



2026 CAKE! NETWORK AWARDS GUIDE

The 2026 ACDN Awards celebrate the skill, creativity, professionalism and community spirit that make Australia's cake-decorating sector so extraordinary. This manual is the source of truth for each award, setting out what is being recognised, who is eligible, how nominations and judging work, and the standards used to determine finalists and winners. The awards have been structured to reflect the many different ways people contribute to our sector — as artists, educators, small businesses, retailers, suppliers and innovators — with clear, consistent processes designed to recognise excellence fairly and meaningfully.

For 2026, the ACDN Awards have been restructured to make the program easier to understand, more consistent across categories and clearer about what each award recognises. Award categories have been refined, eligibility requirements made more explicit, and judging processes aligned so that nominees, voters and judges can see how decisions are made. Different award groups now use processes suited to what they are actually recognising — whether that is technical artistry, customer experience, business excellence, product innovation or contribution to the sector.

These changes reflect the continued evolution of ACDN and the diversity of the cake-decorating community. The aim is to create an awards program that is transparent, accessible and meaningful, while preserving the strong community involvement that has always been central to the awards. By publishing clearer criteria, consistent scoring guides and defined judging pathways, we want every participant to understand what they are being considered for and how excellence will be recognised.

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COMMUNITY AWARDS

Awards in this Category are:

DECORATOR OF THE YEAR

Recognises the outstanding overall decorator selected from the winners of the Artistic Achievement Awards.

The judging panel considers the category winners collectively and selects the artist who demonstrates the strongest overall combination of technical mastery, artistic quality, consistency and breadth of achievement.

This award is not separately entered. Eligibility is automatic for winners of the Artistic Achievement Awards.

RISING TALENT

Recognises an emerging cake artist who has been actively decorating or participating in the cake-decorating sector for approximately two years or less and who demonstrates exceptional early technical and artistic promise.

Artists may self-nominate or be nominated by another person.

All nominations are first vetted by a sector expert to confirm that the artist meets the emerging-talent eligibility requirements. The ACDN Awards Committee, in consultation with relevant sector experts, then considers the eligible nominees and selects the recipient.

The assessment may consider the artist's technical development, artistic growth, consistency, originality, engagement with the sector and demonstrated potential.

ACDN CHOICE AWARD

The ACDN Choice Award is a discretionary recognition presented to an artist whose work demonstrates consistently high artistic and technical achievement, but who has not received another major award in that year.

It is not open for nomination or entry.

The ACDN Awards Committee may present the award where it believes an artist's body of work, consistency, contribution or repeated high-level performance warrants special recognition.

The award may not be presented every year.

JO MCINTOSH CAKE MATE AWARD

The Jo McIntosh Cake Mate Award honours the legacy of Jo McIntosh, a much-loved member of the cake-decorating community whose generosity, friendship and commitment to supporting others left a lasting impact on the sector.

Over the years, the award has recognised wonderful members of our community who embody the spirit of connection, kindness and support that Jo represented.

As ACDN continues to evolve, we are taking the opportunity to pause this award for 2026 and we are working alongside Jo's family to consider how this special recognition should evolve alongside our community.

The Jo McIntosh Cake Mate Award will therefore not be presented this year, while we thoughtfully consider its future form and ensure Jo's legacy continues to be recognised in a meaningful way.