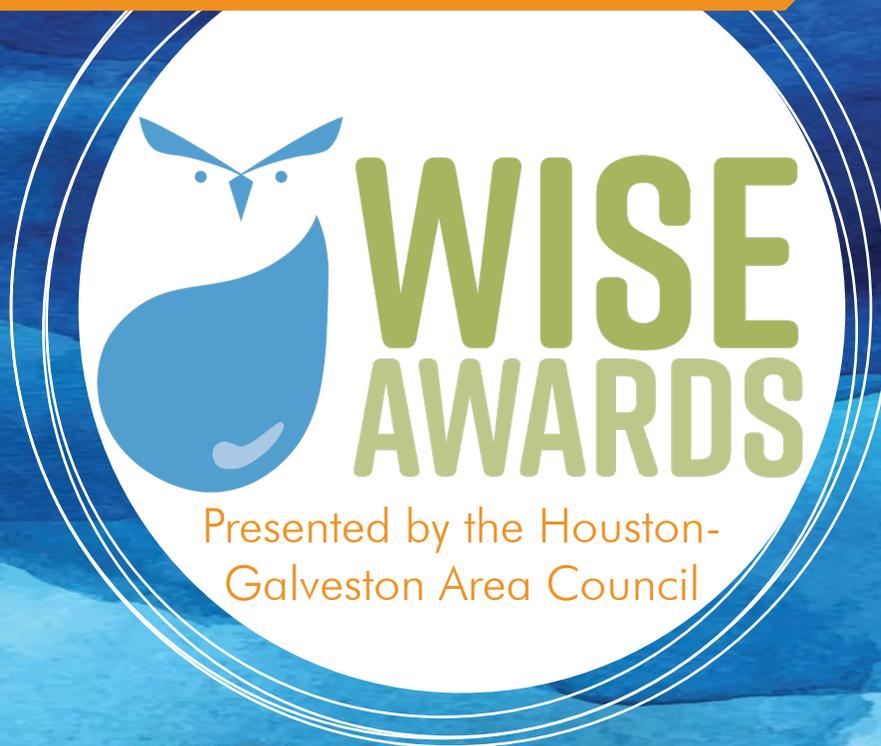


2026 WISE AWARD APPLICATION GUIDE



OVERVIEW

The Water Innovation Strategies of Excellence (WISE) Awards recognize innovative projects, programs, or individuals in the Houston-Galveston region that serve as models for improving and protecting water resources.

This program is overseen by the Natural Resources Advisory Committee, an advisory committee to the Houston-Galveston Area Council Board of Directors.

The application period will begin on Monday, March 2, 2026. Applications must be completed online at h-gac.com/wise-awards by **noon on Friday, April 3, 2026**.

There is no entry fee for the WISE Awards. Additional details, including application requirements and scoring criteria, are available at h-gac.com/wise-awards.

By submitting an application, the applicant agrees all contest materials may be used in presentations and publications developed by Houston-Galveston Area Council without further acknowledgement. Selected projects may be featured on the Houston-Galveston Area Council website and social media channels.

Email Rachel Windham at rachel.windham@h-gac.com, or visit h-gac.com/wise-awards for more information.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible applicants include:

- Local governments
- Businesses
- Non-profit organizations
- Universities and educational institutions
- Utility districts
- Individuals

Projects, programs, or efforts in Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Harris, Galveston, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller, and Wharton counties are eligible for recognition. Joint applications for larger collaborative efforts are encouraged, but not required. Winning submissions must exhibit efficiency, effectiveness, and innovation, and serve as models that improve water resources.

HOW TO APPLY

- Go to h-gac.com/wise-awards and select "Submit an Application"
- Multiple applications may be submitted under the same profile
- Applications can be saved and returned to at a later date
- In-progress applications can be accessed in the WISE Awards application portal after login

All applications must be submitted using the application portal by noon on April 3, 2026, for consideration.

APPLICATION DETAILS

The following details are necessary information for a WISE Awards eligibility.

Nominator Contact Information

- 🔥 First name
- 🔥 Last name
- 🔥 Title
- 🔥 Entity/organization
- 🔥 E-mail address
- 🔥 Address
- 🔥 City
- 🔥 State
- 🔥 Zip code

Nominated Project, Program, or Individual Information

- 🔥 Name of project, program, or individual
- 🔥 First name of project or program lead (if applicable)
- 🔥 Last name of project or program lead (if applicable)
- 🔥 Entity/organization of project, program, or individual (if applicable)
- 🔥 Describe the location impacted by the project, program, or individual
- 🔥 In what year(s) did the project(s), program(s), or individual initiate action?
- 🔥 Which of the following categories describes the project, program, or individual being nominated? For examples of qualifying project, program, or individual, see the last page of the application guide. (select all that apply)
 - Policy and planning
 - Education and public awareness
 - Completed effort (greater than \$200,000)
 - Completed effort (less than \$200,000)
 - Research and monitoring
 - Program performance
 - Individual excellence

In which of the following counties does the nominated project, program, or individual operate? (select all that apply)

- 🔥 Austin
- 🔥 Brazoria
- 🔥 Chambers
- 🔥 Colorado
- 🔥 Fort Bend
- 🔥 Harris
- 🔥 Galveston
- 🔥 Liberty
- 🔥 Matagorda
- 🔥 Montgomery
- 🔥 Walker
- 🔥 Waller
- 🔥 Wharton
- 🔥 None of the above (submission will not be eligible)

APPLICATION DETAILS

Responses to the following questions will be scored from zero (no response) to the maximum number of points indicated at the end of each prompt.

Project, Program, or Individual Details (up to 30 points possible for the section)

- ◆ Provide a detailed description of the project, program, or individual and reasons for nomination. (500 words or less) *15 points possible*
- ◆ Upload at least one (up to five) high resolution digital photo(s), map(s), or similar exhibit(s), sufficient for printing large scale. *5 points possible*
- ◆ What are the goals and objectives of the project, program, or individual? What are the metrics of success? (250 words or less) *10 points possible*

Water Quality Benefits (up to 35 points possible for the section)

- ◆ Explain how the project, program, or individual protects or improves water quality. (500 words or less) *35 points possible*
 - Examples include, but not limited to:
 - Addressing impairments or concerns regarding bacteria, nutrients, dissolved oxygen, grease/oil, sediment, or other parameters
 - Increased community engagement relating to best practices for water quality
 - High quality water resources maintained through consistent performance

Best Practices and Innovation (up to 30 points possible for the section)

- ◆ How does the project, program, or individual use innovative or new technologies, strategies, or approaches? (500 words or less) *20 points possible*
- ◆ How does the project, program, or individual utilize best management practices or demonstrate industry excellence? (250 words or less) *10 points possible*

Community Engagement (up to 20 points possible for the section)

- ◆ Describe how the project, program, or individual engages with the community. (500 words or less) *20 points possible*
 - Examples include, but not limited to:
 - Demonstrations of collaboration with other area partners
 - Specialized public engagement activities
 - Community needs that inspired the project, program, or individual
 - Other awards, honors, or certifications already received

JUDGING

Judges will refer to the following rubrics when reviewing submissions.

ELIGIBILITY – Must answer YES to all to proceed		
	Yes	No
Did the nominator submit their contact information using the application portal?		
Did the nominator submit the project, program, or individual information using the application portal?		
Is the nominated project, program, or individual operating within one or more of the 13 counties in the H-GAC Region?		

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JUDGING

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SCORING								
Section	Question Topic	No Response	Minimum Score	Low Score	Middle Score	High Score	Maximum Score	TOTAL
Project, Program, or Individual Details	Description	(0 points)	Response does not answer the question (3 points)	Response partially answers the question or is not well-composed (6 points)	Response sufficiently answers the question (9 points)	Response answers the question with detailed description and clear reason(s) for nomination (12 points)	Exemplary response that answers the question with detailed description and clear reason(s) for nomination (15 points)	
	Image	(0 points)	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Provided image(s) that represents submission (5 points)	
	Goals and Objectives	(0 points)	Response does not answer the question (2 points)	Response partially answers the question or is not well-composed (4 points)	Response sufficiently answers the question (6 points)	Response answers the question with clear example(s) of thoughtful goal(s) (8 points)	Exemplary response that answers the question with clear example(s) of thoughtful goal(s) (10 points)	
Water Quality Benefits	Description of Benefits	(0 points)	Response does not answer the question (7 points)	Response partially answers the question or is not well-composed (14 points)	Response sufficiently answers the question (21 points)	Response answers the question with clear demonstration(s) of water quality knowledge (28 points)	Exemplary response that answers the question with clear demonstration(s) of water quality knowledge (35 points)	
Best Practices & Innovation	Description of Innovation	(0 points)	Response does not answer the question (4 points)	Response partially answers the question or is not well-composed (8 points)	Response sufficiently answers the question (12 points)	Response answers the question with clear description(s) of innovation (16 points)	Exemplary response that answers the question with clear description(s) of innovation (20 points)	
	Description of Excellence	(0 points)	Response does not answer the question (2 points)	Response partially answers the question or is not well-composed (4 points)	Response sufficiently answers the question (6 points)	Response answers the question with clear example(s) of excellence (8 points)	Exemplary response that answers the question with clear example(s) of excellence (10 points)	
Community Engagement	Community Engagement	(0 points)	Response does not answer the question (4 points)	Response partially answers the question or is not well-composed (8 points)	Response sufficiently answers the question (12 points)	Response answers the question with detailed description(s) of community engagement (16 points)	Exemplary response that answers the question with detailed description(s) of community engagement (20 points)	
SUBTOTAL (Maximum of 115)								

CATEGORIES

The 2026 WISE Awards honor projects, programs, or individuals demonstrating innovation and excellence for protecting and improving water resources through any of the following:

Planning and Policy

The planning and policy category honors projects, programs, and individuals improving water quality through strategic planning and policy creation. Submissions should highlight how entities effectively utilize planning tools, author plans, or implement policy, such as ordinances.

Education and Public Awareness

The education and public awareness category honors projects, programs, and individuals improving water resources through public and stakeholder engagement. Submissions should highlight how everyday activities impact water resources, create a sense of personal investment, and spur positive behavior changes. Examples include, but not limited to stormwater drain marking volunteer initiatives, pet waste management campaigns, workshop series on invasive species, or community clean-up events.

Completed Effort (Greater than \$200,000)

The completed effort (greater than \$200,000) category honors projects, programs, and individuals that have contributed positively toward improving water resources by installing structures or enhancements. This includes, but is not limited to repairs or installation of new wastewater treatment facilities, remediation or replacement of on-site sewage systems, installation of wetland detention basins, riparian buffers, low impact development/green infrastructure projects, or other vegetative areas with a water quality benefit.

Completed Effort (Less than \$200,000)

The completed effort (less than \$200,000) category honors projects, programs, and individuals that have contributed positively toward improving water resources by installing structures or enhancements. This includes, but is not limited to repairs or installation of new wastewater treatment facilities, remediation or replacement of on-site sewage systems, and installation of wetland detention basins, riparian buffers, low impact development/green infrastructure projects, or other vegetative areas with a water quality benefit.

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CATEGORIES

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Research and Monitoring

The Research and Monitoring category honors efforts tracking changes in water quality and measuring the efficacy of strategies and practices put in place to improve water resources. Submissions should demonstrate quality assured methodology, measurable metrics, and how the findings enhance understanding of water quality. This includes but is not limited to efficacy studies for low impact development/green infrastructure projects, targeted monitoring of regional waterways to identify sources of pollution, or explorations of emerging topics in water quality such as microplastics.

Program Performance

The Program Performance category honors efforts by a specific individual, team or program that strives to continually set a high bar for themselves and does amazing work on a consistent basis. Examples might include programs to find and remove illicit connections, measures taken to prevent sanitary sewer overflows, outstanding Capacity, Management, Operations and Maintenance (CMOM) programs, or finding new innovative ways to run on-site sewage facility inspection programs. It could also be an accounting of how a program or team responded to an emergency situation caused by mechanical failure or weather event that kept environmental damage to a minimum.

Individual Excellence

The Individual Excellence category honors individuals that go above and beyond to protect and improve water resources. Nominees may be recognized for their independent work or as standouts within their programs. These individuals show leadership, and don't settle for doing the minimum required to achieve their goals. They are innovators, encouraging the incorporation of new technologies and ideas to improve their programs.

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