

RISE & LEAD WOMEN

Recognising inclusive leadership, women's advancement and meaningful impact

Rise & Lead Awards Entry Kit 2026

A practical guide for organisations, teams and individuals preparing an award submission.

Entries open 15 May 2026	Entry deadline 15 June 2026	Awards Ceremony 10 September 2026
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2026

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WELCOME

About the Awards

The Rise & Lead Awards celebrate organisations and individuals taking intentional, measurable and meaningful action to advance women's leadership, inclusion, workplace equity and social impact.

Presented as part of the annual Rise & Lead Summit, the Awards spotlight companies, leaders and changemakers who are creating better systems, fairer opportunities and more inclusive cultures where women can rise, lead and contribute at their full potential.

What this kit covers	What the Jury will look for
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who can enter• 2026 award categories• How to prepare your submission• Entry questions and evidence• Rules, judging and FAQs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear challenge or opportunity• Strong, practical approach• Evidence of measurable impact• Leadership accountability• Sustainability and learning

About Rise & Lead Women

Rise & Lead Women is an international leadership platform and foundation based in the Netherlands. Our mission is to increase the representation of women leaders from diverse backgrounds in the workplace, marketplace and wider society.

We work with organisations to advance women's leadership, inclusion and economic empowerment through leadership development programmes, executive events, cross-industry insights, advocacy, strategic partnerships and recognition platforms such as the Rise & Lead Awards.

AT A GLANCE

Key dates and reasons to enter

Entries open	15 May 2026
Entry deadline	15 June 2026
Jury review period	16 to 23 June 2026
Finalists announced	30 June 2026
Awards Ceremony	10 September 2026
Rise & Lead Summit 2026	10 September 2026

Why enter?

- Showcase your commitment to women's leadership and inclusion.
- Recognise the leaders, teams and initiatives driving real change.
- Strengthen your employer brand and leadership reputation.
- Demonstrate accountability to employees, stakeholders and partners.
- Celebrate progress in women's advancement, workplace culture and social impact.
- Gain visibility among senior leaders, HR decision-makers, DEI professionals and business executives.
- Share your work as an example that can inspire other organisations.

The Awards provide a platform for organisations that are doing the work and are ready to be recognised for it.

ELIGIBILITY

Who can enter?

The Rise & Lead Awards are open to organisations across sectors, including:

Corporates	Corporate Foundations
Professional services firms	Multinational organisations

Entries may be submitted directly by an internal team. A consultancy, agency or partner may also submit an entry on behalf of a client, provided they have the client's permission.

Easy steps to enter

1	<p>Choose your category</p> <p>Review the award categories and select the one that best fits your organisation, initiative, team or nominee.</p>
2	<p>Prepare your submission</p> <p>Use the entry questions to prepare a clear, evidence-based story.</p>
3	<p>Gather your evidence</p> <p>Include focused evidence such as data, employee feedback, reports, policies, testimonials, videos or case studies.</p>
4	<p>Submit before the deadline</p> <p>Complete and submit your entry through the official Rise & Lead Awards entry process by 15 June 2026.</p>
5	<p>Await finalist announcement</p> <p>Eligible entries will be reviewed by the Distinguished Jury. Finalists will be announced on 30 June 2026.</p>

CATEGORIES

2026 Award categories

The 2026 Rise & Lead Awards recognise organisations, leaders and initiatives advancing women's leadership, inclusive culture, social impact and meaningful change.

1. Best Company for Advancing Women Leaders

This award recognises organisations that are actively advancing women into leadership and creating clear pathways for women to rise into senior decision-making roles.

Judges will be looking for evidence of:

- Clear commitment to advancing women into leadership
- Progress toward gender-balanced leadership or 50:50 representation
- Women represented in senior, executive or board-level roles
- Structured leadership development, mentoring or sponsorship initiatives
- Fair and transparent promotion or succession pathways
- Accountability from senior leaders and managers
- Measurable impact on women's progression, retention, visibility or leadership readiness

Relevant examples

Examples may include women's leadership programmes, sponsorship initiatives, succession planning, executive development, board readiness programmes, promotion equity work, return-to-leadership pathways, leadership visibility initiatives or measurable progress in increasing the number of women in senior roles.

2. Inclusive Culture Award

This award recognises organisations creating workplace cultures where people feel respected, supported, included and able to thrive.

Judges will be looking for evidence of:

- A stronger sense of belonging
- Wellbeing initiatives with clear employee impact
- Parental support or caregiving support
- Flexible or inclusive ways of working
- Employee voice and psychological safety
- Practical action to remove barriers
- Impact on engagement, retention, trust or employee experience

Relevant examples

Examples may include parental leave improvements, return-to-work support, menopause support, wellbeing programmes, flexible working policies, employee resource groups, belonging initiatives, inclusive benefits, mental health support, caregiver support or employee listening programmes.

CATEGORIES

3. Pay Equity Award

This award recognises organisations taking measurable and transparent action to close pay gaps and ensure fair pay practices.

Judges will be looking for evidence of:

- Measuring and monitoring pay gaps
- Fair and transparent pay practices
- Leadership accountability for pay equity
- Practical action beyond compliance
- Reduction in unexplained pay gaps
- Clear communication and employee trust
- Sustainable systems for long-term equity

Relevant examples

Examples may include pay gap audits, pay transparency initiatives, compensation reviews, equitable promotion systems, pay equity tools, salary benchmarking, or innovative approaches to ensuring fair pay.

4. Social Impact Award

This award recognises organisations using their influence, resources, partnerships or business practices to create positive impact beyond their own workplace.

Judges will be looking for evidence of:

- A clear social challenge or need being addressed
- A practical and intentional response
- Partnerships or community engagement
- Measurable impact beyond the organisation
- Connection to equity, inclusion or women's advancement
- Sustainability of the initiative
- Evidence of learning, accountability and future commitment

Relevant examples

Examples may include community programmes, education initiatives, economic empowerment projects, corporate partnerships, supplier diversity initiatives, access-to-work programmes or social mobility initiatives.

5. Changemaker Award

This award recognises an individual, team or organisation that has taken bold, practical and meaningful action to drive inclusion, equity or leadership change.

Judges will be looking for evidence of:

- A clear change the nominee set out to make
- Courage, initiative and leadership
- Practical action, not just advocacy
- Influence on people, systems or culture
- Measurable or visible impact
- How others have benefited from their work
- Sustainability or wider influence of the change

Relevant examples

Examples may include an internal change leader, HR or DEI leader, employee network lead, founder, executive sponsor, programme leader, campaigner or team that has driven meaningful progress within an organisation or community.

6. Ally of the Year Award

This award recognises an individual who has actively used their influence, voice, position or resources to support the advancement of women and underrepresented groups.

Judges will be looking for evidence of:

- Active sponsorship or advocacy
- Use of influence to open doors for others
- Challenging exclusion, bias or unfairness
- Supporting women's leadership or underrepresented talent
- Consistent action over time
- Impact on individuals, teams or organisational culture
- Credibility and trust among those they support

Relevant examples

Examples may include a senior leader who sponsors women into leadership, a male ally advancing gender equity, an executive who challenges exclusionary systems, a manager who creates access to opportunity or a colleague who consistently advocates for underrepresented voices.

SUBMISSION

Entry questions

Each submission should answer the following four questions. Strong entries explain the challenge, the action taken, the impact achieved and what comes next.

Question 1: Context and Challenge

What challenge, opportunity or gap were you trying to address?

- The business, workplace or community context
- The problem, gap or opportunity identified
- Who was affected
- Why action was needed
- What goals or outcomes you wanted to achieve

Suggested word count: 250 to 300 words

Question 2: Action and Approach

What did you do, and how did you do it?

- The actions taken
- Who was involved
- How employees, leaders, communities or stakeholders were engaged
- How the work was designed and delivered
- What made the approach relevant, thoughtful or innovative
- Any challenges or barriers you had to overcome

Suggested word count: 500 to 700 words

Question 3: Results and Impact

What changed as a result of this work?

- Quantitative results such as representation, promotion, retention, engagement, participation or impact data
- Qualitative results such as employee feedback, testimonials or leadership reflections
- Impact on women's leadership, inclusion, belonging or social progress
- Impact on workplace culture or employee experience
- Impact on business performance, reputation or stakeholder trust
- How progress was measured

Suggested word count: 500 to 700 words

Question 4: Learning and Next Steps

What have you learned, and what comes next?

- Key lessons learned
- What you would do differently
- How the initiative or action will be sustained
- How it will be expanded or improved
- What the organisation, team or nominee is committed to next

Suggested word count: 250 to 300 words

Category-specific evidence checklist

<p>Advancing Women Leaders Representation, promotion, succession, sponsorship and retention data.</p>	<p>Inclusive Culture Belonging, wellbeing, parental support, employee voice and engagement data.</p>
<p>Social Impact People reached, community outcomes, partnerships and beneficiary feedback.</p>	<p>Changemaker or Ally Before-and-after examples, advocacy, sponsorship, testimonials and visible impact.</p>

PREPARATION

What makes a strong entry?

- Tell a clear story from challenge to action to impact.
- Show why the work mattered.
- Include specific examples rather than general statements.
- Provide measurable results where possible.
- Include employee, stakeholder or community voices.
- Show leadership commitment and accountability.
- Explain how the initiative created meaningful change.
- Be honest about challenges and lessons learned.
- Avoid jargon and overly polished corporate language.
- Demonstrate progress, not perfection.

Supporting evidence

Supporting evidence should strengthen your submission, not replace a clear written entry. Keep documents focused and relevant.

Before and after data	Community impact data	Internal communications
Employee survey results	Leadership reports	Photos or videos
Programme outcomes	Employee testimonials	Policy changes
Promotion or retention data	Stakeholder testimonials	External recognition
Representation data	Case studies	Media coverage

JUDGING

Judging process and scoring criteria

The Rise & Lead Awards are judged by an independent Distinguished Jury made up of respected leaders and professionals with experience in leadership, inclusion, workplace culture, business, HR, DEI, social impact and organisational change.

1	Review of eligible entries
2	Scoring against category criteria
3	Jury discussion and moderation
4	Selection of finalists and winners
5	Winner announcement at the Awards Ceremony

General scoring criteria

Clarity of Challenge	Has the entrant clearly explained the issue, gap or opportunity they wanted to address?
Strength of Approach	Was the response thoughtful, practical and well designed?
Evidence of Impact	Did the work lead to meaningful and measurable progress?
Sustainability and Learning	Can the work be sustained, scaled or used as a model for others?

RULES

Rules for entering

- All entries must be submitted by the official deadline.
- Entries must relate to work already underway or completed. Future plans may be included only as part of the next steps section.
- Entries should be truthful and accurate.
- Entrants may submit more than one entry across different categories.
- The same initiative may be submitted in more than one category if it is relevant, but the entry should be adapted to match the category criteria.
- Consultancies, agencies or partners may submit on behalf of a client with the client's consent.
- The organisation or individual named in the submission will be the organisation or individual recognised in finalist and winner communications.
- All entries will be reviewed by the Distinguished Jury.
- The Jury's decision is final.
- Information submitted will be treated confidentially by the Awards team and Jury members.
- Rise & Lead Women may request permission to share finalist or winner stories publicly. No confidential information will be published without approval.

Hints and tips

Be specific, use data where possible, tell the human story, show the journey, be honest about challenges, connect the work to business or social priorities, avoid jargon and focus on impact rather than activity.

FAQS

Frequently asked questions

Who can enter the Rise & Lead Awards?

Organisations across sectors can enter, including corporates, corporate foundations, professional services firms and multinational organisations.

Can we enter more than one category?

Yes. You may enter more than one category if your initiative, organisation or nominee is relevant across multiple areas.

Can the same initiative be entered into more than one category?

Yes, but the submission should be adapted to reflect the criteria of each category.

Can a consultancy submit on behalf of a client?

Yes, with the client's permission.

Do we need to provide supporting documents?

Supporting documents are encouraged but not required. A clear, well-written entry with strong evidence can stand on its own.

Will our information be kept confidential?

Yes. Entries will be treated confidentially by the Awards team and Jury. Any public case study or promotional content will only be shared with approval.

Will finalists need to present to the Jury?

At this stage, entries will be judged based on the written submission and supporting evidence. If presentations are required, finalists will be informed in advance.

What do winners receive?

Winners receive recognition at the Rise & Lead Awards Ceremony, visibility through Rise & Lead Women channels and the opportunity to be highlighted as an organisation, leader or initiative advancing women's leadership, inclusion and meaningful impact.

Need help?

For questions about the Rise & Lead Awards, categories or entry process, please contact:

Rise & Lead Women Awards Team

Email: awards@riseandleadwomen.com

Website: www.riseandleadwomen.com

We look forward to receiving your entry and learning more about the work your organisation, team or nominee is doing to advance women's leadership, inclusion and meaningful impact.