



2026 RUBY AWARDS

RECOGNIZING UNCOMMON BRILLIANCE
YEARLY IN OHIO'S TRAVEL INDUSTRY

Official Instructions Booklet

Presented at the Ohio Conference on Travel - Oct. 7-9, 2026
Roberts Centre in Wilmington
RUBY Awards Luncheon - Thursday, Oct. 8



Category added for best
America 250 activation!

Presented by:



Ohio Travel
ASSOCIATION

Sponsored by:

Ohio
Magazine



We invite you to enter the RUBY (Recognizing Uncommon Brilliance Yearly) Awards competition. The RUBY Awards honor those who have found the most innovative ways to market their destinations, attractions, museums, restaurants, hotels or other travel-related businesses.

ELIGIBILITY

The competition is open to all Ohio travel businesses and organizations. All entries must have appeared, aired or been published **for the first time between July 30, 2025 and July 30, 2026**. There is no limit to the number of entries. Entries must not have been entered in any previous RUBY Award competition.

Entries may be submitted by Ohio travel organizations, advertising agencies, public relations firms or any other type of communications professional. If an entry is submitted by a third-party, the entry must be submitted in the name of the travel business or organization for which the work was performed. Only original work may be submitted. All awards, as determined by the judges, are final.

ENTRY PROCESS & GUIDELINES

The completed RUBY Awards nomination form must be submitted via email to Sarah Herrick-Peck (sarah@ohiotravel.org). Entries may be supported by up to 10 examples of supporting material. If links to materials are provided, these must remain live until at least March 1, 2027. Please submit the minimum number of files necessary to support your entry.

Entries not prepared per guidelines will be disqualified. All entries must be submitted in digital format. We prefer linkable URLs be included on entry forms. If you must send attachments, accepted file formats: pdf, doc, mp3, wma, mpg, avi, jpg, jpeg, png and gif.

Additionally, please include a high-resolution logo from your organization with at least one entry.

ENTRIES MUST:

- **Meet all eligibility requirements**
- **Be submitted in the correct category**
- **Include a completed Entry Form for each entry and one Summary Form for the overall business or organization submitting entries**
- **Conform to submission requirements**
- **Conform to all copyright laws**

Judges are selected by the RUBY Awards Committee and represent marketing, advertising and public relations professionals from throughout the midwest. Judges are not assigned to categories where they may have a potential conflict of interest.

WHAT JUDGES ARE SEEKING

Judges score each entry on concept, creativity and results. Each entry will be awarded up to 25 points in each category based on its ability to address the following:

CONCEPT

What is the communications or marketing objective of the entry, and is the entry focused on delivering results? Who is the target audience, and how has the entry addressed a need? Did the entry have an appropriate call to action?

CREATIVITY

Does the entry stand out from the crowd? Was it well executed? Does it inspire the audience? Does it have stopping power?

RESULTS

How well did the entry perform? If results can't be determined yet, what are preliminary results? What is your plan to measure effectiveness? Please don't skip this section! It's often where entries lose points.

THREE REASONS YOU SHOULD SUBMIT



You Deserve the Recognition

While getting recognized in front of your peers is great, the RUBY Awards is also a way to show your supervisor, leadership and stakeholders that you do great work. Media release templates are provided to those submitting. You don't have to win a RUBY to share your story - many businesses celebrate their receipt of Certificates of Achievement and Citations of Excellence.



Get Feedback and Best Practices

Judges comments are available per request. We also feature 'best practices' from winners in each category throughout the year, creating an excellent checklist for planning next year's promotional materials.



Your Office Needs Some Bling

Engraved RUBY Awards will be distributed on stage. Those achieving Citations of Excellence will be recognized during the presentation and can pick up physical awards following the luncheon. All finalists are recognized during the awards ceremony. Those not awarded a RUBY or Citation of Excellence will be sent digital Certificates of Achievement. Digital badges will also be provided for all RUBY winners.

RUBY Awards are given at the discretion of the judges. Three (3) RUBY Awards may be given in each category according to marketing budget level. Citation of Excellence certificates will be given when merited in each category budget level. Finalists will be notified in September, and winners will be honored at the RUBY Awards luncheon Thursday, Oct. 8 at the Roberts Centre in Wilmington during the 2026 Ohio Conference on Travel.

CATEGORIES

Please read through all categories as we have added **two NEW categories**, and to find the best fit for your entries.

Entries can appear in more than one category only if they are part of a larger campaign. For example you may submit a group tour planner for recognition in Travel Guides and Planners. The planner could then be part of a larger strategy if supported with an email campaign, exhibit design, etc. under Targeted Marketing Campaign.

Outdoor advertising should be submitted as part of a campaign. There is no stand-alone category for outdoor advertising.

Campaigns that include physical items (cups, key chains, tote bags, etc.) should include representative pictures of any physical items. Be sure to explain intent and distribution of these items on entry forms. Please do not mail promotional items to OTA.

All submissions should follow the Entry Process and Guidelines outlined on page two.

1. Travel Guides and Planners: This category includes visitor guides, group tour planners, meeting planners and other communications tools to inspire or assist travelers. Entries must be eight pages or more.

2. Print Media: This category includes rack cards, direct mail pieces, brochures or other printed materials less than eight pages.

3. Newsletters: This category includes both printed newsletters and e-newsletters, intended to keep a consistent flow of communication to stakeholders or a B2C audience. Submit a minimum of three separate issues as either links or in pdf form.

4. Annual Report: This could be any format with the purpose of providing updates on your business or a community.

5. Targeted Marketing Campaign: This category includes efforts to hone in on a specific targeted audience, such as meeting planners, group tour planners, niche markets, etc. Media could include email campaigns, print media, promotional pieces, etc. Please submit digital copies, links or images of all products mentioned in your application.

6. Marketing Campaign: This category includes promotional campaigns that use more than one medium, such as a mix of direct mail, digital, print, outdoor display, etc. Please submit digital copies, links or images of all products mentioned in your application.

New to 2026! 7. America 250-Ohio Activation: Exclusive to 2026, this category recognizes excellence in marketing and communications dedicated to the America 250-Ohio celebration, honoring the campaigns and initiatives that amplify the stories of Ohio's contributions to the nation over the past 250 years. Entries may include special event programming, commemorative branding, leveraging America 250-Ohio programs and initiatives, educational outreach, or multimedia campaigns that showcase how Ohio continues to shape the American narrative through creative storytelling and community engagement. *RUBY and Citation recipients will receive a special gift from the America 250-Ohio Commission.*

8. Print Advertisement: This category includes newspaper, magazine, or other advertisements appearing in print form. It includes ads of four color or less than four color. It may be a single ad or a campaign designed around one theme. Please submit one ad or at least three examples if it is an ad series.

New to 2026! 9. Broadcast Ad and Digital Tools: Honoring the intersection of storytelling and technology, this category recognizes impactful broadcast advertising and pioneering digital solutions. Entries may include commercials for television, radio, or streaming platforms, alongside innovative digital tools like custom apps, podcasts, and immersive exhibit designs. This category celebrates creativity that breaks through the noise using modern media channels.

10. Best New Experience: Whether a new exhibit, event, attraction, or activity, the Best New Experience award celebrates the quality of the experience itself, outside from its marketing.

CATEGORIES (continued)

11. **Promotional Video:** Videos could be short-form or long-form. Please submit a link to your video on the entry form.
12. **Website:** Please send the URL along with your entry materials. Sites will be judged based on desktop and mobile versions.
13. **Digital Campaign:** This category includes the use of innovative digital communication channels and creative content. Please include links or attachments to multiple components of the campaign.
14. **Blog:** Judges will be looking at design, writing, engagement levels and creative topics. Please include three blog entries with your submissions, as well as the URL of the overall blog.
15. **Social Media Campaign:** This category includes a campaign using social network sites. Make sure to include URLs or representative images of the campaign on your entry form.
16. **Event Campaign:** This category includes a campaign promoting an event, or series of events.
17. **Spirit of Community:** This category includes efforts to support your local community and can include coordinating volunteer activities or efforts to support causes important to your community. Judging will examine your ability to meet a need in your community, using assets and skill sets to help others, as well as design of any support material.

**OTA reserves the right to move any entry into a category that best fits the submitted entry.*

ENTRY FEES:

OTA Members – \$65 Per Entry

Non-Members – \$80 Per Entry

Entry fees are payable online by credit card or by check. Please make checks payable to the Ohio Travel Association and send to P.O. Box 189, Pickerington, OH 43147.

DEADLINE: Entries are due **Friday, July 24, 2026**. Late entries will be accepted through Friday, July 31 with an additional \$20 late fee for each entry. No entries will be accepted after Friday, July 31.



QUESTIONS?

Call Sarah Herrick-Peck at 614-572-1931 x3 or e-mail: sarah@ohiotravel.org



2026 Official Entry Form

PLEASE SUBMIT ONE FORM (PAGES 6-7) PER ENTRY.
Email this form with your Official Summary Form (page 8) to
sarah@ohiotravel.org



Contact Name

Company Name As It Would Appear on an Award

Entry Title

Category Name and Number

Entry URLs

PROVIDE A SUMMARY FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING:

Concept:

Tell your story. What is goal and marketing objective of the entry? Who is the target audience, and how has the entry addressed a need? What is your intended call to action?



Results:

How well did the entry perform? If results can't be determined yet, what are preliminary results? What is your plan to measure effectiveness? Don't skip this section! It's often where entries lose points.

If emailing supporting materials, please identify what is accompanying this form:



2026 Official Summary Form

PLEASE SUBMIT ONE FORM, REGARDLESS OF NUMBER OF ENTRIES.

Email this form with your entry form(s) to sarah@ohiotravel.org.



Contact Name

Company Name

Address

City

State

Zip Code

Phone Number

Email

Marketing Budget

To the best of your ability, please identify the marketing budget for your overall organization or business. As an example, this should include line items for creative development, media buys and promotional materials. Do not include personnel or operational costs. Each category will be divided into three marketing budget levels based on entries submitted, with RUBYs awarded in each budget level if judges determine a submission worthy.

\$ _____

Payment Information

Cost Per Entry:

OTA Members: \$65 Per Entry

Non-Members: \$80 Per Entry

Deadline for Entry:

Online Entry: Submitted by 11:59 pm July 24, 2026. See page five for late entry fees and details.

Payment must be received with entry. If paying by check, please make checks payable to Ohio Travel Association, P.O. Box 189, Pickerington, Ohio 43147. Credit card payment can also be processed by phone.

Total amount \$ _____ Total number of entries _____

Credit Card payment: (check one): Visa ___ MasterCard ___ AMEX ___ Discover ___

Card Number

Exp. Date

Sec. Code

Name on Card

Signature

Billing Address