American Planning Association
County Planning Division

Making Great Communities Happen

NACP NATIONAL ASSOCIATION -of- COUNTY PLANNERS

2026 Project Awards Program

The APA County Planning Division (CPD) and the National Association of County Planners (NACP) are excited to announce the 16th annual 2026 Project Awards Program! This initiative recognizes outstanding planning projects from counties across the country, providing a platform to showcase their work to the wider county planning community. It also gives our CPD membership the chance to explore innovative, current, and forward-looking planning methods and learn how county planning efforts have positively impacted development, conservation, government, and environmental projects.

Program Timeline

The CPD Awards Committee must receive an award application by **Friday, November 13, 2026.** Incomplete applications or those not received by this deadline will not be considered. Award winners will be notified by email and/or phone no later than Friday, December 4, 2026. The CPD annual virtual business meeting attracts many attendees and serves as an excellent platform for winners to showcase their county's accomplishments. Therefore, we ask the award winners to attend our annual **CPD Business Meeting**, where they will deliver a brief presentation about their project.

Eligible Projects

Eligible projects for submittal must fall under *Physical Projects* that are either completed or in progress within the last two years or *Comprehensive Plans, Tools, or Initiatives* that are finalized and adopted (or formally launched, where applicable) within the last two years.

Award Distinctions

The CPD Awards Committee is responsible for distinguishing between the Award of Excellence and the Award of Merit. The Award of Excellence goes to the highest-scoring, most innovative entry that demonstrates outstanding results and can serve as a model for other counties. The Award of Merit recognizes a high-quality entry that meets the program's standards but falls just short of the Excellence level. Decisions on these awards are based on scores and additional factors, including innovativeness, creativity, quality, comprehensiveness, and applicability in other areas of planning. In each category, judges may confer one Award of Excellence and one Award of Merit or choose not to award if the criteria are not met. The committee may, by a majority vote, reclassify entries into different categories if deemed more appropriate.

Planning Project Award

Recognizes a specific physical planning project of unusually high merit conducted by a county that is in the process of being constructed or has been constructed within the last two years. The project should demonstrate "on-the-ground" results that are supported by documented physical or social change.

Comprehensive Plan Award

- **Large Jurisdiction:** For a comprehensive plan of unusually high merit completed and adopted by a county within the last two years for, by, or within a jurisdiction with the most recent Census population of 50,000 or more.
- **Small Jurisdiction:** For a comprehensive plan of unusually high merit completed and adopted by a county within the last two years, by or within a jurisdiction with the most recent Census population of less than 50,000.

Best Practices Award

Recognizes a specific planning tool, practice, program, project, or process signifying a major advancement in one or more planning elements. This award highlights how innovative or cutting-edge planning methods and practices helped put a plan into action. Nominations can include items such as ordinances, regulations, legislation, adopted policies and codes, tax policies or initiatives, growth management or design guidelines, transferable development rights programs, land acquisition efforts, public-private partnerships, technology applications, handbooks, or initiatives aimed at increasing community planning participation.

Grassroots Initiative Award

Highlights how a community has used the planning process to address a need that goes beyond traditional planning. It emphasizes the success of planning in new or different contexts. Nominated projects should help the public better understand the planning process. Examples include efforts such as community policing, drug prevention, neighborhood outreach, programs for special populations, rural development, public art or cultural projects, community festivals, environmental or conservation initiatives, summer recreational activities for children, and targeted tourism initiatives.

Small Area or Special Area Planning Award

This award will be given to a small area or special area plan, program, design, or related effort that showcases innovative planning principles and measures, fostering sustainable communities with enduring value.

Special Focus Planning Initiative - County Holistic Innovation Project (CHIP)

An area of particular interest currently emphasized by the APA Divisions Council is the concepts of smart cities, sustainability, and infrastructure, including transportation. This award will recognize a county that has integrated "smart cities and sustainability or infrastructure and transportation" considerations into its planning process, demonstrating a commitment to innovative practices that improve cost efficiencies, infrastructure resilience, and citizen engagement.

Material Requirements

A complete award package must include the following documents:

1. The planning document or project submitted via email to communications@apacounty.org
2. A brief description of the project, including the setting, time frame, significance to the planning field, innovations in theory, methodology, and/or practice, and other unique aspects of the application.
3. A brief discussion demonstrating how the project meets the following judging criteria:
   - **Innovation** – Introduction of an original concept or a refinement of an existing technique or procedure.
   - **Transferability** – Potential applicability in other areas of the state or to other planning projects.
   - **Quality** – Excellence in analysis, writing, graphics, and presentation character.
   - **Implementation** – Effectiveness of the work – i.e., proposals that have been carried out or promised to be carried out soon.
   - **Comprehensiveness** – Planning principles that have been observed, especially when considering a project's effects on other public objectives and the surrounding environment.

Responses to Items 2 and 3 should total no more than four (4) pages

4. A 2-3 sentence project summary to be used for the award handout at the CPD Annual Business Meeting.
5. At least four graphics or images (jpg format) that illustrate the planning area or project being submitted.
6. Name, address, daytime telephone, email, and FAX numbers of the person(s) to contact regarding the application: project author(s) and project client.
7. Application fee:
   - $35.00 fee for CPD members or NACP members
   - $50.00 fee for non CPD or NACP members
   - Make checks payable: APA County Planning Division ***please note the project name on the check***

A complete award package must be received electronically at communications@apacounty.org by **11:59 p.m. EST, Friday, November 13, 2026,** *or you may email each Judge by electronic mail no later than 5:00 p.m. EST, Friday, November 13, 2026* ***(no exceptions).***

Please direct any questions about the awards program to ***Tim Brown, CPD Awards Committee Chair***, at (850) 267-1955 or by email to communications@apacounty.org or Adam Bradford, CPD Chair Executive, at chair@apacounty.org.

County Planning Awards Jurors

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