AWARD CATEGORIES

Celebrating excellence and innovation in employee share ownership

The GEO Awards recognize organizations that demonstrate excellence, innovation and meaningful impact in employee share ownership. This guide outlines the ten award categories and the minimum requirements for each, helping you identify where your plan or initiative is the strongest fit.

You may enter the same plan in more than one category, but each submission should be tailored to the specific category criteria and supported by relevant evidence.

Submissions close on 22 January 2027.

Before completing the online application, use the **Practice Application Template** to draft your responses. For questions, contact **Kate Scorer**.

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Best In Financial Education And Wellbeing

Employee financial wellbeing increasingly extends beyond the operation of an employee share plan. Leading organizations are taking a more holistic approach to helping employees understand their finances, rewards and benefits — including the role equity can play within their broader financial lives.

The Best in Financial Education and Wellbeing award recognizes an organization that has implemented an effective financial education or wellbeing initiative connected to employee equity or share ownership.

Judges will consider how the organization identified and addressed employee needs; provided clear, accessible and appropriately objective information; navigated relevant regulatory or compliance considerations; and helped employees better understand equity within their overall financial position or rewards package.

Strong entries will demonstrate the impact of the initiative through evidence such as employee engagement, utilization, understanding, confidence or other relevant outcomes.

Minimum requirements

An eligible entry must:

- Include a financial education or financial wellbeing initiative with a clear connection to employee equity/share plans.
- Identify the employee need or challenge the initiative was designed to address.
- Explain how the initiative was designed and delivered to meet that need.
- Explain how regulatory, compliance or advice boundaries were appropriately managed.
- Include evidence of impact, such as employee engagement, utilization, understanding, confidence or other relevant outcomes.
- Clearly explain the organization's own role in developing and delivering the initiative.

Best Plan Communication

Effective communication is fundamental to the success of an employee share plan. Communicating equity can involve complex concepts and, for global organizations, additional geographic, linguistic, cultural and regulatory considerations.

The Best Plan Communication award recognizes an organization that has developed and delivered an outstanding communication strategy or campaign for an employee share plan.

Entries may include written, digital, web-based, social, video, virtual or other communication channels. Judges will consider the clarity and accessibility of the content; understanding of the target audience; appropriateness and integration of the channels used; creativity of execution; and evidence that the communications achieved their intended objectives.

The award is not based on budget or production value. Judges are interested in the effectiveness, coherence and impact of the communication relative to the organization, audience and challenge involved.

Minimum requirements

An eligible entry must:

- Relate directly to the communication of an employee share/equity plan or program.
- Identify the communication challenge, audience and objectives.
- Demonstrate a considered communication approach rather than simply providing examples of individual materials.
- Include examples of the communications themselves, such as emails, videos, webpages, guides, presentations, infographics, campaign creative or other participant-facing materials.
- Include evidence of effectiveness, such as engagement, understanding, participation, action, reach or other appropriate measures.
- Explain what was distinctive, creative or particularly effective about the approach.

Best In Executive Compensation

Executive and board compensation plays an important role in attracting, retaining and motivating leadership while aligning executive outcomes with an organization's strategy, performance and long-term objectives.

The Best in Executive Compensation award recognizes excellence in a holistic executive compensation strategy, rather than excellence in an individual plan or award in isolation.

Judges will consider how equity compensation operates within the organization's broader executive total rewards framework; its alignment with corporate strategy and stakeholder interests; the appropriateness and effectiveness of performance measures; governance and implementation; and how the overall approach supports attraction, retention, engagement and long-term value creation.

Entries should demonstrate the thinking behind the strategy and provide evidence of how the approach has contributed to clearly defined organizational objectives.

Minimum requirements

An eligible entry must:

- Demonstrate a holistic executive compensation strategy, with equity forming a meaningful component.
- Identify the business, talent or strategic objectives the compensation strategy was designed to support.
- Explain how the strategy aligns with the organization's business strategy and long-term objectives.
- Explain how equity interacts with the broader executive total rewards framework.
- Explain the rationale for key design decisions, including relevant performance measures and/or other measures of success.
- Include evidence demonstrating the effectiveness or impact of the strategy.

Best Plan Effectiveness

Employee share plans are created to achieve specific organizational and employee objectives. The Best Plan Effectiveness award recognizes an organization that can demonstrate that its share plan is successfully delivering against those objectives.

Judges will consider the clarity of the plan's original goals; how its design and operation support those goals; employee participation and engagement where relevant; and, most importantly, evidence demonstrating what the plan has achieved.

Success may be measured differently depending on the organization and purpose of the plan. Entries should therefore identify appropriate measures of effectiveness and demonstrate progress or outcomes against them.

Minimum requirements

An eligible entry must:

- Identify the specific organizational and/or employee objectives the share plan was designed to achieve.
- Explain how the plan's design and operation support those objectives.
- Define the measures used to assess success.
- Include evidence demonstrating performance against those measures, ideally including before-and-after, trend or comparative data where available.
- Demonstrate a meaningful outcome for the organization and/or its employees.

Best Use Of Equity In A Private Company

Private companies face distinct opportunities and challenges when creating meaningful employee ownership. These may include valuation, liquidity, funding, governance, communication and the practicalities of providing employees with an ownership opportunity without access to a public market.

The Best Use of Equity in a Private Company award recognizes a privately held organization that has developed an effective approach to employee equity ownership that supports its people strategy and corporate objectives.

Judges will consider the objectives and design of the equity program; the particular challenges associated with operating in a private company environment; solutions developed to overcome those challenges; employee participation and engagement; and evidence of the program's effectiveness.

Minimum requirements

An eligible entry must:

- Relate to an employee equity/share ownership program operated by a privately held company.
- Identify the business and/or employee objectives the program was designed to achieve.
- Explain at least one material challenge associated with delivering equity in a private company environment and how it was addressed.
- Demonstrate meaningful employee access to or participation in equity ownership.
- Include evidence of impact or progress against defined objectives.
- Clearly explain what was distinctive or effective about the organization's approach.

Best Use Of Employee Share Plans In An Emerging Market

Extending employee share ownership into emerging markets can involve challenges that differ substantially from those encountered in more established equity markets. These may include evolving regulation, unfamiliarity with employee equity, economic conditions, cultural considerations, infrastructure limitations and complex governance environments.

The Best Use of Employee Share Plans in an Emerging Market award recognizes an organization that has successfully introduced, expanded or adapted an employee share plan in an emerging market and developed thoughtful solutions to the particular challenges of that environment.

Judges will consider the local context, the significance and complexity of the challenges encountered, how the organization adapted its approach, the employee experience and evidence that the initiative achieved its intended objectives.

Judges recognize that conventional measures such as participation rates may not always provide the most meaningful measure of success in an emerging-market context.

Minimum requirements

An eligible entry must:

- Relate to the introduction, expansion or significant adaptation of an employee share/equity plan in at least one emerging market.
- Explain why the relevant market presented distinctive challenges for employee share ownership.
- Identify the material regulatory, economic, cultural, operational or other local barriers the organization needed to address.
- Explain how the plan or implementation approach was adapted to the local environment.
- Include evidence of meaningful progress or impact, using measures appropriate to the market and circumstances.
- Clearly explain the organization’s role in developing and implementing the approach.

Best Use Of Employee Share Plans In A Corporate Action

Corporate actions can create significant complexity for employee equity programs and the people who participate in them. Mergers, acquisitions, restructurings, divestitures and similar transactions require organizations to balance corporate objectives with legal, operational, communication and participant considerations.

The Best Use of Employee Share Plans in a Corporate Action award recognizes excellence in the treatment and use of employee equity as part of a significant corporate transaction or transformation.

Judges will consider the complexity of the corporate action; the objectives and decisions relating to employee equity; the treatment and experience of affected participants; the effectiveness of communications; challenges overcome during implementation; and the resulting outcomes.

Minimum requirements

An eligible entry must:

- Relate to a defined merger, acquisition, restructuring, divestiture or comparable corporate action.
- Demonstrate that employee equity was a material consideration within the corporate action, rather than merely an administrative consequence.
- Identify the key equity-related challenges, objectives and decisions arising from the transaction.
- Explain how affected participants were treated and how the implications of the corporate action were communicated to them.
- Include evidence of the outcome and effectiveness of the approach, including the post-transaction position where relevant.
- Clearly explain what the organization did to achieve a successful outcome for the business and affected participants.

Best Use Of Technology

Technology has transformed the way employee share plans are administered, communicated and managed. Organizations are increasingly using automation, data, digital tools and artificial intelligence to solve complex problems and improve the experience of both participants and internal teams.

The Best Use of Technology award recognizes an organization that has developed, adapted or implemented technology in an innovative and effective way to improve an employee share plan or equity-related process.

Judges will consider the problem being solved; the organization's role in shaping the solution; the appropriateness and originality of the technology used; implementation challenges; improvements to participant or administrator experience; and measurable operational or business outcomes.

The award does not recognize the purchase or implementation of technology alone. Where an external vendor or existing platform is used, the entry should demonstrate the organization's contribution, customization, application or innovative use of that technology.

Minimum requirements

An eligible entry must:

- Use technology to address a clearly defined employee equity/share-plan challenge or opportunity.
- Demonstrate more than the routine implementation of an off-the-shelf product or standard system upgrade.
- Explain the organization’s own role in designing, adapting, configuring or applying the solution.
- Explain what was innovative, distinctive or particularly effective about the use of technology.
- Demonstrate a meaningful improvement in administration, communication, participant experience, risk management, efficiency or another relevant area.
- Include measurable evidence of impact, such as time saved, costs reduced, errors reduced, engagement improved or processes scaled.

Most Creative Solution

Employee equity teams regularly encounter challenges that cannot be solved simply by changing plan design or implementing new technology. They may require teams to rethink processes, collaborate differently, work around constraints or find an entirely new way to approach a longstanding problem.

The Most Creative Solution award recognizes an organization that has developed an original, resourceful and effective solution to a specific employee equity challenge.

The solution may relate to administration, operations, compliance, governance, employee experience, internal collaboration, implementation or another aspect of equity plan management. Judges will consider the significance of the challenge, originality of the response, ingenuity demonstrated within the resources available, effectiveness of implementation and measurable results.

The solution does not need to involve significant expenditure or new technology. Creativity and effectiveness — rather than scale or budget — are at the heart of this award.

Minimum requirements

An eligible entry must:

- Address a specific and clearly defined employee equity/share-plan problem or challenge.
- Demonstrate an approach that is meaningfully different from standard practice.
- Explain what made the solution creative, resourceful or distinctive.
- Show that the organization played a substantive role in conceiving and implementing the solution.
- Demonstrate that the solution was implemented and proven in practice, rather than remaining a concept or untested idea.
- Include evidence of measurable or demonstrable improvement.
- Be primarily about creative problem-solving rather than plan design or technology itself.

Most Innovative Plan Design

Employee share plans must balance corporate objectives and employee needs with legal, regulatory, tax, governance and cultural considerations across the jurisdictions in which they operate.

The Most Innovative Plan Design award recognizes an organization that has developed or significantly redesigned an employee share plan using an original and thoughtful approach to achieve its objectives.

Judges will consider the rationale for the design; the corporate and employee objectives being addressed; legal, regulatory, tax or cultural challenges overcome; creative design features; the extent to which the approach differs from conventional practice; and evidence that the resulting plan is achieving its intended outcomes.

Innovation may be global or local and does not require a completely new form of equity. Creative adaptation or combination of established approaches may also demonstrate outstanding innovation.

Minimum requirements

An eligible entry must:

- Relate to the design or significant redesign of an employee share/equity plan, rather than solely its administration or communication.
- Identify the corporate and/or employee objectives driving the design.
- Demonstrate at least one meaningfully innovative design feature or approach.
- Explain the constraints or challenges that influenced the design and how they were addressed.
- Explain how the design differs from standard practice, the previous plan or relevant industry norms.
- Include evidence that the plan has been implemented and, where sufficient time has elapsed, evidence of its effectiveness.