



# 2021 AACE Competition

## *Rules and Guidelines*

Dear ESOP Association Corporate Members,

Welcome to the Annual Awards for Communications Excellence (AACE)! We can't wait to see the creative communication efforts you have put in place in the past year—and neither can your peers.

For those of you who have entered the AACE competition before, this year's categories will look slightly different. We have all had to make changes as a result of the global pandemic, and the AACE competition reflects that reality with a new category focused on COVID-19 Communications. We also have modified the events categories to reflect the many virtual events our members put on in the past year. Our last category change updated the Employee Ownership Marketing category to Community Engagement, to better reflect the entries we were receiving.

We've also extended the deadline to **July 1, 2021** to give you time to prepare your entries in these new categories. The timeframe covered by this award also has been extended, and now runs from Jan. 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021.

The final big change this year is we will move the AACE Competition Awards Dinner to our Employee Owned Conference in Las Vegas this November. The AACE Awards are a very important part of our Association's culture and a valuable way our membership and employee owners receive recognition for their outstanding efforts. With the uncertainty that continues to surround large meetings and conferences, we made the determination that the conference where this celebration can be enjoyed by the largest number of members would be Employee Owned 2021 in Las Vegas. Look for more details on the event later this year.

Good luck entering this year's competition!

# CHANGES FOR THE 2021 COMPETITION

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1. Period under review is extended and runs from Jan. 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021.
2. One Special Event and Series of Special Events Categories have been combined and modified. These categories will now cover in-person and virtual events.
3. New category: COVID Communications. (See below for more information)
4. New category: Community Engagement. (See below for more information)
5. As usual, items submitted for any one category can be included in the Total Communications category. This includes the new categories.
6. This year we request that your submission include your binders and a tri-fold board for the AACE Competition. While you may choose to submit other materials or supporting items as part of your entry, we will no longer be able to return submitted items to your company.
7. Remember to send your materials to our new address:

The International Employee Ownership Center  
200 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 410  
Washington, DC 20001

## RULES AND GUIDELINES

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### **Eligibility**

All current Corporate Members of The ESOP Association may enter.

### **Deadline**

An entry form must be completed, and materials must be shipped no later than June 30, 2021. We strongly urge you to send via FedEx, UPS or USPS parcel with tracking

information to demonstrate shipment date. Entries shipped after the deadline will not be eligible.

### **Cost**

There is no entry fee, but all companies must pay to ship their materials to TEA. Entry materials will no longer be returned.

### **Judging**

Judging is conducted by a panel consisting of TEA members and Leadership. Entries are judged on:

- How clearly and effectively they communicate employee ownership to their audience(s).
- Innovation and use of new methods, ideas, or mediums.
- The amount of creativity and originality evident in the communication.
- The technical quality of the communication.
- How involved employee owners were in creating and executing the communication efforts.
- The quantifiable/measurable success of the communications.

Please note: This is a communication competition, and clear communication counts! The more clearly and concisely you explain your entry to the judges, the more highly it will be scored. Entrants are discouraged from entering materials or programs developed by external consultants or advisors who may have provided the same or very similar communications programs to other ESOP companies. Unique materials professionally produced (such as video, website, or print layout) at the direction and with the involvement of the company are welcome.

### **Prizes**

Winner

- One complimentary full registration to Employee Owned 2021.
- Two tickets to the Awards Gala.
- The coveted crystal AACE obelisk.
- Recognition on TEA's website, newsletter, and social media.

## Runner Up

- Certificate of accomplishment to share with employee owners at your ESOP company.
- Recognition on TEA's website, newsletter, and social media.

## What to Send

1. Fill out the **entry form available on our website**.
2. Prepare a binder for each category you enter. In this binder place information about your communication effort. Include relevant photos, text, and metrics about your project. The first page in each entry should be a short description that provides context about your entry; it should address questions such as:
  - a. What was the intended purpose or goal of the communication? Was there an issue or problem was this communication intended to address?
  - b. Who was this communication intended to reach?
  - c. What challenges were present in addressing this issue? How were they overcome?
  - d. How were employee owners involved in identifying the problem and finding a solution?
  - e. What were the results, if any, of the communication? Measurable results receive higher grades from the judges. (For example, did surveys show that after seeing new educational materials employee owners better understood key ESOP concepts?)
3. You also may submit a tri-fold display as a backdrop for your entry. This display may contain words and images that give the judges a sense of your company's employee ownership culture, or that illustrate specific aspects of one or more of your entries. Tri-fold displays must be no larger than 3' x 4' when open.

# ENTRY CATEGORIES

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There are seven entry categories. Each category is split into two divisions, based on company size. Division A is for companies with 250 or fewer employees; Division B is for companies with more than 250 employees. Each division typically has one winner and one runner up. The categories are:

## **Category 1: Videos**

This award recognizes excellence in the use of original video(s) to explain or promote the ESOP concept to employees or the public. Requirements: Videos must be uploaded to YouTube or some other public site and be no more than five minutes long. Multiple shorter videos can be submitted as long as the total time does not exceed five minutes.

## **Category 2: Printed Materials**

This award recognizes excellence in using original, printed materials to explain or promote the company's ESOP to employee owners, customers, or the community. Consider entering a variety of printed materials, such as brochures, newsletters, books, and the like. The quality, volume, and range of your materials as a package are factors the judges will consider. Only materials printed and distributed during the covered time period as described in the rules will be considered. Note: Entries in the Employee Ownership Month Poster competition are not considered in this category, but if a poster competition submission was part of a larger printed campaign it may be included within this collection of printed materials.

## **Category 3: Intranets**

This award recognizes company intranets that excel at educating employee owners about the company ESOP and excel at spurring employee owners to engage in the company's ownership culture. Judges will consider factors including interactivity, prominence of the ESOP, and mechanisms to encourage frequent use, among others. Requirements: Provide a link to your intranet (with a password, if needed), or print outs of your intranet pages. In the interest of security, it is acceptable to black out private information on the print outs. We also accept video submissions providing a guided tour of your intranet.

#### **NEW FOR 2021 Category 4: Community Engagement**

This award recognizes excellence in how your company interacts with your customers, your community, and your local leaders. Materials must reference the company's ESOP or employee ownership. Judges will appreciate how your company explains the additional value your customers or community receives as a product of being employee owned. Public affairs campaigns that include local philanthropy with an employee ownership message, news media outreach, and advocacy efforts are welcome. Other materials or communications tactics that include references or outreach such as brochures, marketing videos, advertisements, company signage, banners, use of social media, and your company webpage help to flesh out the full range of your company's Community Engagement strategy.

#### **NEW FOR 2021 Category 5: Virtual and In-Person Event(s)**

This award recognizes excellence in organizing and executing one or more significant ownership events, such as a special celebration, ESOP community service day, etc. While events from any time of year are eligible, many companies find that their Employee Ownership Month events are excellent options for this category. Given the nature of 2020 and social distancing, virtual and in-person events qualify.

#### **NEW FOR 2021 Category 6: COVID Communications**

The past year was unlike any other, filled with new challenges. This category was specifically created to help highlight how your company adapted to the communications challenges presented by the global pandemic. Any changes you made to adapt to these unusual times can count toward this entry. For example, how did you make employee owners aware of new safety procedures and policies? How did you stay in contact if some employee owners worked from home? How did you maintain your culture and continue to engage employee owners, while remaining safe? How did you adapt your annual share price reveal, in light of COVID? A winning entry in this category will paint a clear picture of the challenges the pandemic presented to your business and how your company effectively communicated to reach your goals.

#### **NEW FOR 2021 Category 7: Total Communications**

This award recognizes overall excellence in a company's efforts to educate the public and employee owners about a company's ESOP, ownership culture, and the value its customers and the community gain from employee ownership. This year

we will also be taking into account how ESOP companies stayed connected during the pandemic. Virtual events and COVID communications have become normal for many companies and we want to celebrate your successes. Materials submitted in other categories automatically are considered in this category. However, you must submit materials specifically for this category, in a separate binder.

## TIPS FOR ENTERING

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### **Binders**

In addition to the written portion of your binders we encourage you to submit print, digital, websites and intranets, images, words, audio, video, etc. Examples of potential items to submit include: orientation information; training on culture and behavioral expectations; infographics; materials explaining ESOP benefits; advertisements; documentation of special events and meetings; materials explaining the company stock, finances, and valuation; press releases, and the like.

### **Tri-fold Displays**

Each year, companies tell us they wish they had spent more time on their entry, and less time on their tri-fold display. The display is “nice to have,” while the material in your binder is a “need to have.” Many companies have won without a tri-fold.

### **Less Is More**

The volunteer judges must review and evaluate many entries in a single category. That means judges have only a few minutes to decide if your entry merits further review or should be put aside. So put your best foot forward—concisely.

### **Learn from the Past**

See the [judges' comments for past entries](#) on our website.

### **Questions?**

Email us at [media@esopassociation.org](mailto:media@esopassociation.org)