



E-Day Entrepreneurial Excellence Awards are a tradition in Northwest Indiana since 1991 of recognizing the achievements of outstanding entrepreneurs and small business owners. The awards and event are hosted by the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center (NW ISBDC) in partnership with:

- **E-Day Steering Committee members, who are from regional universities, legal, business, banking and accounting communities**
- **E-Day Sponsors**
- **E-Day media partners**

2026 E-Day Entrepreneurial Excellence Awards nominations are open **until Tuesday, August 25, 2026.**

**Nomination Process:** Anyone may nominate an individual or company by submitting a completed nomination form. We have received nominations from chambers of commerce, attorneys, accountants, bankers, customers, employees, trade organizations and other members of the community. Business owners are welcome to nominate themselves.

In addition to the completed nomination form, 1-2 good quality digital photos are requested. Letters of recommendation, testimonials, media articles and company materials are welcome as supporting documentation.

Nomination packages may be emailed to [northwest@isbdc.org](mailto:northwest@isbdc.org). **They must be received by Tuesday, August 25, 2026.**

## Who is eligible?

- **Any individual or company who is classified as a small business under the guidelines of the U.S. Small Business Administration (98% of businesses in Indiana area classified as small).**
- **Businesses must be located in Northwest Indiana's seven-county area (Lake, Porter, La Porte, Starke, Jasper, Pulaski and Newton counties). We look for businesses with at least a 3 year track record of growth.**

## E-Day Entrepreneurial Award Categories:

- **Small Business Person of the Year**
- **Entrepreneurial Success**
- **Small Business Exporter**
- **Young Entrepreneur**
- **Small Business Advocate**
- **Advocate for Youth Entrepreneurship**
- **Veteran Owned Small Business**
- **Family-Owned Business**
- **Emerging Small Business**

These categories have some eligibility requirements specific to the category.

## Financial Information:

Summary financial information is a necessary part of the nomination package in order to evaluate a company's strength and growth. We request only summary financial information for the past three years and do not require financial statements.

## Selection Process:

The E-Day Steering Committee reviews all nominations and selects the recipients for each category. Committee decisions are based on the track record of growth and growth potential of the company, overall economic impact of the business (in terms of investment, job creation), innovation, how the company has handled adversity, and community contributions.

## Confidentiality:

The NW ISBDC and the E-Day Entrepreneurial Awards Committee take great care to ensure that all nomination information remains confidential. All committee members sign a non-disclosure agreement. The NW ISBDC destroys confidential information when the process is completed.

# The Nomination Packet

All nominations must be typewritten into the fillable form available at [www.edayleaders.com](http://www.edayleaders.com) or in a document that contains the items below. Incomplete nominations will not be considered.

All evaluation/selection criteria must be addressed specifically (see guidelines for each category). A complete nomination packet will include:

## 1. COVER SHEET (included in packet)

- The Award for which the nomination is being made
- The nominee's full name, title, business and home addresses with telephone and e-mail
- The nominator's name, title, place of business, business address, telephone and e-mail
- List any SBA assistance that has been provided (example, received a 7(a) loan, or business counseling from SBDC)
- Brief description of the nominee's business

## 2. PHOTOGRAPHS

One-two original head shot photos of the nominee, preferably high resolution digital photos. Email to [northwest@isbdc.org](mailto:northwest@isbdc.org) at least 300 dpi; photocopies are not acceptable. Additional photos of the nominee's company and employees are helpful.

## 3. NOMINATION FORM

The nomination forms are fillable pdf's with questions related to each award category.

## 4. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION (not to exceed 10 pages) requested

Any other supporting documentation deemed significant by the nominator, such as news clips, letters of recommendation and other evidence of the appropriateness of the nomination.

If you have any questions, please contact Lorri Feldt at 219 644-3515 or email [northwest@isbdc.org](mailto:northwest@isbdc.org).

**PLEASE SUBMIT NOMINATIONS BY AUGUST 25, 2026!**

# Financial Requirements

Financial summary information is necessary to evaluate the strength and growth of a small business. This summary format is included in each category nomination form, except for the Advocate categories, where financials are not needed.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY			
Year	2023	2024	2025
Number of Employees			
Total Sales			
Net Profit (Before Tax)			
Total Assets			
Total Liabilities			
Net Worth			

# Small Business Person of the Year

Any individual who owns and operates, or who bears principal responsibility for operating a small business, may be nominated. Partners, who jointly own and operate a small business may be nominated as a team, so long as the number of individuals does not exceed four. A nominee for Small Business Person of the Year must own or operate a business defined as “small” under the applicable SBA size standards. While receipt of SBA assistance is not required, it is preferred. Consult the ISBDC office for assistance, if needed.

## **EVALUATION/SELECTION CRITERIA FOR SMALL BUSINESS PERSON OF THE YEAR** **In evaluating the nomination, judges will look for:**

### **1. A substantiated history as an established business:**

- Number of years in business
- Sustained expansion, addition of territories, growth in square footage occupied
- Steady growth in net worth over three years

### **2. Growth in number of employees to gauge the impact of the business on the job market:**

- Sustained over a minimum of three years
- Increase over the three years must be in excess of growth in Gross National Product

### **3. Increases in sales and/or unit volume that display growth over the last three years:**

- Consistent growth in net income for a minimum of three years

### **4. Innovation of product or service that illustrates the creativity and resourcefulness of the nominee:**

- Specific description of uniqueness of product or service
- Explanation of how product or service fits a unique niche

### **5. Examples of problems faced in the nominee’s business and the methods used to solve them:**

- Specific description of financial, physical, legal or other crisis
- Describe actions taken by the nominee to resolve the crisis

### **6. Contributions to community-oriented projects that evidence the use of personal time and resources:**

- Listing of specific contributions of money, time, or resources to charitable causes
- Membership in councils, boards and clubs providing support and services to the community

# Entrepreneurial Success Award

Individuals meeting the following two criteria may be nominated: They must own and operate businesses initially launched as a small business according to SBA size standards which have subsequently developed into large businesses; and they must have received SBA assistance.

## **EVALUATION/SELECTION CRITERIA FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS AWARD** **In evaluating the nomination, judges will look for:**

### **1. A substantiated history as an established business:**

- Number of years in business
- Sustained expansion, addition of territories, growth in square footage occupied
- Steady growth in net worth over three years

### **2. Growth in number of employees to gauge the impact of the business on the job market:**

- Sustained over a minimum of three years
- Increase over the three years must be in excess of growth in Gross National Product

### **3. Documentation of the type(s) and amount(s) of SBA assistance received by the business and the year(s) in which they were received.**

### **4. Innovation of product or service offered — an illustration of the creativity and imagination of the nominee:**

- Specific description of uniqueness of product or service
- Explanation of how product or service fits a niche not being adequately addressed by the competition

### **5. Examples of problems faced in the nominee's business and the methods used to solve them:**

- Specific description of financial, physical, legal or other crisis
- Describe actions taken by the nominee to resolve the crisis

### **6. Contributions to community-oriented projects that is evidenced by the use of his/her personal time and resources:**

- Listing of specific contributions of money, time, or resources to charitable causes
- Membership in councils, boards and clubs providing support and services to the community

# Small Business Awards Evaluation Criteria

## **SMALL BUSINESS EXPORTER OF THE YEAR**

**Any small business owner who operates a business engaged in exporting.**

- Increased sales, profits and/or growth of employment because of exporting
- Description of the products exported and markets served
- Creative overseas marketing strategies
- Effective solutions to export-related problems
- How the business has coped with financial, legal or other adversity
- SBA or state assistance used
- Contributions to the community

## **YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR**

**This individual must serve as a majority owner and bear principal responsibility for operating a small business with a two-year track record, and who has not have reached the age of 30 by June 1, 2025.**

- Evidence of success as measured by sales/profits
- Increased employment opportunities created by the nominee's business
- Development and/or utilization of innovative or creative business methods
- Demonstrated entrepreneurial potential necessary for long-term success and economic growth
- How the business has coped with financial, legal or other adversity
- Contributions to the community

## **SMALL BUSINESS ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR**

**Any individual or organization dedicated to the support of the small business community in the Northwest Indiana, including, but not limited to, trade, professional or business organizations.**

- Significant contribution to assist, promote and advocate for the interests of small business owners
- Amount and quality of assistance given outside of regular business duties
- No financial information is needed

## **ADVOCATE FOR YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

**Any individual dedicated to the support of youth entrepreneurship and mentoring activities, who encourages young people to create, innovate and form small businesses.**

- Significant contribution to assist, promote and advocate for the interests of small business owners
- Amount and quality of assistance given outside of regular business duties
- No financial information is needed

# Small Business Awards Evaluation Criteria

## **VETERAN OWNED SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**

**A small business must be at least 51% owned and run by a U.S. veteran, service-disabled veteran, reservist, or active-duty service member.**

- Evidence of success as measured by sales and profits, including current and past financial position
- Increased employment opportunities/growth in employees
- Demonstrated potential necessary for long-term business success and economic growth
- Innovation and response to financial, legal or other adversity
- Contributions to the community; highlight any veteran-related activities if possible.

## **FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**

**Any family-owned and operated business that has been passed on from one generation to another may be nominated. The owner must also serve as a majority owner and bear principal responsibility for operating a small business with at least a 10-year track record.**

- Evidence of success as measured by sales and profits
- Increased employment opportunities for family members and non-family members for the nominee's business
- Demonstrated potential necessary for long-term business success and economic growth
- How the business has coped with financial, legal or other adversity
- Contributions to the community

## **EMERGING SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**

**Any business less than 10 years old that has fewer than 25 employees and less than \$2.5 million in sales may be nominated.**

- Evidence of consistent overall growth in both number of employees and sales
- Demonstrated potential necessary for long-term business success and economic growth
- Innovation and response to adversity
- How the business has coped with financial, legal or other adversity
- Contributions to the community