



Tom Wellman “Spirit of Membership Award” Program

Membership is the “lifeblood” of any nonprofit organization, but for an organization to flourish, its membership must be organized, engaged, and active. The Spirit of Membership Award recognizes and honors those state and local Retired affiliates that while building membership have built an innovative program to engage, involve, grow, and advocate around professional issues within their organization, their state, and their communities.

Goal: To recognize and honor state and local Retired affiliates that have developed successful, innovative, and productive programs which adhere to the NEA Leadership Competency Framework, which are available via at this [URL](#), and exhibit positive membership results in one or more of the following areas:

- **Leadership** – The program successfully exhibits strategies that have resulted in organizing or mobilizing members.
- **Involvement/Capacity** – The program shows marked increase in the number of Retired members participating in Retired affiliate initiatives.
- **Communication** – The program shows improved sharing of overall Retired affiliate information with and among members to promote unity and with others to promote program success.
- **Advocacy/Social Justice** – The program has built advocacy skills of members and gained momentum in protecting or improving members’ benefits or rights or that of its targeted population.
- **Community Outreach** – The program allows for productive interaction and/or collaboration on shared community and/or association-based initiatives.
- **Growth** – The program has effectively increased Retired affiliate membership numbers or shows the potential to do so.

Eligibility: All state and local Retired affiliates in good standing with the NEA and NEA-Retired (and state Retired affiliate in the case of a local submission) must submit a complete application online by **April 15, 2026, at 5:00 PM** of the award year are eligible. An original program for the current fiscal year or the previous fiscal year may be submitted on an annual basis. Affiliates may resubmit applications, but the previously submitted program must have significant changes in its scope, objectives, and outcomes to be reconsidered in a subsequent year.

Judging: Program submissions will be scored by the Awards Committee using the attached scoring rubric. The program submission that earns the highest combined total of the judges’ scores will be deemed the Award winner. In addition, a runner-up will be selected. Honorable Mention(s) may also be awarded.

Promotion: The Spirit of Membership Award will be presented at the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting and will be presented by the NEA-Retired President. In addition, the winner will be acknowledged at the NEA Annual Meeting, showcased in both NEA and NEA-Retired publications and archived in a collection of projects deemed Best Practices in Membership Engagement, which will be accessible to NEA and NEA – Retired affiliates and members.