2027 URPA Awards

Award Descriptions & Eligibility Requirements

Nomination Deadline: January 8, 2027

1. Lifetime Achievement

The Lifetime Achievement Award acknowledges a parks and recreation professional who has dedicated their time to improving the quality of their community and supporting the parks and recreation movement in Utah. This individual has shown strong leadership through community outreach, inspiration to others and note-worthy contributions to the field of parks and recreation.

Eligibility Requirements

- Currently retired or retiring in the current year, moving out of the state of Utah or is no longer active in the day-to-day activities of an agency
- Minimum of 10 years of service in the field of parks and recreation
- Minimum of 4 years as a URPA member

2. Department of the Year

The Outstanding Department of the Year Award is one of URPA's highest honors, recognizing member agencies that demonstrate exceptional leadership, innovation, and commitment to excellence in parks and recreation.

This prestigious award celebrates departments that make significant contributions through outstanding programs, facilities, services, and initiatives that enhance quality of life in their communities and advance the parks and recreation profession throughout Utah.

One department is recognized annually in each population classification, celebrating excellence among agencies serving communities of different sizes.

Eligibility Requirements

- Nominated agency must be a current URPA member
- Nominations must represent a single municipality, county, special service district or parks and/or recreation agency.

When preparing a nomination, please consider the accomplishments of all parks and recreation divisions, departments, and services within your agency, including those that may operate under separate administrative departments. Nominations are encouraged to highlight the collective achievements that contribute to your agency's overall success.

3. Outstanding Professional

The Outstanding Professional Award recognizes individuals who demonstrate exceptional leadership, dedication, and contributions to the parks and recreation profession.

This award celebrates professionals who make a meaningful impact through outstanding service to their agencies and communities, professional advocacy, mentorship, and a commitment to advancing the field of parks and recreation.

One individual is recognized in each professional category, honoring excellence across the diverse disciplines within the profession.

Eligibility Requirements

- Current member of URPA (*SFMA for Groundskeeper of the Year)
- At least 3 years as a professional in the field (Waived for Young Professional)
- Young Professional must be age 35 or younger at the time of the annual URPA Conference

4. Outstanding Citizen Advocate/Volunteer

The Outstanding Citizen Advocate/Volunteer Award recognizes an individual, parks and recreation board member, or volunteer who has demonstrated exceptional dedication to supporting and enhancing parks and recreation within their community, agency, or throughout Utah.

Nominees may be recognized for their sustained volunteer service and contributions over time or for their significant impact on a specific project, program, or initiative.

Eligibility Requirements

- Nominee must have served as a volunteer for at least one year.
- Nominating agency must be a current URPA member.

5. Outstanding Program

The Outstanding Program Award recognizes URPA member agencies that demonstrate excellence in developing and delivering recreation programs that create meaningful opportunities for their communities.

This award celebrates programs that address community needs, encourage participation, and enhance quality of life. Through these efforts, agencies demonstrate the value of parks and recreation in providing engaging and beneficial experiences for the communities they serve.

Eligibility Requirements

- Agency is a current URPA Member
- Program must have been successfully offered or completed at least once by the submission deadline.
- Programs must be ongoing, recurring, or offered over multiple days. Single-day events, holiday celebrations, and city festivals should be submitted under the Outstanding Special Event Award.

6. Outstanding Adaptive Program

The Outstanding Adaptive or Inclusive Program Award recognizes URPA member agencies that demonstrate excellence in developing and delivering recreation programs that remove barriers, expand access, and create meaningful opportunities for individuals and communities who may otherwise face challenges participating in recreation.

This award celebrates programs that intentionally address accessibility, inclusion, and underserved community needs through thoughtful adaptations, innovative approaches, and meaningful engagement. Whether designed specifically for individuals with disabilities or to welcome participants facing other barriers to recreation, these programs demonstrate the power of parks and recreation to create opportunities, foster belonging, and enhance quality of life.

Detailed form title: Outstanding Adaptive or Inclusive Program

Eligibility Requirements

- Agency is a current member of URPA
- Program must have been successfully offered or completed at least once by the submission deadline.
- Programs must be ongoing, recurring, or offered over multiple days. Single-day events, holiday celebrations, and city festivals should be submitted under the Outstanding Adaptive or Inclusive Special Event Award.

7. Outstanding Special Event

The Outstanding Special Event Award recognizes URPA member agencies that demonstrate excellence in planning and delivering special events that bring communities together and create memorable experiences.

This award celebrates one-time or annual events that reflect the unique character, spirit, and traditions of a community. Through creativity, collaboration, and meaningful engagement, these events strengthen community connections, encourage participation, and enhance quality of life.

Eligibility Requirements

- Agency is a current URPA Member
- Event must have been successfully held at least once by the submission deadline.
- Eligible events may include one-time or annual celebrations, festivals and other special events that bring communities together.

8. Outstanding Adaptive Special Event

The Outstanding Adaptive or Inclusive Special Event Award recognizes URPA member agencies that demonstrate excellence in planning and delivering accessible and inclusive special events that create meaningful opportunities for individuals and communities who may otherwise face challenges participating in recreation.

This award celebrates one-time or annual events that intentionally address accessibility, inclusion, and underserved community needs through thoughtful adaptations, innovative approaches, and meaningful engagement. Whether designed specifically for individuals with disabilities or to welcome participants facing other barriers to recreation, these events demonstrate the power of parks and recreation to create opportunities, foster belonging, and enhance quality of life.

Detailed form title: Outstanding Adaptive or Inclusive Special Event

Eligibility Requirements

- Agency is a current member of URPA
- Event must have been successfully held at least once by the submission deadline.
- Eligible events may include one-time or annual celebrations, festivals and other special events.

9. Outstanding Facility

The Outstanding Facility Award recognizes URPA member agencies that demonstrate excellence in the planning, design, development, or renovation of recreation facilities.

This prestigious award celebrates exceptional facilities that combine innovative design, functionality, accessibility, and thoughtful use of resources to address community needs and enhance quality of life. Recipients demonstrate how outstanding recreation facilities create welcoming spaces, expand recreational opportunities, and provide lasting benefits to the communities they serve.

Eligibility Requirements

- Agency is a current member of URPA
- The facility must be open to the public by the submission deadline.

10. Outstanding Park, Trail & Open Space

The Outstanding Park, Trail and Open Space Award recognizes URPA member agencies that demonstrate excellence in the planning, design, development, or renovation of public parks and outdoor recreation spaces.

This prestigious award celebrates exceptional parks that combine innovative design, accessibility, environmental stewardship, and thoughtful use of resources to address community needs and enhance quality of life. Recipients demonstrate how outstanding parks create welcoming outdoor spaces, encourage recreation and community connection, and provide lasting benefits to the communities they serve.

Eligibility Requirements

- Agency is a current member of URPA.
- Must be open to the public by the submission deadline.

11. Conservation & Sustainability Award

The Conservation & Sustainability Award recognizes agencies that demonstrate leadership and innovation in protecting natural resources and promoting sustainable practices within their communities.

This award celebrates projects, programs, and initiatives that conserve resources, reduce environmental impact, and create lasting benefits for the community. Through their efforts, recipients demonstrate the important role parks and recreation plays in environmental stewardship and sustainability.

Eligibility Requirements

- Agency is a current member of URPA

12. Innovation of the Year

The Innovation of the Year Award recognizes a creative and innovative program, facility, service, or approach that addresses community needs and demonstrates an agency's commitment to improving parks and recreation.

This award celebrates new ideas, unique solutions, and improvements to existing programs, facilities, or services that enhance recreation opportunities, increase efficiency, or create meaningful benefits for the community.

Eligibility Requirements

- Nominating agency must be a current URPA member.
- The innovation must have been implemented or offered by the nomination deadline.
- Eligible innovations may include new programs, facilities or services as well as creative approaches that improve existing programs, facilities or services.

13. Vendor/Partner of the Year

The Vendor/Partner of the Year Award recognizes a vendor, company, or individual who has made significant contributions to the parks and recreation profession and demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting URPA and its member agencies.

Through leadership, collaboration, and contributions such as equipment, volunteer time, in-kind services, sponsorships, or other resources, the recipient helps strengthen parks and recreation programs, projects, and services that benefit communities.

Eligibility Requirements

Nominees must meet both of the following requirements:

- Be a current vendor or sponsor of a URPA training, conference, or program, or a vendor or sponsor of a current URPA member agency.
- Be a current Corporate Member of URPA.

14. SFMA Groundskeeper of the Year

The SFMA Groundskeeper of the Year Award recognizes an individual who demonstrates exceptional leadership, dedication, and contributions to parks and field maintenance.

This award celebrates professionals who make a meaningful impact through outstanding service to their agencies and communities, professional advocacy, mentorship, and a commitment to advancing the field of parks and recreation.

Eligibility Requirements

- Current member of SFMA.
- At least 3 years as a professional in the field.

15. SFMA Sports Field of the Year

The SFMA Field of the Year Award recognizes outstanding achievements in the design, development, renovation, or ongoing management and maintenance of sports fields.

This award celebrates exceptional sports fields that demonstrate excellence in playing surface quality, safety, functionality, innovation, and responsible resource management. Recipients showcase how thoughtful field design, improvements, and professional maintenance practices enhance athletic experiences, support community recreation, and create lasting value for the communities they serve.

Eligibility Requirements

- Agency is a current member of SFMA
- The facility must be open by the submission deadline