

BSLA Awards Program 2010

Frequently Asked Questions

And some guidelines to creating a successful submission

Q: Who is the jury who reviews and votes on the entries? Is it the BSLA officers? Are they the same people every year?

A: A unique jury is developed every year. The goal always is to establish a jury which recognizes the breadth of our profession, and which rewards the variety of project types and firm sizes represented in our region.

The immediate past-president of the BSLA, with input from members of the BSLA Executive Committee, develops a list of potential jurors from a cross-section of landscape architects, academics, and allied professionals including architects, engineers, and public clients. A range of representatives of the various aspects of the profession is sought, such as specialists in public projects, residential design, historic renovation, sustainable design, etc. We aim for a range of practice locations throughout around New England, a balance of men and women, and a variety of age groups, with the goal of creating a balance between the various aspects of the field to keep any one approach to the profession from dominating the jury.

The BSLA Awards Committee members are volunteers who organize and facilitate the Awards Program, but they are not eligible to serve on the juries and do not participate in the jury process. To help ensure fairness, practitioners are not allowed to serve on a jury if they have a project submitted which would be reviewed by that jury.

Q: We're a small firm which focuses on small public and even pro-bono projects. Our work is nothing like the work of the larger firms which submit projects with seemingly unlimited budgets. Is there any point in submitting for an award?

A: YES! This is exactly the type of project that we strive to recognize: projects which make the most of limited design and construction budgets, which meet the requirements of the many public interest groups which may be impacted, and which still make a significant contribution to the communities of which they are a part.

Q: Why do we need to submit so many copies of our entry? And why do you require so many different formats as part of the submittal – jpegs, Powerpoints, and hard copies? Since we're submitting images on compact discs, do we really need to spend the time and money also printing out colored images?

A: There typically are up to eight jurors on the Design jury and another four jurors deliberate on the Landscape Analysis and Planning, Communications, and Research categories.

Once the submittals are received at the chapter office (typically about 60-70 submittals a year), they are sorted, and a box filled with one jury packet from each submittal is distributed to each juror several weeks before the day of jury deliberations. Over the next few weeks, the jurors independently read through each of the jury packets, review the supplemental images, and take notes on the significant aspects of each project.

Printed Graphics: During this independent review period, the jurors rely heavily on the printed graphics and the narrative. While it's common to feel that we've moved into the paperless computer age and that printed graphics are out-dated, jurors repeatedly comment that the printed graphics, on which notes can be made, which can be easily reviewed during a train commute, and which can be spread out over a desk for comparison, are a very critical part of the process. Use these to full advantage.

JPEG Images: It is because each juror has different computer capabilities that we ask for simple jpeg images in small file sizes, plus compressed Powerpoint files, to ensure each submittal can easily be reviewed by each juror without overloading computers. Ignoring the outlined size and file format requirements means that the jurors may not have been able to view your supplemental images prior to deliberations, putting you at a significant disadvantage.

Powerpoints: Along with allowing the jurors to easily view the images if they have Powerpoint capability, on the day of jury deliberations, each jury meets to review and discuss the submitted projects. Powerpoint presentations are the simplest way to review all of the images from the large number of submittals. Very large size Powerpoint files can overload the computer and significantly slow the review process, so we ask that you compress the file size. These reduced size Powerpoints are every bit as clear and detailed as the large-size files. See the simple directions below.

Please be sure to follow the guidelines regarding Powerpoint slide shows. Just a simple black background: **No** fancy title page, **No** Text, **No** animation. Your project image should be the full focus of the jurors' attention. Anything else is clutter which only detracts from the image's impact.

Q: How do I reduce a Powerpoint file size?

A: After you've completed setting up the slideshow, follow these steps to reduce the file size of a Powerpoint presentation:

- Right click on any image in the "normal" view of the Powerpoint presentation.
- Depending on what the image format is, the second-to-the-bottom option will be 'Format Picture', 'Format Object', 'Format AutoShape', or similar. Select the available Format option.
- In the menu box which pops up, select the 'Picture' tab
- Click the 'Compress' button in the lower left hand corner.
- In the 'Compress Pictures' menu that comes up:
 - Under 'Apply to' check off 'All pictures in document'
 - Under 'Change Resolution' check off 'Web/Screen'
 - Under 'Options', check off both 'Compress pictures' and 'Delete Cropped areas of pictures'
 - Click OK
 - Click Apply when prompted

Following the above listed steps will typically reduce the Powerpoint file size by 90% from a typical 70 MB to 7MB, while retaining a presentation which is still very clear and detailed for review by the jury.

Q. The master plan report I'd like to submit was very expensive, and I don't have a lot of copies to give away. Do the copies have to be original reports? Can I get copies of the report back?

In the past, we've had submittals made with one original, and the remaining reports black and white xerox copies. But we do not encourage this approach. Again, the jurors independently review all submittals in their category ahead of time, and as the saying goes: you only get one chance to make that great first impression.

As noted in the Calls for Entries, you may request that your submittals be returned, and we strongly encourage that to reduce waste (though the BSLA typically retains one copy for our records.) See the Calls for Entries for the requirements for having your submittals returned.

Q: Do you have any suggestions for me to help make my submission a winner?

A: Here are some tips for improving submissions to the awards program:

- **Keep it simple and follow the directions.** Keep the focus on clearly communicating your project to the jury. While it's tempting to customize a submission in hopes it will stand out from all the others, the best way to draw the jury's attention is through a clear narrative description combined with high-quality photos and graphics which give the jurors a full idea of what your project is about. Unusual paper or packaging, printing out the narrative description in landscape style instead of portrait, using colored ink, submitting a collage in order to include more images, etc. can actually detract from your presentation.
- **Keep the narrative clear and concise.** Resist the temptation to over-write or use overly flowery or self-congratulatory language. Using fonts smaller than the minimum type-size indicated, trying to get by with a very condensed font, or otherwise trying to cram as many words as possible into the outlined format usually detracts significantly from the submittal. Use an easy-to-read font, and increase line spacing from single to 1.2, with double-spacing between paragraphs, to make the narrative more readable. The jurors have many, many submittals to review, and are extremely appreciative of submittals that are easily readable!
- **Photography is key!** The best narrative in the world can't make up for poor photography. Be creative: shoot the project in different seasons, during the day, and at night if appropriate. Format the submittal so that the photographs can be easily be related to the site plan, and provide existing conditions photographs that help demonstrate the success of the project. If possible, hire a professional photographer to shoot your project. Lighting is particularly important, and professional photographers can show your project to its best advantage.
- **Consider submitting projects in less-traditional categories.** The Awards Program has four categories for submission: Design, Landscape Analysis & Planning, Communications, and Research. But Design is far and away the most competitive, with two or three times as many submissions as the next largest category, Landscape Analysis & Planning. Consider all the work your firm has done for the past several years. There may be projects to submit in the alternative categories.
- **For Design submittals, let plantings mature.** Where site plantings are a key design component of a project, wait for the plantings to mature before photographing for your awards submission. Large expanses of mulch do not make for a winning submittal, no matter how interesting the overall design. Some firms wait up to three years before photographing projects.
- **Don't short-change the printed graphics!**

Q: I think my project meets the criteria for awards outlined in the Call for Entries, but it didn't receive an award when I submitted it a few years ago. Can it be re-submitted? Would another jury find it award-worthy if the past one didn't?

A. **Yes! Always resubmit projects you believe in.** If your submission isn't successful one year, don't give up. Juries change each year, and what appeals to one year's jury may completely differ from the views of subsequent juries. But rather than just re-entering the exact same submittal, review the jury comments you receive, and make changes to address the comments. Simple improvements such as better photography or allowing plantings to mature can turn the project into a winner. So can a more directed narrative. Edit to focus on a uniquely successful aspect of the project. An expanded explanation clarifying the difficult existing conditions and the thoughtful design required to transform those conditions to the success that

it became, or emphasizing the significant role the landscape architect played in moving a project of public benefit to completion, etc. may communicate the winning aspects of your project to the jury in a way that the earlier submission did not.

Q: Does the Supporting Documentation have to be sent in to the BSLA in a different box or package from the Jury Packets?

A: No, the envelope with the Supporting Documentation should be sent in the same box/package as the Jury Packets. If you are submitting for more than one project in any of the categories, you may also send submittals for more than one project in the same package.

Q: If my project doesn't win an award, will I get feedback from the jury?

A: Yes, the members of the Awards Committee document the comments made by the jury on all of the projects during the deliberations and with input and sign-off from the jury members finalize the comments. The comments for the winning projects are used as part of the Awards Banquet presentation and the comments for the non-award winners are compiled and sent to the submitting firm for their use.