



2026 ISM Award Categories & Criteria

This document provides information on each category with the criteria and the most recent award recipients.

Collaboration Across Boundaries

Recognizes the use of technology to support collaboration and/or integration that crosses traditional program or organizational boundaries.

- Promotes cooperation and coordination in addressing shared problems or opportunities.
- Demonstrates collaboration / integration occurring with agencies, organizations, and community partners outside of HHS towards the achievement of a significant positive HHS program outcome.
- Provides that the collaboration / integration be unusual, innovative, creative.
- Demonstrates that the collaboration / integration must be a significant part of the success of the project or initiative.
- Focus: Collaboration/integration, outcome-focused, strategic

Best Use of Technology for Operations – Internal Focus

Recognizes the innovative use of technology to enhance and improve the internal productivity and/or efficiencies of the human services organization or program.

- It is *internally focused* **on business operations** within the HHS public service organization.
- Is specific to outcomes from one or more areas because of the technological solution/approach:
 - Improves the administration of an existing HHS program.
 - Significantly upgrades the working conditions or capabilities for workers.
 - Enhances the worker experience and/or productivity.
 - Vastly enhances worker productivity, as result of the technological solution/approach
- Focus: Services, internal efficiencies, operations, worker effectiveness and productivity

Best Use of Technology for Customers – External Focus

Recognizes the innovative use of technology to enhance and expand external service delivery to those we serve. Human services are being delivered in non-traditional places and/or methods, and these new approaches would not be possible without the thoughtful and strategic use of information technology.

- It is *externally focused* on a **public facing service outcome**.
- Can demonstrate a new service to customers or fill in gap in the availability of existing services.
- Demonstrates a creative approach leading to improved customer experience.
- Illustrate improvement that provides better/quicker/more efficient and effective services to clients.
- Demonstrates measurable client-based outcomes and results.
- Focus: Innovation, efficiencies, outcomes, customer experience

The Jerry W. Friedman Excellence in Leadership – Government

Recognizes an individual who has demonstrated a clear understanding of the fundamental role that information technology can play in efficient and effective operation in the field of human services. It honors innovative leadership that has promoted sound information technology solutions, policies, and practices in federal, state, or local government. **Note:** this is the only award open either an individual and/or public agency.

Demonstrates innovative leadership that stands out amongst peers.

- Achieves exceptional outcomes and articulates these specific impacts.
- Demonstrates a clear understanding of the role IT plays in efficient/effective operations.
- Shows a strong passion and drive for the human services field.
- Demonstrates this success over a sufficient period.
- Focus: Achievements, excellence in leadership, positive outcomes, motivating/inspiring others to accomplish

The Jerry W. Friedman Excellence in Leadership – Private Sector/CBO/Academia

Recognizes an individual who has demonstrated a clear understanding of the fundamental role that information technology can play in efficient and effective operation in the field of human services. It honors innovative leadership that has promoted sound information technology solutions, policies, and practices in the **private sector, non-profit/CBO, and/or academia**. **Note** this is the only award open either an individual and/or an organization.

Demonstrates innovative leadership that stands out amongst peers.

- Achieves exceptional outcomes and articulates these specific impacts.
- Demonstrates a clear understanding of the role IT plays in efficient/effective operations.
- Shows a strong passion and drive for the human services field.
- Demonstrates this success over a sufficient period.
- Focus: Achievements, excellence in leadership, positive outcomes, motivating/inspiring others to accomplish



ISM 2026 Awards Information

The purpose of this document is to provide you with the general criteria, project eligibility information, timeline for the awards schedule, and the questions you need to be prepared to answer once you start your submission. **NOTE:** It is important to gather all your information prior to starting your submission as the platform does allow you to sign back into an unfinished nomination.

Nomination Process and Deadline

Any person may submit a nomination. There is no limit to the number of nominations a person may submit. A separate form for each nomination must be submitted no later than 11:59 PM EDT on **Wednesday, July 22, 2026**. Please note: There will be no extensions given for submissions.

Awards Schedule

Task	Date
Nominations Open	Monday, June 1
Nominations Closed	Wednesday, July 22
Peer Review Committee Evaluations	Between July 23 and July 30
Finalists and Winners Notified	By Wednesday, August 12
Videos Due	Friday, September 11
Awards Recognition	Monday, September 28

General Criteria for all awards:

- For all award categories, other than the Jerry W. Friedman award, the entity must represent federal, state, local government, university, or nonprofit organization. A non-profit or university award applicant must show how their project/initiative benefited the clients of the associated or partner government HHS organization or the organization itself.
- An organization can submit multiple projects for awards, and they can also submit multiple projects for consideration in a single category. The limitation is that any individual project may only be submitted for consideration in one category. If an organization submits the same project for an award in multiple categories, we will contact the organization to make them choose a single category for the project. *For example:*
 - **Allowed:** An organization submits a Child Welfare project for an award and a different SNAP/TANF project for an award. These submittals can be in the same category or in different categories.
 - **Not Allowed:** An organization submits a Child Welfare project for an award in multiple categories.
- The application must show how the project/initiative specifically meets the criteria for each category.
- For the *Collaboration Across Boundaries* award, only one award will be made to the specific collaboration project/initiative. The award will name the entities that participated in the collaboration project/initiative.

Project Eligibility:

The project or initiative must have been completed or deployed in production during the calendar year 2023 to be considered. Any benefits highlighted or derived in the nomination must reflect measurable results, and any supporting data submitted reflect the status of the project at time of application.

To be eligible for an award, the nominated project must stand on its own. If the specific project represents one phase of a larger project or program, the nomination may explain the broader context but should only include benefits realized by the specific project being nominated.

- Project completion and deployed in calendar year 2025.
- The criteria for judging the nominations for initiatives include the following:
 - Results gained from the initiative, such as significant improvement in service delivery and/or cost savings,
 - Currency (completed during the last calendar year); if the project does not meet this timeline, it will not be evaluated,
 - Uniqueness,
 - Broad applicability in other jurisdictions, and
 - Standout among similar initiatives.
- We are encouraging nominations which, if selected, can be accepted in person at the conference. However, if accommodation needs to be made Show Management will work to provide.

Online Submission Guidelines

The project nomination should include the following elements:

1. Project needs, business plan and solution. This description should also include information about how the project meets the criteria for the award category.
2. Significance to the improvement of the operation of the government, noting measurable results.
3. Benefits of the Project – In this section please address the financial and non-financial reasons why this project, initiative and/or solution was worthy of the investment made.
4. Please make specific notes of any marketing or education and awareness strategies to promote adoption and include a brief narrative on the solutions architecture as part of the justification.

Please ensure the attachments do not exceed **three (3)** pages, and no more than **four (4)** pertinent attachments. Attachments should not exceed more than 30 MB.

Evaluation and Scoring

Nominations for each system award category are evaluated on the clarity, quality and completeness of the information presented. Submissions which do not follow the required format or are submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

Each of the following elements will make up a portion of the total score:

1. How well does the nomination represent an innovative use of existing technology or a use of new technology.
2. Significance to the improvement of the operation of government
3. High level discussion of the benefit of the project

Nominations for The Jerry Friedman Excellence in Leadership Awards are evaluated based on the following:

1. How has the individual demonstrated a clear understanding of the fundamental role that information technology can play in efficient and effective operations in the field of human services?
2. How has the individual provided innovative leadership to promote sound information technology solutions, policies, and practices?
3. Resulting benefits, gains, or process improvements?
4. How has the nominee impacted the modernization of human services through their leadership?

Gather this information prior to starting to complete your nomination. We suggest that you have everything in a word document to copy and paste into the fields of the form. Have all files you want to upload saved and available at the time you are filling out the form.

Nominator Questions: (required)

- Name, Title, Organization, Full Address, Email, and Best Phone Number
- Sector: Public Sector (Federal, State, Local), Private, Community Based/NonProfit, Academia

Award Categories – Select one per nomination: (required)

- Project Initiative (**Collaboration Across Boundaries, Best Use of Technology for Operations - Internal, Best Use of Technology for Customers - External**)
- Leadership Award Nominations (**Jerry W. Friedman Excellence in Leadership-Government or Jerry W. Friedman Excellence in Leadership-Private Sector/CBO/Adademia**)

Program/Initiative Nominations (these fields only will appear and are required):

- Name of the Program Being Nominated
- Agency
- Effective Date or Operational Date
- Describe the Business Problem (850 words)
- Describe the Project/Initiative/Solution (850 words)
- Describe and illustrate measurable outcomes, quantifiable results and/or recognized improvements

Jerry W. Freidman Excellence in Leadership Award Nominations (these fields only will appear and are required):

- **Select either**
 - Jerry W. Friedman Excellence in Leadership – Government
 - Jerry W. Friedman Excellence in Leadership – for Private Sector, Non-Profit/CBO, or Academic nominations
- **Full Name of Nominee** – please include any professional credentials (i.e., MSW, PhD, etc.) and submit the name as it should appear on an award, if selected
- **Title of Nominee**
- **Nominee Organization**
- **Overview of the Nominee’s Contributions**
 - Describe how this individual/organization has demonstrated innovative, impactful, and excellence in leadership.

- Describe how their leadership played a significant role in creating efficient/effective operations and/or achieved exceptional outcomes.
- Describe how this person has impacted you personally and why you are recommending them for this award.

Optional for all nominations

Additional Attachments – up to four (4) can be uploaded, no longer than 3 pages in length each and no larger than 30MB each.

Depending on the nature of the nominations, ISM may choose not to make awards in one or more categories.

Questions

- For questions or clarity on the individual award criteria or project eligibility: Contact a member of the ISM Awards Committee: [Mark Allen](#)
- For technical assistance: Contact [Donna Jarvis-Miller](#), APHSA Director, Conferences and Events and ISM Conference Director.