



DEVELOPMENT WEST COAST  
**Leading light**  
BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2026

**2026 Entry Guidelines and  
Conditions of Entry**

**Note:** In these Guidelines, “business” includes organisations, charities, trusts, incorporated societies, and not-for-profits unless the context requires otherwise.

## Welcome

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Thank you for considering an entry in the West Coast Leading Light Business Excellence Awards. These Awards recognise strong business practice, celebrate success, and give businesses a chance to step back and reflect on what they do well and where they are heading next.

These Guidelines follow the same section order as the entry form so you can keep them open beside you while you complete your application. The aim is to keep the process straightforward and practical, whether you are a one-person operation, a growing employer, or a larger organisation.

For administrative help with the entry platform or clarification of the entry requirements, please contact the Event Manager, Alicia Mitchell, at [info@leadinglights.org.nz](mailto:info@leadinglights.org.nz). The Event Manager can explain the process and the information requested, but cannot influence the judging outcome.

## How to use these documents

- Read these Guidelines before starting the entry form.
- Choose one Organisational Excellence category based on your FTE size.
- Decide whether you also want to enter one or more of the Special Awards.
- Draft your answers in plain language. You do not need to write in corporate or technical language.
- Use specific examples wherever possible. Judges are looking for clarity, credibility, and evidence of sound business practice.
- Only upload supporting documents that directly help explain your entry.

## Key dates

Entries open: Wednesday, 6 May 2026

Entries close: 4pm on Wednesday, 10 June 2026

Finalists announced: Monday, 20 July 2026

Awards event: Thursday, 24 September 2026

## Eligibility and Conditions of Entry

- Any sole trader, partnership, incorporated society, not-for-profit, non-government organisation, trust, company, or other business entity with a place of business based and trading in the West Coast region may enter, subject to these Conditions.
- A business that is part of a wider national or international organisation must be able to show that its West Coast operation functions as a distinct business unit for the purposes of this entry and that relevant financial information can be provided for that operation.
- Entrants must provide true and accurate information. Any significant liabilities, pending litigation, insolvency matters, or other issues that could materially affect the integrity of the entry should be disclosed where relevant.
- Entrants must comply with the published entry process, criteria, and deadlines.
- All information provided in the entry is subject to verification. The organiser or judges may request clarification or supplementary information where needed for fair assessment.
- If required, finalists agree to reasonable engagement in the judging process, which may include follow-up questions or a site visit.
- Judges will not assess an entry where a conflict of interest exists. Judges' decisions are final and no correspondence will be entered into regarding the outcome.
- A business may not enter a category or award where it is the named sponsor of that category or award.
- Category winners may also be considered for the Supreme Award.
- Entrants agree to cooperate with awards-related publicity if shortlisted, named a finalist, or selected as a winner, subject to approval of the information used publicly.
- All entrants agree not to make adverse public statements that could damage the integrity of the Awards process or event.

## Privacy and confidentiality

Information collected through the entry form, including financial information and supporting documents, is collected for the purpose of administering the Awards, confirming eligibility, verifying that an entrant is solvent, and supporting assessment of any aspects of the application that relate to financial performance.

Entry information will be held in strict confidence and accessed only by authorised award administration personnel and the judging panel on a need-to-know basis. Information will not be used for unrelated purposes without consent, unless required by law.

Entrants are encouraged to provide their latest annual financial accounts to support the application. Draft financial statements will be accepted. Financial information is requested to verify solvency and provide context where financial performance is relevant to the story of the business.

Electronic copies of entry information should be securely retained only for as long as necessary for award administration and then securely deleted in accordance with the organiser's records management and privacy obligations.

## Judging overview

The Awards are intended to be accessible to businesses of different sizes, sectors, and structures. Judges are not looking for identical types of evidence from every entrant. They are looking for a clear and believable explanation of how each business works, what it is trying to achieve, and what outcomes show business excellence in that context.

A small business with simple but effective practices can score strongly if those practices are well understood, consistently applied, and supported by good examples. A larger business may have more formal systems and documentation, but size alone does not make an entry stronger.

Across the form, judges will generally consider:

- Understanding of the business and its context
- Clarity of direction and decision-making
- Evidence of good practice and effective delivery
- Relevance and credibility of examples provided
- Results, outcomes, or indicators of impact
- Overall consistency of the entry

## Section 1 – Business Information

This section confirms who you are, how to contact you, your eligibility, and the basic information needed to administer your entry. It also collects the short summary and media files that may be used if you are shortlisted.

Tips for Section 1:

- Use the legal name and trading name if both are relevant.
- Provide a straightforward description of what your business does.
- State your FTEs as clearly as you can. If you rely heavily on contractors or seasonal labour, note that as context.

- For the public profile summary, write in plain language for a general audience.
- Use clear file names for your logo and photos.

## Section 2 – Category Entry for Organisational Excellence

You must choose one Organisational Excellence category and answer all parts of this section. The categories are:

- NZME Small Enterprise – less than 6 FTEs
- Medium Enterprise – 6 to 15 FTEs
- Duncan Cotterill Large Enterprise – more than 15 FTEs

Aim to keep your total response for this section to around 1,000 words or 5,000 characters. You do not need to fill every answer box to the maximum. Concise, relevant responses are often easier for judges to assess.

### 2.1 Business context and direction

Explain what your business does, the environment you operate in, and what your main priorities are. This helps judges quickly understand the business and what success looks like for you.

Examples:

- A two-person mechanic business might explain that its priorities are reliable turnaround, repeat customers, safe work practices, and steady growth that does not compromise service quality.
- A 20-person office-based business might explain its services, target client groups, geographic reach, and the priorities guiding the next one to three years.

### 2.2 How your business creates value for customers, clients, or the community

Describe how you understand needs and deliver value. Think about service quality, relationships, responsiveness, product quality, trust, reputation, or how you tailor what you do. If you are a community or not-for-profit organisation, explain the value or outcomes you create for the people or communities you serve.

### 2.3 How you run the business effectively

Describe the practical systems, routines, and ways of working that help the business operate well. This can include job planning, budgeting, communication, technology, compliance, workflow, reporting, or quality controls. Focus on what actually happens in your business.

### 2.4 People, culture, health, safety and wellbeing

Explain how you create a positive and safe work environment. For larger employers, this may include recruitment, development, communication, wellbeing initiatives, leadership practices, and health and safety systems. For a very small business, this may simply be how you organise work safely,

manage fatigue, maintain standards, support one another, and work with contractors or family members.

### 2.5 Improvement, innovation and resilience

Innovation does not need to be complex. Judges are interested in practical improvements that made the business better, stronger, more responsive, or more efficient. This could be a new service, a better process, an investment in technology, a smarter scheduling method, a new revenue stream, or a successful response to difficult conditions.

### 2.6 Results and one example that brings your entry to life

This is where you pull the story together. Describe the results or outcomes that best reflect your business excellence. Use measures where you can, but practical indicators are acceptable when exact data is unavailable. It is often helpful to finish with one example that shows the business at its best.

Examples:

- Repeat customers or improved retention
- Better turnaround times or productivity
- Reduced waste or fewer errors
- Strong staff retention or improved capability
- Safer work practices or reduced incidents
- Successful delivery of a change or project
- Positive community or stakeholder impact

### Suggested supporting information for Section 2

- Strategic priorities or business plan extracts
- Customer feedback or testimonials
- Policies or process documents
- Certifications, accreditations, or awards
- Project summaries or improvement initiatives
- Marketing material or evidence of brand positioning

## Section 3 – Special Awards Entry

You may enter one, two, or all three Special Awards. Complete only the sections you select in the entry form.

- Greymouth Star Rising Star Award
- MBD Contracting People First Award
- Department of Conservation Sustainability Award

For each selected Special Award, use a case study or story structure. A strong response often covers four simple points:

- What was the challenge, opportunity, need, or goal?
- What did you do and why?
- How did you put it into practice?
- What changed or what impact did it have?

### 3.1 Greymouth Star Rising Star Award

This award recognises a business operating for five years or less that has achieved strong growth or traction through effective business practice and delivery. Judges may look for market fit, momentum, customer response, clear direction, innovation, and signs of sustainable development.

### 3.2 MBD Contracting People First Award

This award recognises leadership, people practices, and a safe and supportive workplace culture that contributes to business success. Judges may look for strong leadership behaviours, workforce development, culture, communication, wellbeing, health and safety, and evidence that these practices make a real difference.

### 3.3 Department of Conservation Sustainability Award

This award recognises products, services, strategies, or initiatives that reduce environmental impact and improve long-term sustainability. Judges may look for practical action, relevance to the business, measurable or observable outcomes, long-term thinking, and the extent to which the initiative is embedded in the way the business operates.

### Suggested supporting information for Section 3

- Project plans or summaries
- Staff survey results or wellbeing information
- Health and safety statistics or initiatives
- Environmental data, photos, or certifications
- Media articles, testimonials, or community feedback

## Section 4 – Financial Information

This section is intended to confirm that your business is financially sound and to give judges appropriate context where financial performance forms part of your business story. It is not intended to disadvantage businesses that are smaller, newer, seasonal, grant-funded, or structured differently from a traditional for-profit business.

You will be asked to provide commentary on your financial and strategic results, together with revenue, gross profit percentage, and net profit information for the latest financial year and up to two prior years if applicable.

Guidance for completing this section:

- If you were not trading in an earlier year, write N/A or 0 as appropriate.
- If you are a not-for-profit, you may write NFP for net profit and explain the financial sustainability measures that are more meaningful for your business.
- If gross profit percentage is not a useful or standard measure for your business, state N/A and briefly explain that in your commentary if helpful.
- If figures have changed significantly between years, provide short context rather than leaving judges to guess.
- Attach your latest annual financial accounts if possible. Draft financial statements will be accepted.

The commentary box is your chance to explain the numbers in plain language. For example, you might explain an investment year, a major contract, a difficult trading period, a successful expansion, or how productivity or market position has changed over time.

## Section 5 – Entry Checklist and Acknowledgement

This final section confirms that you have reviewed the Guidelines, that the information supplied is accurate, and that you understand how your information may be used for award administration and awards-related publicity. It also confirms that you understand the deadline for edits and final submission.

### Practical advice for a strong entry

- Be clear rather than impressive. Plain English is easier for judges to assess than technical or heavily promotional language.
- Use examples. A short, specific example is often stronger than a long general statement.
- Do not worry if some areas are less developed. Explain honestly what is most relevant to your business.

- If you are a small business, describe the practical routines, standards, and decisions that keep the business strong. That is strategy too.
- If you are a larger business, focus on what matters most rather than trying to document everything you do.
- Only attach supporting information that directly supports your story.

## What happens next

After entries close, submissions will be checked for completeness and then provided to the judging panel. Judges may request clarification or additional information where needed. Finalists and winners will be determined through the published judging process. Shortlisted entrants and finalists will be contacted using the details provided in Section 1 of the entry form.