



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 – 3 rd 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	3 rd September – 20 th 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.	23 rd -26 th 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.	27 th September – 12 th October
Awards Presented	During the ACDN Community Night, the winners of each award will be announced and presented with their trophy.	20 th 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 BUSINESS 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