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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THE AWARDS ARE GROUPED WITHIN 4 PILLARS

SMALL BUSINESS AWARDS

These awards celebrate Australia's top Cake Decorating Businesses, based on customer ratings and judged by a panel of industry experts. Any licensed cake business across Australia is welcome to be nominated. The aim is to recognise businesses that provide an outstanding customer experience across various areas, while also meeting the high standards set by industry specialists.

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

These awards celebrate individuals who are passionate about pushing the boundaries of cake decorating excellence. They’re open to any cake artist across Australia. Your body of work from the past 12 months (either showcased online or through a submitted portfolio) will be assessed in two judging rounds.

RETAIL, MANUFACTURING AND WHOLESALE AWARDS

These awards shine a spotlight on the top businesses supporting the Cake Decorating Industry, including retailers, wholesalers, and manufacturers. Each award features a unique judging process, with some judges coming from outside the cake sector, bringing expertise in B2B business practices

COMMUNITY AWARDS

Some awards sit under the community award pillar as they are based on contribution to the sector or sit outside the technical parameters of the other award categories.

SMALL BUSINESS AWARDS

Awards in this Category are:

CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

For businesses whose primary offering is custom celebration cakes for adults and general occasions, including birthdays, anniversaries, engagements and other celebrations. Businesses whose work is predominantly children's cakes, wedding cakes, cupcakes or another specialist category should enter the category that best represents their primary offering.

CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

For businesses whose primary offering is custom cakes created for children's celebrations, including birthdays and other childhood occasions. The business should be predominantly recognised for children's cake work rather than producing children's cakes occasionally as part of a broader cake business.

COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

For businesses whose primary offering is decorated, bespoke or specialist cookies, whether sold individually, in sets, as gifts, for events or as custom orders. Cookies should represent the majority of the business's work or the product for which the business is most strongly recognised

CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

For businesses whose primary offering is cupcakes, including custom, celebration, event, corporate or retail cupcake products. Cupcakes should represent the majority of the business's work or be the product category for which the business is most strongly recognised

WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

For businesses whose primary offering is cakes created for weddings, including bespoke wedding cakes and associated wedding cake desserts. Wedding work should form the majority of the business's cake work or be the area for which the business is predominantly recognised

MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR*

For professional cake educators whose is mostly identified as teaching classes focused on advanced, specialist or professional-level cake decorating skills and techniques. Eligible educators may deliver learning through face-to-face classes, workshops, demonstrations, online education or a combination of formats, and should predominantly be known for teaching learners who already have established cake-decorating knowledge or skills.

CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

For cake-decorating teachers whose primary teaching practice is focused on beginner and intermediate learners and/or children. Eligible teachers may deliver classes face-to-face, online or through a combination of formats, with their principal teaching activity centred on developing foundational and progressing cake-decorating skills. While they may teach some advanced classes, they are best known for teaching and guiding beginning cake artists.

SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

For businesses whose primary offering is cakes, baked goods or decorated products made to meet specific dietary or ingredient requirements, including vegan, gluten-free, dairy-free and other specialist dietary needs. Specialist products should form the majority of the business's offering or be the area for which the business is predominantly recognised

SMALL BUSINESS AWARDS KEY DATES 2026

PROCESS	DESCRIPTION	DATE
Public Nominations	Businesses are nominated or may self nominate for each award category. The category in which the majority of that business' work sits is the category they will be placed in.	11 August – 30 August
Accept Nominations	All nominates will be contacted via email and asked to accept their nomination. Nominees will be asked to provide a logo, head shot and other images of their work as required to allow TCN to promote and run the awards processes.	11 August – 3rd September
Public Voting	Round 1 voting is a public vote – nominees are encouraged to share their nomination and the link to vote across their marketing platforms. Once voting closes, scores will be tallied, weighted and reviewed by the Awards committee	3rd September – 20th September
Regional Winners and finalists announced	For each category, the top voted business in each State/Region of Australia, along with the second highest voted, will be announced as the regional winner and runner up. The business voted top in each state becomes a finalist and moves onto round two to compete for the national trophy. *NOTE: Nominees in the Master Educator award will not be judged at the regional level, being considered at a national level of expertise as part of their eligibility, thus no regional awards will be given. 4-6 Finalists will be announced instead.	23rd-26th September
Judging Panel	Round 2 is judging by an expert panel of judges. They will assess the business against published criteria to determine the business to receive the national trophy. The Awards panel will meet with the judges and provide moderation of the results to determine the final rankings of the finalists. The Finalist with the top ranking will be awarded the trophy.	27th September – 12th October
Awards Presented	During the ACDN Community Night, the winners of each award will be announced and presented with their trophy.	20th November, 7pm Hijinx Hotel QV Melbourne.

SMALL BUSINESS AWARDS ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be eligible for any award in the Small Business Awards category, the nominated business or educator must:

- Be based in Australia and actively operating within the Australian cake-decorating or baking sector;
- Have been actively trading or teaching throughout the published eligibility period;
- Hold all licences, registrations, permits and insurances required for the way the business operates;
- Comply with applicable food safety, labelling, consumer and workplace requirements;
- Operate under a genuine business identity that can be verified through its website, social media, business registration or other public-facing information;
- Respect the intellectual property of other artists, businesses and brands, including copyright, trademarks and licensed character use;
- Not knowingly present another person's work, images, designs or teaching materials as its own;
- Enter the category that best reflects the business's primary and most identifiable offering;
- Agree to participate in the public voting round and, if selected as a finalist, the independent judging process;
- Provide accurate information where requested to confirm eligibility; and
- Agree to the Awards' conflict-of-interest, judging and conduct requirements.

A business may offer more than one product or service, but should participate in the category that most accurately reflects its primary business offering during the eligibility period.

Where this is unclear, the Awards may consider:

- The majority of the business's work;
- The products or services for which the business is most strongly recognised;
- How the business presents and markets itself publicly; and
- The overall nature of its work during the eligibility period.

The Awards may reassign a nominee to a more appropriate category where necessary.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR EDUCATORS

For Master Cake Educator of the Year and Cake Teacher of the Year, the nominee must also:

Actively teach cake decorating or closely related skills;

- Deliver structured learning through classes, workshops, demonstrations, online education or a combination of formats;
- Teach at the level appropriate to the nominated category; and
- Use teaching materials, course content and student resources they are entitled to use.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

The business must be primarily recognised for products created to meet specific dietary or ingredient requirements.

Any claims made about ingredients, allergens or dietary suitability must be accurate, appropriately qualified and consistent with the business's actual production practices.

SMALL BUSINESS AWARDS INELIGIBLE NOMINATIONS

A nomination may be excluded where:

- The business does not meet the published category definition;
- Required licences, registrations or insurance cannot be confirmed;
- Information provided to the Awards is materially inaccurate or misleading;
- There is substantiated evidence of serious intellectual-property misuse, misrepresentation or other conduct inconsistent with the Awards' published standards; or
- The nominee does not agree to participate in the required judging process.

SMALL BUSINESS AWARDS & ACCOLADES

The following awards and accolades will be presented:

SMALL BUSINES AWARDS RECOGNISED WITH TROPHIES

WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

SMALL BUSINESS AWARDS RECOGNISED WITH CERTIFICATES

ACT/TAS CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

ACT/TAS CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

ACT/TAS COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

ACT/TAS CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

ACT/TAS CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

ACT/TAS MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

ACT/TAS SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

ACT/TAS WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

NSW CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

NSW CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

NSW COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

NSW CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

NSW CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

NSW MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

NSW SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

NSW WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

QLD CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

QLD CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

QLD COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

QLD CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

QLD CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

QLD MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

QLD SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

QLD WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

SA CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

SA CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

SA COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

SA CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

SA CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

SA MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

SA SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

SA WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

VIC CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

VIC CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

VIC COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

VIC CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

VIC CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

VIC MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

VIC SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

VIC WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

WA/NT CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

WA/NT CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

WA/NT COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

WA/NT CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

WA/NT CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

WA/NT MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

WA/NT SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

WA/NT WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

SMALL BUSINESS AWARDS RECOGNISED WITH DIGITAL CERTIFICATE

NSW WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

ACT/TAS WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

QLD WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

VIC WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

SA WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

WA/NT WEDDING CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

NSW CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

ACT/TAS CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

QLD CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

VIC CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

SA CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

WA/NT CUSTOM CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

NSW CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

ACT/TAS CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

QLD CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

VIC CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

SA CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

WA/NT CHILDREN'S CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

NSW CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

ACT/TAS CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

QLD CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

VIC CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

SA CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

WA/NT CUPCAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

NSW COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

ACT/TAS COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

QLD COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

VIC COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

SA COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

WA/NT COOKIE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

NSW SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

ACT/TAS SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

QLD SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

VIC SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

SA SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

WA/NT SPECIALIST DIETARY CAKE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

NSW CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

ACT/TAS CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

QLD CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

VIC CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

SA CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

WA/NT CAKE TEACHER OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

NSW MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

ACT/TAS MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

QLD MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

VIC MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

SA MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

WA/NT MASTER CAKE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

JUDGING CRITERIA – SMALL BUSINESS AWARDS						
Judging Criterion	**Weight**	**1 - Limited**	**2 - Developing**	**3 - Good**	**4 - Very Strong**	**5 - Outstanding**
Excellence in the Core Offering	**30%**	Little evidence that the business or educator consistently delivers its core product, service or teaching to an acceptable standard. Significant quality, skill or consistency concerns are evident	Some competent work is evident, but quality or delivery is inconsistent, underdeveloped or not yet strong enough to distinguish the finalist	The business or educator delivers its core offering to a clear and reliable professional standard, with sound skill, quality and consistency	The core offering is delivered to a consistently high standard, with strong evidence of technical skill, care, quality and reliability	The finalist demonstrates exceptional mastery of its core offering, with consistently outstanding quality, execution and evidence that clearly distinguishes it at a national level
Customer or Learner Experience	**25%**	Evidence suggests poor or inconsistent communication, care, reliability or support. Customer or learner needs are not well managed.	Some positive experiences are evident, but communication, support or reliability appears inconsistent.	Customers or learners are generally well supported, with clear communication, appropriate care and a reliable overall experience	The business or educator provides a consistently strong experience, with responsive communication, thoughtful support and clear attention to customer or learner needs	The finalist provides an exceptional and highly consistent experience, with strong evidence of trust, care, accessibility, responsiveness and meaningful support throughout the customer or learner journey
Professionalism and Business Practice	**15%**	There is little evidence of clear, reliable or professional business practice. Information, organisation or delivery may be inconsistent or unclear	Basic systems and professional practices are in place, but there are noticeable gaps in organisation, communication or consistency.	The business or educator demonstrates sound professional practice, with clear information, reliable processes and appropriate organisation.	Professionalism is consistently strong, with well-managed systems, clear expectations and dependable delivery across the business or teaching practice.	The finalist demonstrates exceptional professionalism, with highly effective systems, clear and transparent communication and outstanding consistency between what is promised and what is delivered
Creativity, Distinctiveness and Development	**15%**	Little evidence of a clear identity, creative development or evolution in the finalist's work or teaching	Some individual style or development is evident, but it is limited or inconsistent.	The finalist demonstrates a clear and appropriate style or approach, with some evidence of ongoing development and thoughtful improvement	The finalist has a strong, recognisable identity and demonstrates meaningful development, innovation or refinement in their work, products, services or teaching	The finalist demonstrates an exceptional and distinctive approach, with clear evidence of sustained creative or professional development that meaningfully advances their offering
Contribution to the Cake Decorating Community and Customer Journey	**15%**	Little evidence of contribution beyond normal commercial activity	Some participation or support is evident, but contribution is occasional, limited or unclear in impact.	The finalist contributes positively through activities such as support, education, collaboration, mentoring, inclusion or community involvement.	The finalist makes a sustained and meaningful contribution that supports customers, learners, peers or the wider cake-decorating sector.	The finalist demonstrates an exceptional and clearly evidenced contribution that strengthens, supports or advances the cake-decorating community in a meaningful and lasting way

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

These awards recognise individual artistic and technical achievement. Entrants do not need to operate a cake business and commercial success is not considered. The focus is the quality of the artist's work within their nominated discipline.

Awards in this Category are:

COOKIE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

---ROYAL ICING ARTIST OF THE YEAR

---FONDANT COOKIE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists whose submitted work is primarily focused on decorated cookies as the finished artistic medium. Entries may include royal icing, painting, airbrushing, modelling, dimensional elements, wafer paper or other edible decorative techniques. Due to popular demand, this award has been split into two awards for 2026. Nominees will be placed in the correct category by the Awards committee.

CUPCAKE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists whose submitted work is primarily focused on cupcakes as the finished artistic medium. Entries may include piped, sculpted, painted, modelled or mixed decorative techniques, but the cupcake itself must remain the principal format being judged

3D/NOVELTY CAKE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists specialising in sculpted, shaped or dimensional cakes where construction, carving and form are central to the finished piece. This category is for work that goes beyond a traditionally shaped cake and relies on technical structure, proportion and three-dimensional design

SUGAR & WAFER FLOWER ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists whose work is primarily focused on realistic or stylised floral work created from sugar-based mediums or wafer paper. The flowers should be the dominant feature being judged, rather than a minor decorative element within a broader cake design

BUTTERCREAM ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists whose submitted work demonstrates buttercream as the principal decorative medium. This may include piping, palette-knife work, buttercream flowers, textured finishes, painted effects and other buttercream-led techniques. Work where fondant, modelling or other mediums are dominant should be entered in the more appropriate category

SUGAR MODELLING ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists specialising in hand-modelled figures, characters, animals, objects or decorative elements created primarily from modelling mediums such as modelling paste, fondant, gum paste or modelling chocolate. The modelled elements should be the main focus of the work being judged.

EDIBLE DECORATIONS ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists whose submitted work is primarily focused on edible decorative work that is not fully represented by another Artistic Achievement Award. This may include mixed-media edible work, wafer paper decoration other than flowers, edible fabrics and textiles, rice paper, sails, structural decorative elements and combinations of edible techniques and materials

CHOOSING THE RIGHT CATEGORY

Artists may enter more than one category where judges can view evidence of cakes/work that match the chosen category. Where a piece uses several techniques or materials, the category should reflect the element that is most central to the technical achievement of the work.

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS KEY DATES

Process	Description	Date
Public Nominations	Artists are nominated or may self nominate for each award category. Artists may be nominated in several categories.	11 August – 30 August
Accept Nominations	All nominates will be contacted via email and asked to accept their nomination. Nominees will be asked to provide a logo, head shot and other images of their work as required to allow TCN to promote and run the awards processes.	11 August – 3rd September
Judging panel	Round 1 for this awards is judging by an expert panel of judges. They will assess the artists skill against published criteria to determine the artists who will be announced as finalists and move onto the next round to compete for the national trophy. The Awards panel will meet with the judges and provide moderation of the results to determine the final rankings of the finalists. 4-6 Artists will be announced as the finalists.	3rd September – 20th September
Finalists Announced	The Finalists will be announced.	23rd – 26th September
Cake Decorators Voting	Due to the technical nature of these awards, voting for the national award will be restricted to current ACDN members – artists themselves who have a wide variety of skill and understanding in the techniques demonstrated. The Awards Committee will tally the votes, weigh the results and moderate the final rankings to determine the final results.	27th September – 12th October
Awards Presented	During the ACDN Community Night, the top ranked artist will be announced as the award winner and the second ranked artist will receive the Highly Commended award.	20th November, 7pm Hijinx Hotel QV Melbourne.

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be eligible for any Artistic Achievement Award, the nominee must:

- the individual artist or decorator, not nominated as a business;
- be based in Australia;
- have created their represented work (submitted portfolio, social media or online photos) themselves;
- demonstrate unique or personal interpretation of cake decorating styles, avoiding direct imitation or work completed as part of a class or workshop where the design was guided step by step by another artist or teacher;
- provide any additional information reasonably required to confirm authorship, technique or category eligibility;
- respect the intellectual property of other artists, businesses and brands;
- not present another person's work, images, designs or teaching material as their own;
- agree to the published judging process, including expert shortlisting and ACDN member voting; and
- comply with the Awards' conflict-of-interest and conduct requirements.

ACDN membership is not required to enter or be nominated for these awards.

AUTHORSHIP OF WORK

The award recognises the technical and artistic achievement of the individual nominee.

The nominee must have personally completed the work. Assistance with non-decorative tasks may be permitted where it does not materially contribute to the artistic or technical execution being assessed.

Where collaborative work is submitted, the nominee must clearly identify which elements they personally created. Work will only be considered where the judges can reasonably assess the nominee's individual contribution.

The Awards may reassign a nominee to a more appropriate category where necessary.

MULTIPLE CATEGORIES

An artist may be considered in more than one Artistic Achievement category where they can demonstrate distinct bodies of work that genuinely meet the eligibility requirements of each category.

The same piece should not ordinarily be entered across multiple categories.

COMMERCIAL STATUS

Artists do not need to operate a registered cake business, sell their work commercially or earn income from cake decorating. These awards recognise technical and artistic achievement

regardless of whether the nominee is a professional, semi-professional, hobbyist or emerging artist.

INELIGIBLE ENTRIES

An entry may be excluded where:

- the submitted work was not created by the nominee;
- the work does not substantially fit the nominated category;
- images or information provided are materially misleading;
- there is substantiated evidence of plagiarism or misrepresentation;
- the work falls outside the stated eligibility period; or
- the nominee does not agree to participate in the required judging process.
- the artist attempts to sway the outcome or dissuade members from voting using persuasion, rewards or other methods not in line with ACDC community values as determined by the ACDN Awards Committee
- the artists body of work is determined to be offensive in matter, tone, presentation or likely to offend as determined by the ACDN awards Committee

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS & ACCOLADES

The following awards and accolades will be presented:

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS RECOGNISED WITH TROPHIES

3D/NOVELTY CAKE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

BUTTERCREAM ARTIST OF THE YEAR

ROYAL ICING COOKIE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

FONDANT COOKIE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

CUPCAKE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

EDIBLE DECORATIONS ARTIST OF THE YEAR

SUGAR MODELLING ARTIST OF THE YEAR

SUGAR & WAFER PAPER FLOWERS OF THE YEAR

CAKE DECORATOR OF THE YEAR

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS RECOGNISED WITH CERTIFICATES

HIGHLY COMMENDED 3D/NOVELTY CAKE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED BUTTERCREAM ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED ROYAL ICING COOKIE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED FONDANT COOKIE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED CUPCAKE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED EDIBLE DECORATIONS ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED SUGAR MODELLING ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED SUGAR & WAFER PAPER FLOWERS OF THE YEAR

JUDGING RUBRIC: ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Judging Criterion	Weight	1 - Limited	2 - Developing	3 - Good	4 - Very Strong	5 - Outstanding
Technical skill and control	**30%**	Limited control of the nominated medium or technique. Significant technical issues are evident and execution is inconsistent	Some competent technique is demonstrated, but control is uneven or there are noticeable technical weaknesses.	The artist demonstrates sound control of the relevant medium and techniques, with competent and generally consistent execution.	The artist demonstrates a high level of technical control, precision and confidence across their body of work.	The artist demonstrates exceptional mastery of the medium, with highly refined, precise and consistently controlled technical execution that clearly distinguishes the work at a national level.
Finish and Quality of Execution	**25%**	The work appears unfinished, poorly resolved or significantly affected by visible flaws.	The work is generally complete but contains noticeable issues with finish, refinement, proportion or consistency.	The work is well finished to a solid professional standard, with only minor flaws that do not materially detract from the overall result.	The work is highly refined, polished and consistently well executed, with strong attention to detail.	The work demonstrates exceptional refinement and finish, with meticulous attention to detail and virtually no visible technical weaknesses.
Complexity and Degree of Difficulty	**15%**	The work demonstrates limited technical challenge or ambition within the nominated discipline	Some challenge or complexity is present, but the techniques or construction remain relatively straightforward	The work demonstrates an appropriate level of technical difficulty and successfully manages several challenging elements.	The work demonstrates substantial technical complexity, intricacy or difficulty, handled with confidence and control.	The work demonstrates exceptional technical ambition and difficulty, successfully resolving highly complex, intricate or demanding techniques.
Artistic Design and Interpretation	**20%**	The designs lack cohesion, balance or a clear artistic direction. Creative decisions do not effectively support the finished work	Some thoughtful design choices are evident, but composition, colour, proportion or interpretation may be inconsistent.	The work demonstrates a clear and cohesive artistic approach, with effective composition, colour, proportion and interpretation.	The work is visually distinctive and thoughtfully resolved, showing strong artistic judgement, cohesion and individual interpretation.	The work demonstrates exceptional artistic vision. Design, composition, colour, proportion and interpretation work together seamlessly to create a highly distinctive and memorable result.
Consistency and Body of Work	**10%**	Body of work is inconsistent or provides insufficient evidence of sustained skill within the nominated category	Some strong examples are present, but quality or technical achievement varies noticeably across their body of work.	The body of work demonstrates a generally consistent standard and clear competence within the nominated discipline.	The artist demonstrates a consistently high standard across multiple pieces, with clear breadth and confidence within the discipline.	The artists body of work demonstrates exceptional consistency, depth and sustained technical achievement across all examples presented.

RETAIL, MANUFACTURING & WHOLESALE AWARDS

These awards each have their own unique Judging Process and Criteria.

RETAILER OF THE YEAR – LARGE

The Retailer of the Year — Large award recognises an outstanding cake-decorating retailer operating from two or more physical retail shopfronts and may also include an online store.

The award celebrates a retailer that provides an excellent and reliable customer experience across its locations and relevant online channels. It recognises strong customer care, an appropriate and accessible product range, knowledgeable support, dependable retail operations, adaptability and a positive contribution to the cake-decorating sector and community.

The award is not based on business size, turnover, advertising reach or the number of customer votes alone. Finalists are assessed against the published judging criteria using customer feedback, information supplied by the retailer and relevant public-facing business information.

Due to the size and influence of these businesses in the cake decorating sector, the panel of judges will be made up primarily of business and retail experts from outside the cake decorating who will be supported by a moderation panel of cake sector experts.

RETAILER OF THE YEAR – (LARGE) ROUND 2 JUDGING: FINALISTS QUESTIONNAIRE

Each retailer will be asked to answer the following questions. These provide vital information to the judging panel and retailers unable to return their questionnaire answers before the deadline will not be considered for the National Award. The questionnaire is designed to take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

1. Tell us briefly about your business and the customers you serve
2. What improvement or achievement from the past 12 months are you most proud of?
3. How have do you support customers in choosing and using your products?
4. How have you contributed to the cake-decorating community?
5. Is there anything the judges needs to understand about your business model or operating environment?

RETAILER OF THE YEAR (LARGE) KEY DATES

Process	Description	Date
Public Nominations	Business are nominated or may self nominate for each award category.	11 August – 30 August
Accept Nominations	All nominees will be contacted via email and asked to accept their nomination. Nominees will be asked to provide a logo, head shot and other images of their work as required to allow TCN to promote and run the awards processes.	11 August – 3rd September
Public Voting	Round 1 voting is a public vote – nominees are encouraged to share their nomination and the link to vote across their marketing platforms. Once voting closes, scores will be tallied, weighted and reviewed by the Awards committee	3rd September – 20th September
Finalists Announced	3-6 Finalists will be announced.	23rd – 26th September
Finalists Questionnaire	Finalists in this category will be asked to complete a short questionnaire to provide evidence to the judging panel of their work and success within the sector. The answers to these questionnaires will form a key part of the information used as part of the judging process.	26th September – 3rd October.
Judges Panel	Round 2 is judging by an expert panel of judges from outside the cake sector. They are experts in retail and business. This panel will assess the business against published criteria and in consideration of the answers provided to the committee to determine the business to receive the national trophy. The Awards panel will meet with the judges and provide moderation of the results to determine the final rankings of the finalists. The Finalist with the top ranking will be awarded the trophy.	27th September – 12th October
Awards Presented	During the ACDN Community Night, the top ranked artist will be announced as the award winner and the second ranked artist will receive the Highly Commended award.	20th November, 7pm Hijinx Hotel QV Melbourne.

ELIGIBILITY – RETAILER OF THE YEAR - LARGE

To be eligible, the nominated business must:

- Operate primarily as a retailer supplying products to cake decorators, bakers or closely related customers
- Operate from two or more permanent physical retail shopfronts under the same business ownership or retail brand.
- Have been actively trading throughout the stated eligibility period
- Sell directly to members of the public
- Hold all licenses, registrations and insurances required for its operations
- Be based in Australia and serve Australian customers
- Agree to participate in the Customer Review Round and, if selected, the finalist judging process
- Provide accurate information needed to confirm its eligibility

A business may also operate an online store. Online sales do not affect its eligibility for this category where it operates two or more qualifying physical shopfronts

For the purposes of this award, temporary market stalls, pop-up shops, collection points, warehouses, showrooms not ordinarily open for retail trade, and separately owned franchise locations do not automatically count as permanent shopfronts. Their eligibility will be determined according to the published category rules.

GROUNDS FOR THE AWARD TO BE WITHHELD.

In the case that the award receives fewer than 4 nominations, the award will not be judged or awarded for that calendar year.

Insufficient participation - where a retailer cannot provide 10 verified customer reviews, they will be disqualified due to insufficient evidence for effective judging.

In the case that no retailer in the group achieves a weighted final score of 40% or more, the award will not be granted to avoid awarding of businesses unable to demonstrate high quality experience to their customers.

RETAILER OF THE YEAR (LARGE) AWARDS & ACCOLADES

RETAILER OF THE YEAR (LARGE) AWARDS RECOGNISED WITH A TROPHY

LARGE RETAILER OF THE YEAR

RETAILER OF THE YEAR – SMALL AWARD

The Retailer of the Year — Small award recognises an outstanding independent cake-decorating retailer operating through an online store, one physical retail shopfront, is a small volume retail stockist or a combination of the above

The award celebrates a retailer that delivers excellent customer care, relevant products, knowledgeable assistance and a reliable purchasing experience within the scale and structure of its business. It also recognises adaptability, thoughtful business development and a positive contribution to the cake-decorating sector and community.

Finalists are assessed relative to their business model and available resources. An online-only retailer, a retailer with one shopfront and a retailer operating through both channels may all demonstrate excellence in different ways.

RETAILER OF THE YEAR (SMALL) KEY DATES

Process	Description	Date
Public Nominations	Business are nominated or may self nominate for each award category.	11 August – 30 August
Accept Nominations	All nominees will be contacted via email and asked to accept their nomination. Nominees will be asked to provide a logo, head shot and other images of their work as required to allow TCN to promote and run the awards processes.	11 August – 3rd September
Public Voting	Round 1 voting is a public vote – nominees are encouraged to share their nomination and the link to vote across their marketing platforms. Once voting closes, scores will be tallied, weighted and reviewed by the Awards committee	3rd September – 20th September
Finalists Announced	For each category, the top voted business in each State/Region of Australia will be announced as the regional winner and will be announced as the a finalist that moves forward to compete for the national trophy.	23rd – 26th September
Judges Panel	Round 2 is judging by an expert panel of judges. They will assess the business against published criteria to determine the business to receive the national trophy. The Awards panel will meet with the judges and provide moderation of the results to determine the final rankings of the finalists. The Finalist with the top ranking will be awarded the trophy.	27th September – 12th October
Awards Presented	During the ACDN Community Night, the top ranked artist will be announced as the award winner and the second ranked artist will receive the Highly Commended award.	20th November, 7pm Hijinx Hotel QV Melbourne.

ELIGIBILITY – RETAILER OF THE YEAR – SMALL

To be eligible, the nominated business must:

- Operate primarily as a retailer supplying products to cake decorators, bakers or closely related customers
- An online store, one permanent physical shopfront, one regular market or pop-up retail outlet, or a combination of these including or in combination with an online shopfront
- Have been actively trading throughout the stated eligibility period
- Sell directly to members of the public
- Hold all licenses, registrations and insurances required for its operations
- Be based in Australia and serve Australian customers
- Agree to participate in the Customer Review Round and, if selected, the finalist judging process
- Provide accurate information needed to confirm its eligibility

A business operating two or more permanent physical retail shopfronts is not eligible for this category and should be considered for Retailer of the Year — Large. Businesses entered in Retailer of the Year — Small cannot also compete in Retailer of the Year — Large in the same awards year.

A regular market or pop-up retail outlet is a recurring in-person sales location operated by the business at least twice per month, or on another published and consistent schedule approved by the awards organisers.

Regular market and pop-up trading is recognised as a valid retail model. Market appearances do not count as separate permanent shopfronts when determining eligibility for the Large Retailer category

RETAILER OF THE YEAR (SMALL) AWARDS & ACCOLADES

RETAILER OF THE YEAR (SMALL) AWARDS RECOGNISED WITH A TROPHY

SMALL RETAILER OF THE YEAR

RETAILER OF THE YEAR (SMALL) AWARDS RECOGNISED WITH A CERTIFICATE

QLD SMALL RETAILER OF THE YEAR

NSW SMALL RETAILER OF THE YEAR

ACT/TAS SMALL RETAILER OF THE YEAR

VIC SMALL RETAILER OF THE YEAR

SA SMALL RETAILER OF THE YEAR

NT/WA SMALL RETAILER OF THE YEAR

WHOLESALE SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR AWARD

The Wholesale Supplier of the Year award recognises an outstanding business supplying products to retailers, cake businesses and other trade customers within the Australian cake-decorating sector.

The award celebrates excellence in product range, trade service, product knowledge, ordering and fulfilment, reliability of supply, business adaptability and contribution to the sector

Products may be manufactured by the business, produced on its behalf, imported or distributed. The award assesses the quality of the supplier's service and contribution to its trade customers rather than the geographic origin of the products it supplies.

Due to the size and influence of these businesses in the cake decorating sector, the panel of judges will be made up primarily of business and retail experts from outside the cake decorating who will be supported by a moderation panel of cake sector experts.

CUSTOMER QUESTIONS ON VOTING FORM

1) How would you rate the supplier's trade customer service and communication?

   Judging Guide for Customers
   5 - Excellent: The supplier is consistently responsive, professional and easy to communicate with. Enquiries are answered promptly, important information is communicated clearly, and any concerns or problems are handled effectively. The trade customer feels valued and well supported.
   3 - Good: The supplier provides polite and generally reliable service. Most enquiries are answered and important information is usually communicated, although response times or follow-up may sometimes vary
   1 - Poor: The supplier is difficult to contact, slow to respond or unclear in its communication. Enquiries, concerns or problems are not handled appropriately, and the trade customer receives limited support.

2) How would you rate the suppliers product range, quality and value for trade customers?

   Judging Guide for Customers
   5 - Excellent: The supplier offers a strong and relevant range of consistently high-quality products. Trade pricing and terms provide appropriate value, and the range supports the needs of the customer's business
   3 - Good: The supplier offers a suitable product range of generally reliable quality and reasonable trade value. Some products, options or price points may be limited, but the range meets most business needs.
   1 - Poor: The product range is limited, unsuitable or frequently unavailable. Product quality may be inconsistent, and the pricing or trade terms provide poor value for the customer's business

3) How would you rate the ease, accuracy and reliability of ordering and fulfilment?

   Judging Guide for Customers
   5 - Excellent: The ordering process is clear, straightforward and dependable. Orders are processed accurately, stock and delivery information is reliable, and products arrive within the advised timeframe and in appropriate condition.

3 - Good: Ordering and fulfilment generally work as expected. There may be occasional delays, stock issues or minor errors, but these are communicated and resolved appropriately.
1 - Poor: The ordering process is confusing or unreliable. Orders may be inaccurate, delayed, incomplete or poorly packed, and stock or delivery information may be unclear. Problems are not resolved satisfactorily.

4) How would you rate the supplier's product knowledge and the support they provide to your business?

Judging Guide for Customers

5 - Excellent: The supplier demonstrates strong product and industry knowledge. It provides clear, accurate and practical advice, helps the customer make suitable purchasing decisions, and offers support that contributes positively to the customer's business
3 - Good: The supplier can answer common product questions and provides reasonable assistance when requested. More detailed or specialised support may sometimes be limited
1 - Poor: The supplier provides little useful product guidance or business support. Information may be inaccurate, unclear or difficult to obtain, and the supplier shows limited understanding of the customer's needs

5) How would you rate the suppliers innovation, adaptability and contribution to the cake decorating sector?

Judging Guide for Customers

5 – Excellent: The supplier responds positively to changes in customer and industry needs. It introduces useful products, services or improvements and makes a meaningful contribution through activities such as education, collaboration, industry support or responsible business practices
3 – Good: The supplier shows some evidence of adapting its range or service and participates positively in the sector. Its contribution is useful, although it may be occasional or limited in scope
1 – Poor: There is little evidence that the supplier responds to changing industry needs or improves its products or services. It makes little visible contribution to the broader cake-decorating sector.

6) Trade Customer Comment

Please provide a brief comment describing your experience with the retailer.

Helpful comments include a specific example of:

- the service or communication you received
- the quality, range or value of the products supplied;
- how an order, delay or problem was handled
- the product knowledge or business support provided
- how the supplier has supported or contributed to the sector.

Comments should be factual, respectful and based on your own experience as a trade customer

WHOLESALE SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR KEY DATES

Process	Description	Date
Public Nominations	Business are nominated or may self nominate for each award category.	11 August – 30 August
Accept Nominations	All nominees will be contacted via email and asked to accept their nomination. Nominees will be asked to provide a logo, head shot and other images of their work as required to allow TCN to promote and run the awards processes.	11 August – 3rd September
Customer Voting	Customers of the nominated businesses be asked to vote by answering 5 questions and providing a comment for the judges to review.	3rd September – 20th September
No Finalists	Due to the small number of businesses in this category – all nominees will be eligible and in the running for the national prize, there will be no finalists announcement.	
Judges Panel	Round 2 is judging by an expert panel of judges from outside the cake sector. They are experts in retail and business. This panel will assess the business against published criteria, customer scores and comments to determine which business will receive the national trophy. The Awards panel will meet with the judges and provide moderation of the results to determine the final rankings of the finalists. The Finalist with the top ranking will be awarded the trophy.	27th September – 12th October
Awards Presented	During the ACDN Community Night, the top ranked artist will be announced as the award winner and the second ranked artist will receive the Highly Commended award.	20th November, 7pm Hijinx Hotel QV Melbourne.

ELIGIBILITY – WHOLE SALE SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR

To be eligible, the nominated business must:

- Supply products primarily to retailers, cake businesses or other trade customers;
- Operate predominantly on a wholesale or business-to-business basis
- Have no material direct retail exposure to the general public, except where incidental to its wholesale operations
- Have been actively trading throughout the stated eligibility period
- Supply Australian trade customers
- Hold the licences, registrations and insurances required for its operations
- Agree to participate in the review and finalist judging process
- Provide accurate information required to confirm eligibility

A business may supply products that it manufactures, imports, distributes or has produced under its own brand. The method or location of manufacture does not, by itself, affect eligibility

GROUNDS FOR THE AWARD TO BE WITHHELD.

In the case that the award receives fewer than 4 nominations, the award will not be judged or awarded for that calendar year.

Insufficient participation - where a retailer cannot provide 10 verified customer reviews, they will be disqualified due to insufficient evidence for effective judging.

In the case that no whole sale supplier in the group achieves a weighted final score of 40% or more, the award will not be granted to avoid awarding of businesses unable to demonstrate high quality experience to their customers.

WHOLESALE SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

WHOLESALE SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR AWARDS RECOGNISED WITH A TROPHY

WHOLE SALE SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR

JUDGING RUBRIC – RETAILER OF THE YEAR LARGE AND SMALL, WHOLESALE SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR

Judging Criterion	Weight	1 - limited evidence	2 - Developing	3 - Good standard	4 - Very Strong	5 - Outstanding
Customer Service and Customer Care	**25%**	There is little evidence of consistent customer care. Customer comments identify significant concerns, poor communication or unresolved issues. The retailer's answers do not explain clear customer-service practices.	Some positive service practices are evident, but delivery appears inconsistent. Customer feedback is mixed, and the retailer provides limited evidence of how enquiries, concerns or complaints are managed.	The retailer demonstrates reliable and respectful customer service. Customer comments are generally positive, and the retailer provides credible examples of supporting customers and resolving issues appropriately.	Customer care is clearly embedded in the business. Feedback shows consistently positive experiences, responsive communication and effective problem resolution. The retailer provides strong examples of adapting support to customer needs.	The retailer demonstrates an exceptional and consistently customer-centred approach. Evidence from customers, retailer responses and public-facing channels strongly aligns and shows proactive support, trust, accessibility and exemplary handling of customer needs.
Product range, knowledge and accessibility	**20%**	The range appears limited or poorly matched to the customers served. Product information is difficult to find, unclear or inaccurate. There is little evidence of useful product knowledge or accessible customer support.	The retailer provides a basic range and some product assistance, but there are noticeable gaps in availability, information, accessibility or staff knowledge.	The product range is appropriate for the retailer's customers. Information is generally clear, and the retailer demonstrates sound knowledge and the ability to provide useful guidance.	The retailer offers a strong, relevant and well-presented range. Product guidance is knowledgeable and practical, and customers can access clear information, suitable alternatives and support through relevant purchasing channels.	The retailer demonstrates exceptional understanding of its market. Its range, specialist knowledge and customer guidance is highly relevant, accessible and responsive. Evidence shows that customers are actively helped to make informed and suitable product choices.
Reliable Retail Operations	**20%**	There is significant evidence of unclear, inconsistent or unreliable purchasing, ordering, fulfilment or communication. Public-facing information may be incomplete, inaccurate or difficult to navigate.	Basic operations are in place, but customer feedback or public information indicates recurring issues with ordering, stock information, delivery, collection, accuracy or communication.	The retailer provides a generally clear and dependable purchasing experience. Orders, payments, fulfilment and customer communication are managed to a good and appropriate standard.	Retail operations are efficient, clear and reliable across the retailer's relevant channels. Evidence shows strong systems, accurate information, effective communication and appropriate responses when problems occur.	The retailer delivers an exceptionally dependable and well-managed customer experience. Operations are seamless, transparent and responsive, with strong evidence of consistency, accuracy, accessibility and effective contingency management.
Business Development and Adaptability	**15%**	The retailer provides little evidence of improvement, development or response to changing customer or business needs during the past 12 months. Claims are vague or unsupported.	Some change or development is described, but its purpose, implementation or benefit is unclear. Evidence of adaptation or measurable improvement is limited.	The retailer identifies a relevant improvement or achievement and explains how it benefited the business or its customers. It demonstrates an appropriate capacity to respond to change.	The retailer provides strong evidence of thoughtful development, innovation or adaptation during the past 12 months. The improvement has a clear purpose and has produced meaningful benefits for customers or business operations.	The retailer demonstrates exceptional strategic development and adaptability. It has identified a genuine need, implemented an effective response and shown clear, well-supported impact while maintaining or improving customer service.
Contribution to the sector and community	**20%**	There is little evidence of contribution beyond ordinary commercial activity. Claims of community or sector support are unclear, incidental or unsupported.	The retailer demonstrates occasional participation or support, but the contribution appears limited in reach, consistency or impact.	The retailer makes a positive and credible contribution through activities such as education, collaboration, customer support, local engagement, inclusion or responsible business practice regradless of the size of their contribution (quality over quantity)	The retailer provides strong evidence of thoughtful development, innovation or adaptation during the past 12 months. The improvement has a clear purpose and has produced meaningful benefits for customers or business operations.	The retailer makes an exceptional contribution that strengthens, connects or advances the sector or community. Its contribution is sustained, purposeful and demonstrably beneficial, extending meaningfully beyond its normal commercial interests, regardless of the size of the contribution.

NEW PRODUCT OF THE YEAR AWARD

The New Product of the Year award recognises an outstanding product newly introduced to the Australian cake-decorating sector during the eligibility period.

The award celebrates a product that responds to a genuine customer or industry need and demonstrates excellence in quality, performance, usability and value. It also recognises meaningful innovation, whether through a completely new product or a substantial improvement to an existing product.

Products will be assessed through a consistent practical judging process. The award is not determined by brand size, sales volume, advertising reach or public popularity.

NEW PRODUCT OF THE YEAR KEY DATES

Process	Description	Date
Public Nominations	Business are nominated or may self nominate for each award category.	11 August – 30 August
Accept Nominations	All nominees will be contacted via email and asked to accept their nomination. Nominees will be asked to provide a logo, head shot and other images of their work as required to allow TCN to promote and run the awards processes.	11 August – 3rd September
Provision of Product for Testing	Nominated Businesses will be asked to send in 6 units of their nominated product for testing.	3rd September – 10th September
Product Testing and Judging	The products will be send to judges who are experts in the field/technique for which that product would be used. They will assess each product's merits against the published criteria and provide a score. Scores will be reviewed by a moderation panel before final rankings are decided.	10th September – 12th October
Awards Presented	During the ACDN Community Night, the top ranked artist will be announced as the award winner and the second ranked artist will receive the Highly Commended award.	20th November, 7pm Hijinx Hotel QV Melbourne.

NEW PRODUCT OF THE YEAR ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible, the nominated product must:

- be designed for use within cake decorating, baking or a closely related creative field;
- have first become commercially available to Australian customers during the published eligibility period;
- be available for purchase in Australia at the time of judging;
- be a new product or a substantially improved version of an existing product;
- be entered by the product's manufacturer, Australian brand owner, importer, distributor or authorised wholesale supplier;
- comply with all applicable Australian safety, labelling, food, consumer and product requirements;
- be supplied in its normal retail or trade-ready form;
- include any instructions, warnings or supporting information ordinarily provided to customers; and
- be supplied in sufficient quantity for eligibility checks and practical judging.

WHAT COUNTS AS A NEW PRODUCT?

A product may be eligible where it is:

- a completely new product;
- a new formulation, material, tool or piece of equipment;
- a substantially redesigned or improved version of an existing product; or
- an existing product newly introduced to the Australian market during the eligibility period.

A change to colour, flavour, size, packaging or branding alone would not ordinarily be considered a new product unless the change creates a clear and meaningful new benefit for the intended user.

PRODUCT ORIGIN

Products may be manufactured in Australia or overseas.

The place of manufacture does not determine eligibility. The award recognises the quality, performance, relevance and value of the product as supplied to the Australian cake-decorating sector.

PRODUCTS NOT ELIGIBLE

The following would not ordinarily be eligible:

- Products released before the stated eligibility period;
- Minor packaging or branding updates;

- A new colour, flavour or size with no substantial functional difference;
- Products that are not commercially available in Australia;
- Products that are readily available on retail marketplaces such as Amazon.com, Temu, Aliexpress etc.
- Prototypes or products not yet available for purchase;
- Products entered without the authority of the manufacturer, brand owner, importer or distributor; and
- Products that cannot be supplied for practical assessment.

ENTRY COMMITMENT

By entering, the nominated business agrees to:

- Provide accurate product and release information;
- Disclose any special handling, storage, safety or equipment requirements;
- Supply the required judging samples by the stated deadline;
- Permit the product to be opened, used and tested as part of the judging process; and
- Accept that samples used in judging may not be returned.

ELIGIBILITY CHECKS AND SHORTLISTING

Products may be entered by the manufacturer, brand owner, importer, distributor or authorised wholesale supplier.

Each nominated product must be submitted with:

- Confirmation of the product's Australian release date;
- The recommended retail price;
- A brief description of the intended user and purpose;
- An explanation of what is new or substantially improved;
- Any instructions, warnings or supporting information provided to customers;
- Relevant safety, ingredient, storage or compliance information; and
- The required product samples.

All entries will first be checked against the published eligibility requirements. In the case that more than 10 products are entered into this category, the Awards panel will use the published criteria to review the entries and pick 4-6 finalists.

STAGE 2: PRACTICAL PRODUCT ASSESSMENT

Products will be assessed by an independent panel with relevant cake-decorating, baking, technical or product experience.

Each judge will test every finalist against the published criteria. Testing will be based on the product's intended purpose and the claims made by the entrant.

Because products may differ in type, material and use, the exact practical test may vary. However, each finalist will be assessed through a documented process designed to ensure that comparable products are tested consistently and that all products are judged fairly against their intended function.

PRODUCT SAMPLES

Finalists must provide six (6) identical samples for practical assessment.

Samples must:

- Be unopened and supplied in their ordinary retail or trade-ready form;
- Be from normal production stock;
- Include the standard instructions, packaging and warnings;
- Be suitable for use within the stated judging period; and
- Be supplied by the published deadline.

During judging, products may be opened, used, consumed or altered during testing and will not be returned. Where specialist equipment is genuinely required, the entrant must disclose this at the time of entry.

INDEPENDENT SCORING AND MODERATION

Judges will score each product independently before participating in a moderated panel discussion. Scores will be reviewed for consistency, and judges may be asked to explain unusually high or low scores. No single judge can determine the outcome.

AWARD STANDARD

The product achieving the highest weighted score will be named New Product of the Year, provided it meets the standard expected of a national award winner.

GROUNDS ON WHICH THE AWARD MAY BE WITHHELD.

Where no finalist reaches an award-worthy standard, the award may be withheld.

NEW PRODUCT OF THE YEAR AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

NEW PRODUCT OF THE YEAR AWARDS RECOGNISED WITH A TROPHY

NEW PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

JUDGING RUBRIC – NEW PRODUCT OF THE YEAR						
Judging Criterion	**Weight**	**1 - Limited**	**2 - Developing**	**3 - Good standard**	**4 - Very Strong**	**5 - Outstanding**
Quality and Performance	**30%**	The product does not perform reliably as intended, produces inconsistent results, or has significant quality concerns	The product performs some functions adequately but has noticeable limitations, inconsistency or reliability issues	The product performs as intended to a good and dependable standard, with acceptable consistency and quality.	The product performs very well, produces consistently strong results and demonstrates a high level of quality and reliability.	The product performs exceptionally well, is highly consistent and delivers a clearly superior result for its intended purpose.
Innovation and identified need	**20%**	There is little evidence of a genuine new idea, meaningful improvement or identified customer need.	The product offers a modest variation or improvement, but the benefit or need addressed is limited or unclear.	The product addresses a genuine need or provides a useful improvement over existing options	The product demonstrates a thoughtful and meaningful innovation that clearly improves the user experience, outcome or process.	The product represents an exceptional innovation or substantial advancement that addresses a significant sector need in a highly effective way.
Ease of use and user experience	**20%**	The product is difficult, confusing or frustrating to use, even when instructions are followed.	The product can be used successfully, but the process is unnecessarily difficult, inconsistent or requires significant additional knowledge.	The product is reasonably intuitive and performs well when used as directed. The overall user experience is appropriate for its intended customer.	The product is easy and efficient to use, with thoughtful design that clearly supports the intended customer.	The product provides an exceptional user experience. It is intuitive, efficient and significantly improves the ease, confidence or enjoyment of the task
Value for the intended customer	**15%**	The price appears difficult to justify relative to the product's performance, quantity, durability or benefit	The product provides some value but is comparatively expensive or offers limited additional benefit for its intended customer.	The product provides reasonable value for its price, quality, performance and intended use	The product offers very good value, with clear benefits that justify its price or provide meaningful efficiencies, durability or improved results.	The product provides exceptional value for its intended customer, delivering substantial benefit, performance or efficiency relative to its cost
Instructions, packaging and usage	**15%**	Instructions or essential information are unclear, incomplete or absent. Packaging or presentation negatively affects safe, effective or appropriate use.	Basic information is provided but there are noticeable gaps in clarity, usability, protection or suitability.	Instructions and packaging are clear and appropriate and provide the information needed for normal use.	Information is comprehensive and easy to understand. Packaging is practical, appropriate and supports the effective use, storage or handling of the product.	Instructions, packaging and supporting information are exceptionally clear, thoughtful and fit for purpose, significantly enhancing the overall product experience

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.

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.

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.

RISING TALENT YEAR KEY DATES

Process	Description	Date
Public Nominations	Business are nominated or may self nominate for each award category.	11 August – 30 August
Accept Nominations	All nominees will be contacted via email and asked to accept their nomination. Nominees will be asked to provide a logo, head shot and other images of their work as required to allow TCN to promote and run the awards processes.	11 August – 3rd September
Nominee Vetting	Nominees will be vetted by the Awards panel to identify eligibility of nominees.	10th September – 12th October
Judging	Once vetting is complete, an experienced sub-panel of judges. They will assess the artists skill against published criteria. The Awards panel will meet with the judges and provide moderation of the results to determine the final rankings. The Artist with the top ranking will be awarded the trophy.	10th September – 12th October
Awards Presented	During the ACDN Community Night, the top ranked artist will be announced as the award winner and the second ranked artist will receive the Highly Commended award.	20th November, 7pm Hijinx Hotel QV Melbourne.

Rising Talent Judges Rubric										
Criterion	Limited		Developing		Promising		Very Strong		Exceptional Rising Talent	
Scoring Scale	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
Demonstrated Technical & Artistic Ability	Work remains at a very early stage, with significant inconsistency in technique, finish or artistic decision-making		Some sound skills are emerging, but execution and artistic confidence remain inconsistent.		Demonstrates a solid and increasingly confident technical and artistic foundation, with generally consistent work.		Demonstrates strong skill, finish and artistic judgement for their limited time in the sector, with an emerging individual style.		Demonstrates exceptional technical and artistic ability for an emerging decorator, with highly accomplished work, strong consistency and a distinctive developing voice.	
Growth & Development	Limited evidence of significant progression across the period assessed.		Some improvement is evident, but development has been gradual or inconsistent.		Clear progression is visible in skill, confidence, complexity and quality over time.		Demonstrates substantial development in a short period, with increasingly ambitious and successfully executed work.		Demonstrates exceptional progression within approximately two years, showing a striking transformation in technical ability, artistic confidence and quality of work.	
Emerging Potential	Current work provides limited evidence of a clear future development trajectory.		Some promising qualities are evident, but future direction or progression is not yet strongly demonstrated		Shows clear potential for continued development, supported by increasing skill, confidence and ambition.		Demonstrates very strong future potential, with clear momentum, curiosity and an increasingly individual artistic direction.		Demonstrates exceptional emerging potential, with rapid progression, strong artistic direction and a trajectory that clearly distinguishes the artist among their peers at this stage of development.	