



2025 ISHA AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE APPLICATION

Entries must be for projects completed by *January 1, 2024 through April 30, 2025*.

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Entry Category:

Education/Workforce Development – A program or project that introduces new employees, demonstrates an effective training mechanism, or otherwise enhances knowledge of our industry.

Events and Fundraising – A program or project that clearly raised significant funds for a industry related cause and/or an event that experienced a dramatic increase in attendance, industry visibility and/or net profitability.

Governmental Affairs – A program or project that effectively communicates the message of governmental activities, or demonstrates success in championing an industry cause.

Member Programs – A program or project that shows performance results through increases in members or retention of members.

Public Relations – A program or project that positively highlights the activities of the association to external audiences.

Communications – A program or project that positively impacts the association's communication to members and stakeholders.

Please respond to the following questions on a separate piece of paper.

1. Title of Program
2. Goals & Objectives of Program
3. Target Audience
4. Results of Program
5. Evaluation Measures
6. How was the program presented to the Target audience?
7. Addition information

ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN May 14, 2025

1. Title of Program

Telling the Industry's Story: WHLA's Member-Driven Content Initiative
Highlighting Industry Achievements and Expert Insights from Wisconsin Lodging Professionals

2. Goals & Objectives of Program

The primary goal of WHLA's member-driven communications initiative was to elevate the voices of our members while building a sustainable, high-impact content strategy that would support association publications, highlight industry achievements, and strengthen member engagement.

WHLA identified a growing demand for fresh, relevant content that reflected real experiences and insights from within Wisconsin's lodging industry. At the same time, staff recognized the need to scale up communication efforts without increasing workload significantly. To meet these goals, WHLA developed a new approach centered on structured member contributions.

The WHLA Member-Driven Content Initiative was launched to strategically strengthen the association's communications by directly incorporating member perspectives into our content ecosystem. Our key objectives were to:

- **Increase member engagement** by offering meaningful, high-visibility opportunities for both lodging and vendor members to contribute to WHLA communications.
- **Enhance the relevance and diversity of content** in WHLA publications by sourcing real-world insights, stories, and updates from our membership.
- **Streamline staff content production** by shifting to a model that encourages contributions from members, reducing reliance on internally generated articles.
- **Promote professional pride** and industry collaboration by spotlighting member achievements in areas such as property renovations, operational improvements, and hospitality expertise.
- **Support vendor marketing goals** through a platform that allows them to share educational, non-promotional thought leadership pieces, providing added value for vendor membership.

To achieve this, WHLA created **two streamlined content submission funnels**:

- **The WHLA Property Improvement Feature**: Designed for lodging members to submit property upgrades, renovations, or other capital projects. This funnel directly supports editorial content in *InnTouch with WHLA*, our print magazine, as well as year-round digital communications.
- **The WHLA Article Submission Process**: Developed for vendor (associate) members to contribute educational articles that share practical knowledge and best practices with hoteliers. These submissions are featured on the WHLA website, in the *Wisconsin Lodging Insider* e-newsletter, and in *InnTouch with WHLA* if selected.

Both programs were built with ease-of-use in mind, using clear instructions, simple online forms, and minimal staff editing. This structure not only maximized content collection but also empowered members to take ownership in WHLA's storytelling and communications.

Ultimately, the initiative was designed to foster stronger connections within the WHLA community while enriching the quality and authenticity of our communications.

3. Target Audience

The program was designed with two distinct member segments in mind:

- **Lodging Property Members:** This includes hotel and motel owners, general managers, operators, sales directors, and other property-level professionals who benefit from industry visibility and the opportunity to showcase their capital improvements or operational excellence.
- **Associate Vendor Members:** These are the suppliers, consultants, and service providers who support the lodging industry and often possess deep knowledge of their niche area. This program gave them a vetted channel to share educational insights with lodging members while reinforcing their brand expertise.

Secondarily, the target audience includes stakeholders who engage with WHLA's public-facing platforms—such as potential members, policymakers, and industry partners—who benefit from reading about the innovation, improvement, and expertise driving Wisconsin's lodging community.

4. Results of Program

The program generated measurable engagement and significantly enriched WHLA's communications. Key outcomes include:

- **9 lodging property improvement project submissions** were collected to be featured in the *InnTouch with WHLA* magazine, WHLA's News Section at WisconsinLodging.org/news, and on social media. Projects ranged in scope and style, and were presented with compelling visuals, including before-and-after photos.
 - The print feature spanned 6 pages and highlighted four diverse properties across Wisconsin, reflecting the breadth of our membership.
 - Each of the 9 property projects also receive their own individual features across WHLA's digital channels and promoted to both travelers and WHLA members.
 - The program also yielded indirect results beyond communications, including new associate member leads generated through vendor partner mentions in lodging member submissions.
- **12 vendor articles** were submitted and curated for publication across WHLA's print and digital channels. Topics included sustainability, renovations, operations, technology, and guest experience—providing timely and actionable insights for lodging professionals.
- Created new advertising and sponsorship opportunities directly tied to featured content, increasing value for vendor members and generating non-dues revenue.
- WHLA's **weekly Insider newsletter** gained fresh and engaging content for multiple issues, driving up link click-throughs to blog and article pages.
- Vendors who participated expressed high satisfaction, with many requesting to contribute again in the future.
- Member contributors were celebrated across communications, creating a ripple effect of interest and increased perception of WHLA as a platform for member success.
- Internally, the program provided WHLA staff with a scalable, replicable structure to source content while reinforcing member value and voice.

5. Evaluation Measures

We used a combination of quantitative and qualitative metrics to assess the success of the program:

- **Submission volume:** The number of projects and articles submitted indicated strong member interest and willingness to participate.
- **Engagement analytics:** Click-through rates from the newsletter to featured articles and time-on-page metrics from the WHLA website showed increased reader interest.
- **Member feedback:** Direct comments and responses—especially from featured members—highlighted appreciation for being included and pride in being showcased.
- **Internal time saved:** By shifting from a staff-driven to a member-driven content model, the program improved efficiency and allowed the marketing team to focus on design and editing rather than sourcing and authoring content from scratch.
- **Repeat participation and interest:** Several vendors and properties expressed interest in participating again, and the ongoing nature of submissions demonstrates momentum.

6. How was the program presented to the Target audience?

WHLA utilized a multi-channel communications strategy to ensure maximum awareness and accessibility for the submission opportunities.

- **Newsletter Promotions:** Weekly Insider newsletters featured engaging calls-to-action and clear explanations of how to contribute. We utilized our current “Insider Tip” section using a “Did you know...” format to regularly feature reminders and deadlines.
- **Website Visibility:** Dedicated submission pages were developed for both lodging project stories and vendor articles, with easy-to-use forms and clear instructions.
- **Social Media Integration:** WHLA shared submission calls and member features on LinkedIn and Facebook, using compelling visuals and direct links.
- **Email Campaigns:** Targeted emails were sent to vendors and properties, personalized when appropriate, to encourage participation.
- **Direct Outreach:** Staff personally reached out to members we believed had strong stories to share, especially if they had recently renovated or were industry experts.
- **Cross-Promotion:** When members were featured, we tagged and thanked them across platforms, reinforcing the value of participation and encouraging others to join.

7. Additional information

The WHLA member-driven content program is built on two distinct but complementary content funnels, each designed to meet specific member needs and support our association’s broader communications goals.

- **WHLA Property Improvement Feature**
This funnel invites lodging members to share recent property or capital improvement projects through a dedicated submission form. Members are asked to provide:
 - Project descriptions
 - Vendor partners involved. This created a unique opportunity for WHLA to:
 - Invite member vendor contributors to provide a brief quote about their role in the project, adding depth and authenticity to the final feature
 - Strengthen the visibility of our existing associate members
 - Identify and connect with vendors not yet in membership with WHLA, creating a new funnel for associate member recruitment.
 - Before-and-after photos (if available)

- Key outcomes and dates

This collaborative approach positioned the Property Improvement Feature not only as a communications initiative—but as a cross-functional member engagement and growth strategy.

Submissions were compiled by WHLA staff into a multi-page spread in our annual print magazine (*InnTouch with WHLA*), and repurposed across additional channels including social media and our weekly *Innsider* newsletter. In 2025, four properties were featured in the magazine, with additional submissions scheduled for digital publication throughout the year—ensuring sustained visibility for contributors.

- **WHLA Article Submission Process**

To provide more visibility and value to vendor (associate) members, WHLA developed a separate submission process for educational articles. Using a simple online form, vendors can submit timely, relevant content on operations, marketing, sales, leadership, and more. WHLA staff evaluate submissions for editorial quality and member value, then distribute selected articles through:

- The *WHLA News* section of our website
- The *Wisconsin Lodging Insider* newsletter
- *InnTouch with WHLA* (for high-impact articles)

To maximize the value of vendor participation and support WHLA’s non-dues revenue goals, featured vendors were given the opportunity to purchase advertising tied directly to their content placement. If their article was selected for *InnTouch with WHLA*, they could purchase a corresponding ad in that print issue. If the article appeared in our *Innsider* newsletter, vendors were offered the option to serve as that week’s Top Level Sponsor—placing their brand at the forefront of a high-engagement digital channel.

This content-to-sponsorship model created a seamless funnel between editorial visibility and paid opportunities, reinforcing the benefit of membership while supporting the financial sustainability of WHLA’s communications.

This system delivers a consistent flow of insightful, member-generated content while minimizing staff workload and ensuring relevance to our audience.

These two programs were developed in-house by WHLA’s Publications Committee and staff team, informed by member feedback, and guided by internal strategy sessions. The initiative reflects a shift toward communications that are not just for members—but **by** members—enhancing authenticity, accessibility, and engagement.

We also built internal tracking systems to ensure equitable coverage, timely follow-up, and year-round use of collected content. Submission forms remain open throughout the year, creating a sustainable and scalable content pipeline that flexes with our evolving needs—whether for digital campaigns, print features, or future advocacy storytelling.

This initiative reflects WHLA’s evolving approach to communications—one that values member connection and the storytelling power of shared experience. By elevating our members’ voices, WHLA

strengthened its role as a **community builder** and **trusted voice** for Wisconsin's lodging industry.

The program directly supports WHLA's mission: *To be the trusted voice advancing Wisconsin's hotel and lodging industry through advocacy, education, and connecting communities.* Through this content collaboration strategy, we've amplified member pride, built stronger relationships, and reinforced WHLA's value as a communications platform and professional network.

Links & Supporting Materials:

- Articles can be found featured on our WHLA News page: WisconsinLodging.org/news
- Also included in the InnTouch with WHLA magazine: WisconsinLodging.org/latest-inntouch
- Submission form for property improvement projects: WisconsinLodging.org/property-improvement-submission
- Submission form for vendor articles: WisconsinLodging.org/submit-content

These resources demonstrate how WHLA's content collaboration program amplifies member voices across multiple platforms while supporting association goals.