently Asked Questions

Besides the official Entry Form and Summary of Entries Form, do I need to submit anything additional?

Yes. Please include corresponding photos or images associated with your entry. Photos do not have to be professionally taken, but please keep in mind any submitted images will be used in the review of your submission by the judges and if you win a Silver or Gold award, the image(s) will be shown on screen. If your supporting material is embedded in your application, please clearly indicate this for the judges.

If I submit an entry in the Marketing Campaign category, am I able to submit individual components of the campaign as separate entries? Yes.

Am I allowed to send physical items to accompany my entry instead of a photo?

No. Only electronic materials associated with an entry can be considered during judging.

I am including several copies of the same picture, but they were used in different ways (bookmarks, poster, car wrap, magnet, coaster, on social media, etc). Do they still need to be individually labeled?

Yes. Judges will want to see the different methods used to reach your target audience.

What if there were not quantifiable results for my project?

If there are no measurable metrics to show the impact of your project, explain any impact you experienced from it. For example, if you created posters for an event that were distributed around town and you received positive feedback, be sure to describe that feedback.

If I am a part of a Multi-Partner project, what organization is responsible for submitting the entry?

Any one of the participating KTIA member organizations can submit an entry for the project on behalf of all the partners involved in the project. However, it can only be submitted in the category once. The other participating organizations are not able to submit the project in other categories and all participating partners need to be noted on the entry form.

What is the timeframe for a project to be eligible for consideration?

Entries eligible for the 2026 awards must have been initiated between March 1, 2025 and July 31, 2026.

When will I know if I won?

Winners will be announced throughout the day and evening on Thursday, November 12 during the 2026 annual conference in Lexington.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact Katherine Bowman at katherine.bowman@ktia.com or by phone at 502-223-8687.