

# How to Build Your SEE Awards Program

*Building, Growing & Celebrating Structural Engineering Excellence*



# Part 1: Why SEE Programs Matter

Recognizing excellence strengthens the profession — and your association.

# The Case for Structural Engineering Excellence Awards



## Member Recognition

Gives your members a meaningful way to be recognized by peers for work they're proud of — inside and outside the SEA.



## Community & Belonging

Creates a shared moment for the profession to gather, celebrate, and strengthen relationships across firms and generations.



## Public Awareness

Showcases the vital role structural engineers play in shaping safe, resilient, and beautiful structures in the built environment.



## Association Growth

Award programs attract sponsorships, increase event attendance, and give prospective members a visible reason to join.



## Advancing the Profession

Highlights innovative projects and practices that set a bar for excellence and inspire the next generation of structural engineers.



## Historical Record

Documents landmark engineering achievements in your region for posterity — a legacy that outlasts any single project.

# What Makes a SEE Program Exceptional?



## Integrity

Transparent judging process with clear, published criteria and diverse, qualified judges.



## Inclusivity

Categories that celebrate projects of all sizes, types, and firms — not just the biggest.



## Visibility

Active promotion through media, social channels, and partner organizations.



## Celebration

A well-produced event that makes winners feel truly honored and remembered.



## Community

Brings members together around shared values of safety, beauty, and ingenuity.



## Continuity

Consistent annual or biennial cadence that builds long-term prestige.

# Part 2: Anatomy of a Successful SEE Program

Examining what established programs have in common.

# Core Components of a SEE Program

1

## Governance & Charter

Board approval required; review your existing bylaws with your board; build your Awards Committee

2

## Award Categories

Select categories that best reflect the projects your SEA is involved

3

## Submission Process

Online portal, required documentation, fee structure, eligibility rules

4

## Judging Panel

Mixed panel: SE practitioners, academics, client-side PMs; conflict-of-interest policies

5

## Evaluation Rubric

Published scoring criteria (technical merit, innovation, impact, constructability)

6

## Announcement & Event

Gala dinner or awards ceremony, press release, online gallery, plaques/trophies

# Governance: Setting Up for Long-Term Success

## Potential Committee Structure

**Program Chair** Board appointee, 2-year term

**Vice Chair** Succession pipeline

**Judging Coordinator** Recruits/manages judges

**Event Coordinator** Ceremony planning

**3–5 At-Large Members** Review submissions

## Governance Considerations to Discuss With Your Board

- How will the awards committee be authorized? (standing committee vs. ad hoc — check your bylaws)
- Who has final authority to approve winners — committee alone, or board ratification?
- How will conflicts of interest be handled when a judge's firm submits a project?
- What confidentiality obligations apply to judges reviewing submissions?
- Does your SEA need a budget amendment, or can this be funded from existing discretionary authority?
- Will you need separate insurance or liability language for the event itself?

# Part 3: Building Your SEE Program from Scratch

A practical, phased roadmap for associations starting their first program.

# 12-Month Launch Roadmap

Phase 1  
Months 1–2

## Foundation

- Board approval & charter vote
- Committee formation
- Budget allocation (initial)

Phase 2  
Months 3–4

## Design

- Define award categories
- Draft criteria & rubric
- Select submission platform

Phase 3  
Months 5–6

## Infrastructure

- Recruit judges
- Build submission portal
- Develop marketing plan

Phase 4  
Months 7–9

## Launch

- Open call for entries
- Active outreach campaign
- Sponsor recruitment

Phase 5  
Months 10–11

## Evaluation

- Judging sessions
- Select winners
- Prepare ceremony

Phase 6  
Month 12

## Celebration

- Awards ceremony
- Press & media push
- Debrief for Year 2

► Program Progression Over 12 Months ►

# Budget Planning: What Real SEE Programs Charge & How They're Funded

## Typical Startup Expenses

Submission platform (e.g., Submittable, Google Form, etc.)	<i>Varies</i>
Trophy / plaque design & fabrication	<i>\$50-\$500</i>
Event venue & catering	<i>\$2,000-\$20,000</i>
Marketing & print collateral	<i>\$0-\$500+</i>
Videography & photography	<i>~\$1,000+</i>
Judge honoraria (optional)	<i>Many SEAs use volunteers</i>
Miscellaneous & contingency	<i>Build in a buffer</i>

## Revenue Sources: Real Benchmarks

### Submission Fees (NCSEA model)

*NCSEA charges \$500/entry; \$100 discount for firms with ≤20 employees*

### Sponsors *Varies by SEA*

*Title, category, and event sponsors — structure based on your market & member base*

### Ticket / Table Sales *Varies by SEA*

*Gala tickets and premium table packages — price to your local market*

### Association Seed Budget *Ask NCSEA*

*Ask peer SEAs what they allocated in Year 1 — NCSEA staff can connect you*

*Note: Cost figures vary significantly by region and market. Contact peer SEAs and get vendor quotes before setting your budget.*

# Part 4: Award Categories & Evaluation Criteria

Designing categories that are meaningful, fair, and comprehensive.

# Award Categories: How Leading SEE Programs Structure Theirs

## Potential SEA Categories

- ✓ New Buildings — Under \$30 Million
- ✓ New Buildings — \$30M to \$80 Million
- ✓ New Buildings — \$80M to \$200 Million
- ✓ New Buildings — Over \$200 Million
- ✓ New Bridge & Transportation Structures
- ✓ Renovation / Retrofit / Rehab — Up to \$20M
- ✓ Renovation / Retrofit / Rehab — Over \$20M
- ✓ Other Structures (non-building, special use)
- ✓ Structure of the Year (overall best-in-show)

## NCSEA Categories

- ✓ Forensic/Retrofit/Rehabilitation/Renovation/Adaptive Reuse
- ✓ Landmark Structures
- ✓ Residential/Single and Multi-Family Homes
- ✓ Innovation in Materials
- ✓ Built to Serve (formerly know as Social Impact)
- ✓ Sustainable Design
- ✓ Non-Building Structures
- ✓ Bridge and Transportation
- ✓ Performance Design for Resilience

*Your categories should reflect your region's project mix. Survey members before finalizing — what they'll submit to is the best guide.*

# Evaluation Criteria: Questions to Guide Your Rubric Design

*NCSEA judges projects on innovative design, engineering achievement, and creativity. How will YOUR SEA define excellence for your region and membership?*

## What should carry the most weight?

Technical innovation? Public impact? Complexity of constraints? There's no universal right answer — your rubric should reflect your SEA's values.

## How do you evaluate across scales?

A small-firm rehabilitation project faces different challenges than a \$200M tower. Should criteria shift by category, or be universal?

## Who decides the criteria?

NCSEA uses Past Presidents for the first round. SEAOC relies on regional juries. Will you use a committee, external panel, or a hybrid?

## How much does presentation matter?

Strong submissions help judges see the work. But does a less polished entry from a small firm deserve a lower score for that reason?

## Will you publish scoring weights?

Transparency builds trust and helps entrants know what to emphasize. NCSEA publishes that projects are judged on 'design,

## What will your floor be?

Will you give awards in every category regardless of quality, or only when an entry truly merits recognition? SEAOC explicitly allows no

# Judging: Recruiting, Training & Managing Your Panel

## Recruiting the Right Judges

- Aim for 5–9 judges per category to avoid deadlocks
- Mix: practicing SEs, academic researchers, owners/clients, contractors
- Require minimum 15 years experience (or PE + 10 years)
- Recruit from outside your state for fresh perspective on featured categories
- Reach out to SEAOC, NCSEA, or sister SEAs for recommendations

## Managing the Review

- Use secure online platform (e.g., SurveyMonkey, Submittable, Google Form, etc)
- Set firm deadlines with automated reminders
- Designate a tiebreaker process before judging begins
- Collect numerical scores AND brief written justifications
- Conduct final consensus call if scores are within 5% of each other

## Training & Orientation

- Send rubric and scoring guide 2 weeks before review begins
- Host a 60-min virtual orientation: review criteria, answer questions
- Provide anonymized example submissions with sample scores
- Require signed conflict-of-interest disclosure before access
- Use calibration exercise: all judges score one practice entry together

## Judge Recognition & Retention

- Send personalized thank-you from SEA President
- List judge names and credentials in event program
- Offer complimentary gala ticket or virtual attendance
- Provide signed certificate of service for their portfolio
- Build a 'judges alumni' roster — great pipeline for future years

# Part 5: Marketing & Outreach


Getting submissions, building buzz, and reaching the broader profession.


# Marketing Strategy: Building Momentum for Year 1 and Beyond


6 Months Out	4 Months Out	2 Months Out	Submission Deadline	Award Night
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Announce program launch</li><li>• Open sponsor conversations</li><li>• Publish call for entries page</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Email blast to members</li><li>• Post on LinkedIn/SEA socials</li><li>• Reach out to partner chapters</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'Last chance' reminders</li><li>• Feature past winners (Year 2+)</li><li>• Media advisory to engineering press</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Announce deadline extension?</li><li>• Social countdown posts</li><li>• Update website with entry count</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Live social coverage</li><li>• Pre-scheduled winner reveals</li><li>• Tag winners on LinkedIn/X</li></ul>


## Key Channels & Messages

 Member e-newsletter + dedicated email blasts

 LinkedIn posts + SEA chapter page updates

 ENR, Structure Magazine, SEI News press releases

 NCSEA, ACEC, AIA chapter cross-promotion

 Webinars & chapter meeting announcements

# Designing a Submission Process That Invites Participation

## Suggested Required Submission Elements

- ✓ Project name & location
- ✓ Submitting firm + engineer of record
- ✓ Project completion year
- ✓ Construction cost (optional — for category eligibility)
- ✓ written narrative or essay questions (technical + impact)
- ✓ Structural drawings set (PDF, 10-page max)
- ✓ 12–20 high-resolution photos
- ✓ Owner/client authorization letter

## Best Practices to Maximize Entries

- Keep the process under 4 hours of total preparation time for applicants
- Offer a 'First-Time Entrant' discounted fee to remove the barrier
- Provide a sample winning submission from a past year (Year 2+)
- Build a short FAQ page and assign a staff /volunteer 'submission concierge'
- Accept late submissions with a modest late fee (generates urgency + revenue)
- Send personalized outreach to firms with visible recent landmark projects

# Part 6: Planning the Celebration Event

Creating an evening that feels worthy of the work being honored.

# Choosing the Right Event Format for Your SEA

## Gala Dinner

**Best for:**

*Associations with 200+ members; established programs*

**Pros:**

- Premium feel; high-value sponsorships
- Networking + dinner + ceremony in one
- Significant fundraising opportunity

**Considerations:**

- Higher cost (\$15k–\$50k+)
- Complex logistics

## Awards Luncheon

**Best for:**

*Mid-size associations; programs in first 3 years*

**Pros:**

- Lower cost (\$5k–\$15k)
- Easier to fill seats
- Works during conference/convention

**Considerations:**

- Less formal feel
- Shorter networking time

## Virtual / Hybrid Ceremony

**Best for:**

*Geographically dispersed SEAs; budget-constrained start*

**Pros:**

- Lowest cost option
- National/international reach
- Easy recording for promotion

**Considerations:**

- Lower perceived prestige
- Technical risks

# Event Planning: From Venue to the Final Toast

## 6–9 Months Before

- Book venue (hotel ballroom, museum, iconic building)
- Select date — avoid major SE/AEC conference conflicts
- Engage AV company & event coordinator
- Set ticket pricing strategy

## 3–5 Months Before

- Design event branding & program book
- Confirm emcee (past SEA president, prominent engineer, or media personality)
- Send save-the-dates to full membership
- Optional: Produce winner video reels (2–3 min per category)

## 1–2 Months Before

- Open ticket sales; launch sponsor table packages
- Finalize menu, dietary accommodations
- Print programs, name badges, table assignments
- Rehearse run-of-show with AV team

## Event Night Essentials

- Photo backdrop / step-and-repeat for winner photos
- Cocktail reception (45 min) → seated dinner → ceremony
- Post-event press release same evening
- Optional: Live social media coverage with event hashtag

# Sample Run-of-Show: Awards Gala Evening

<b>5:30 PM</b>	<b>Cocktail Reception &amp; Registration</b>	Guests arrive; networking, project photo display, sponsor table
<b>6:30 PM</b>	<b>Welcome &amp; Call to Dinner</b>	SEA President welcomes attendees; dinner service begins
<b>6:45 PM</b>	<b>Opening Remarks</b>	3-minute remarks framing the value of structural engineering and tonight's honorees
<b>7:00 PM</b>	<b>Award Presentation — Block 1</b>	3–4 categories; video reel, winner called, photo, brief remarks (90 sec max)
<b>7:50 PM</b>	<b>Award Presentation — Block 2</b>	Remaining project categories; same format
<b>8:30 PM</b>	<b>Individual Honor Awards</b>	Young Engineer, Lifetime Achievement, or special recognition — allow 3 min for remarks
<b>8:55 PM</b>	<b>Closing Toast &amp; Sponsor Thanks</b>	SEA President closes; announce next year's program dates
<b>9:00 PM</b>	<b>Dessert, Networking &amp; Photography</b>	Informal close; group photos; media interviews with winners

# Trophies, Plaques & Lasting Recognition Materials

## Physical Awards: What Winners Value Most

- Custom trophy with structural engineering motif (bridge arch, truss, crystalline form)
- Individual plaque for each project (Value Add: make awards for each principal engineer on the team)
- Project-specific citation on heavy stock with raised gold lettering
- Digital award seal (.PNG/.SVG) for firm websites, email signatures

## Event Ambiance & Production

- Project poster displays at cocktail reception (large-format prints or digital screens)
- Step-and-repeat backdrop with SEA logos + sponsor names for winner photos
- 2–3 minute video reel per category: drone footage, construction photography, team interviews
- Live social wall or hashtag display on projection screens

## Ongoing Recognition Beyond the Night

- Online awards gallery with project photos, narrative, and judge comments
- Feature article in SEA newsletter and partner publications
- Press release template for winners to send to local media
- Social media kit: pre-written posts + branded images for winners

## Sponsorship Deliverables at the Event

- Logo placement: event screens, printed program, table cards, step-and-repeat
- Title sponsor: 2-minute speaking opportunity before award ceremony
- Category sponsors: presented alongside 'their' award
- Sponsor recognition in all post-event press releases and digital content

# Part 7: Q&A, Resources & Next Steps

Let's talk — and here's everything you need to get started.

# Your SEE Program Action Plan: Starting This Month

## First 90 Days: Action Checklist

- Present SEE concept to your board for approval
- Survey members on award categories they'd value
- Research 3 peer SEA programs as benchmarks
- Draft program charter (1–2 pages)
- Identify committee chair candidate
- Request initial budget allocation
- Evaluate submission platform options (ask peer SEAs what they use)
- Set tentative award date 10–12 months out

## Key Resources & References

### NCSEA

[ncsea.com/awards](https://ncsea.com/awards)

Start here — national model and staff who can connect you with peer programs

### SEAOC

[seaoc.org](https://seaoc.org)

California's regional SEE program — one of the most established models in the country across 4 chapters

### SEAoNY

[seaony.org/SEEAwards](https://seaony.org/SEEAwards)

New York's SEE Awards — modeled on NCSEA; recognizes NYC-area projects; winners announced at annual Boat Cruise

### SEAoA

[seaooa.org](https://seaooa.org)

Arizona's SEE Awards program — active annual program with convention recognition; good model for mid-size SEAs

### SEAoI

[seaoi.org](https://seaoi.org)

Illinois's Excellence in Structural Engineering Awards — active regional program; great peer for Midwest SEAs

**Elevate Your Profession.**

**Celebrate Your Community.**

**Leave a Lasting Legacy.**

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*A Structural Engineering Excellence Awards program is one of the highest-impact investments your SEA can make in its members and in the future of the profession.*

**Questions? Let's continue the conversation.**

**Thank you.**

