

Exemplary Leadership Award

Scoring Guide

How Applications Are Scored

Applications are evaluated across fourteen objectives organized under three priorities. Each objective is scored on a scale of 0-10, for a maximum score of 140 points.

Evaluation Priorities

1. Leadership

1.1 Influenced Nursing Standards and Professional Practice

Nominee shaped nursing standards, protocols or professional practice at the organizational, regional or national level. Includes policy contributions, published standards or demonstrated changes in practice norms attributable to the nominee's leadership.

1.2 Career-Spanning Leadership Recognition

Nominee recognized as a leader at the local, regional or national level across multiple career stages, not solely in their current role. Includes awards, appointments, elected positions or peer acknowledgment of sustained leadership over time.

1.3 Guidance, Mentorship, and Support of Others

Nominee mentored nurses and nurse leaders, creating demonstrable pathways for future leaders. Evidence reflects sustained commitment, not isolated mentoring relationships, and includes outcomes such as mentees' career advancement.

1.4 Creates Vision for the Future of Nursing

Nominee articulates and champions a compelling vision for nursing's future that evolves with the profession. Their vision connects workforce development, care delivery innovation and health equity in a manner that inspires others to act.

1.5 Advances Engagement and Belonging within Nursing Leadership

Nominee actively promotes engagement and belonging across nursing leadership practice. Efforts include fostering supportive work environments, expanding leadership development opportunities and modeling collaborative leadership practices. Contributions strengthen the nursing workforce and support AONL's commitment to reducing disparities in healthcare outcomes.

2. Influence

2.1 Supports and Advances AONL Strategic Priorities

Nominee's body of work reflects alignment with and active advancement of AONL's strategic priorities: leading the workforce, eliminating disparities and advancing technology and innovation. Contributions may include committee service, thought leadership or demonstrated organizational adoption of AONL priorities.

2.2 Influences Others Outside of Nursing to Advance Nursing and Population Health Goals

Nominee effectively influenced non-nursing stakeholders, including physicians, community leaders, policymakers, public health partners or payers—to advance both the goals of nursing practice and broader population health outcomes. Evidence includes cross-sector partnerships, policy engagement, community health initiatives or advocacy that resulted in measurable improvements to health outcomes beyond the acute care setting.

2.3 Inspires Excellence and Evidence-Based Practice in Nursing

Nominee cultivates a culture of excellence rooted in evidence-based practice. They inspire nurses to apply research, data and best practices to clinical and leadership decision-making and demonstrate this commitment through publications, presentations or measurable improvements in care quality.

2.4 Demonstrates Commitment to Eliminating Healthcare Disparities

Nominee's career reflects a sustained commitment to reducing disparities in healthcare outcomes across populations. Evidence includes data-driven efforts to improve access to care, creating environments where nurses, leaders, patients and communities can thrive.

3. Impact Across the Nominee's Career

3.1 Develops and Executes Effective Approaches to Advance Nursing Practice

Nominee has designed and implemented strategies—at the unit, organizational or system level—that have measurably advanced nursing practice. Impact has grown over their career, demonstrating increasingly broad and complex leadership as they advanced.

3.2 Acts as a Catalyst for Innovative and Future-Focused Care Delivery Models

Nominee has championed innovative care delivery models that reflect emerging healthcare needs, including technology integration, team-based care or community-embedded models. Evidence demonstrates that their advocacy for innovation has evolved alongside the profession and produced sustained outcomes.

3.3 Formal and Informal Mentorship with Demonstrated Career Outcomes

Nominee has served as a formal and informal mentor to nurses at multiple career stages. The impact of their mentorship is evident in the professional advancement of those they have guided, reflecting a sustained commitment to developing the next generation of nurse leaders.

3.4 Contribution to Community and Population Health Improvement

Nominee's career demonstrates increasing engagement with community and population health beyond the walls of acute care. Contributions may include community partnerships, population health strategies, advocacy for social determinants of health or collaboration with public health and community organizations to improve health outcomes for diverse populations.

3.5 Sustained Engagement with AONL and Professional Nursing Organizations

Nominee has actively contributed to AONL or its state chapters, professional nursing organizations or other leadership bodies over the course of their career. Contributions reflect increasing levels of engagement and influence, including committee leadership, governance roles, publications or dissemination of best practices to the broader nursing community.