Introduction

This document aims to help prospective nominators and endorsers of award candidates understand how to create and support a successful nomination. (In this document "award" includes ACM Advanced Member Grades: Senior Member, Distinguished Member, and Fellow.) ACM grants approximately 25 awards spanning various areas of achievement; each award has a webpage describing the requirements for nominations for that award. This document does not seek to repeat those requirements; instead, it focuses on the best practices for creating successful nominations.

Most of the advice offered below applies to all ACM awards, though some recommendations for specific award nominations are included as well.

Acknowledgement: This document updates and expands upon Marc Snir's *Informal Guide to ACM Fellow Nominations* and Jim Horning's *Making the Case for Fellow*, borrowing heavily (and sometimes verbatim) from both.

Advice to Nominators

A nomination is a narrative explaining why a candidate is worthy of recognition with an award. Many award nominations require endorsements, which support that narrative with the first-hand knowledge of the endorsers. The success of a nomination depends first and foremost on the quality of the candidate, but that must be adequately conveyed in the narrative and, where required, in the supporting endorsements. Decisions on candidates will be based almost exclusively on the information provided in the nomination and endorsements, so the quality of these documents is paramount. While a good nomination package may not help a weak candidate, a weak one will certainly sink a good candidate. This document seeks to help nominators and endorsers avoid the most frequent deficiencies.

For any questions not addressed by the individual award webpages or this document, contact the ACM Awards Committee Program Liaison. See https://awards.acm.org/contact-us.

Involve the candidate in the nomination process.

A nominator might be tempted to nominate a candidate without their knowledge, to avoid disappointment in the case the nomination fails. This is a bad idea because the candidate is best placed to provide accurate information on their achievements and to select plausible endorsers. Additionally, for some awards (notably Fellows), there is a waiting period before an unsuccessful nomination can be resubmitted, so in effect a nomination is a bet that carries a risk and the nominators should consult the candidate before making the bet on their behalf.

Start early.

Starting early obviously permits more time to iterate on the nomination text. When endorsements are required starting early makes it more likely that endorsers will agree to endorse, since they have not yet been approached multiple times, and they have time to write a quality endorsement. It enables endorsements to be submitted well ahead of the deadline, thus ensuring that unforeseen events will not prevent a submission.

Many awards require a specific number of endorsements. A nominator may be tempted to request more than the specified number as “insurance”, but that can upset endorsers whose work ends up being unused. A better strategy is to solicit the required number of endorsements from the preferred endorsers and identify an additional individual who would be willing to write a “backup” endorsement on short notice, if needed.

Ensure that the specific requirements for the award are met by the nomination and include everything required on the nomination form.

This is a bit more than just “follow instructions”. Some awards have requirements (e.g., ACM membership or service over a specified period) that may not be met. It behooves the nominator to check with the candidate that these requirements are satisfied before beginning the process.

In describing a candidate's contributions, include everything that is pertinent to the award and why. Depending on the award, this might include publications, service roles in or outside ACM, and previous achievements or honors. Don't assume that committee members will already know.

Provide relevant evidence in support of claims of accomplishment.

Accomplishments are meaningful if they have a recognizable impact, but impact manifests itself in various ways. If the nominee's achievements are in theoretical computer science, the impact may be intellectual advances in our understanding of computing, and the supporting evidence could be citations of subsequent research that builds on this advance. If the achievements are in applied research, the impact could be in the use of the developed technology, for which tangible artifacts could be more relevant than citations. If the achievements are in the computer industry, the impact could be industrial success with products as evidence of that impact. These are intended as examples; they are not firm rules, and many caveats apply: the last contributor to a new concept is often more cited than the first one, and commercial success of a product is only weakly correlated with its technical quality or novelty.

Don't allow the candidate to write the nomination.

A candidate may want to write their own nomination. While such a write-up could be a useful draft for the nominator, it should not be the final nomination. The nomination expresses the view of the nominator, not the candidate. A nominator has a more objective view of the importance of the candidate's contributions and a better understanding of how the nomination will be read by a committee that is not necessarily familiar with the candidate. Moreover, the nominator should have more experience writing this type of document.

Don't include platitudes – stick to the facts.

One regrettably frequent (and obnoxious) platitude is "This nomination is a no-brainer." Perhaps the nominator or endorser thinks so, but no nomination is a no-brainer for the committee, which is charged with basing its decisions on evidence. Let the evidence show that the nomination is a no-brainer.

A common pitfall (especially with nominations for ACM Fellow) is a statement of the form, "It is my opinion that the candidate is in the top 1% of ACM members." Unless the nominator is truly acquainted with a representative sample of the entire ACM population (rare), such an unsupported opinion undermines the credibility of the nomination.

Don't duplicate information that the committee already has.

It is pointless to paraphrase information in the candidate's CV.

It is best to avoid spending space reporting citation counts and similar metrics. If the committee deems such metrics relevant, it acquires them.

Don't assume that the committee is broadly familiar with awards given across the world.

ACM strives to have broad representation on award committees, but of course not every country can be represented. While a nominator can reasonably assume committee members are familiar with ACM awards (including SIG awards), committee members may not be familiar with other forms of recognition, including national awards, national academic society memberships, or national leadership

positions, that are given around the world. In such cases, the nomination should help the committee to understand their importance.

Don't assume that the committee is deeply familiar with a nominee's specific research area.

Some awards are specific to a field, such as theoretical computer science or AI, and committee members will be knowledgeable within that field. However, they may not be experts in the subfield of a nominee. For awards with broader scope, the handful of people constituting the committee cannot possibly comprehensively represent all areas of computing that might appear in a nomination. Even when the committee has relevant expertise, the committee member most familiar with the candidate's area of work may have a conflict-of-interest. For these reasons, the nomination must explain why an achievement is important. "She proved the XYZ theorem" is not useful to a committee without an explanation of why people care about that theorem; "he developed the PQR protocol" is not useful without an explanation of how broadly that protocol is used.

Concentrate on the past; don't talk about the future.

Awards are given for accomplishments, not potential accomplishments. Specifically, when a nomination refers to impact, the impact must have occurred, not be projected.

Don't confuse a nomination with a tenure case.

Academic promotion and ACM awards have significantly different criteria. While some criteria may overlap, a nomination modeled on a tenure case will likely fail.

Do not combine related but distinct work of multiple people in a single nomination

Most ACM awards are specified as being given "to an individual", though a few explicitly permit groups. The individual requirement normally means what it says: one person. For a nomination for an individual award to include multiple people, it must make the case for their inseparability. Most commonly, the individuals will have collaborated closely on the nominated work. In rare cases the nominees may have achieved equivalent results independently. Unrelated or loosely related work by multiple individuals must not be the subject of a single nomination for an individual award.

If endorsements are required, select endorsers carefully.

Nominators naturally seek to pick as endorsers the most famous individuals that they can. Well-written endorsements from prominent members of the field certainly carry weight, but famous people are busy people, and despite their best intentions, they may, under time pressure, create weak, pro-forma endorsements. This is particularly likely if the famous person is not already deeply familiar with the candidate's work. (Extreme versions, reminiscent of Benjamin Franklin's famous satire (https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-23-02-0365) are regrettably not unknown.)

While the candidate's advice is important in selecting the endorsers, it is better that endorsers be approached by the nominator, for it will be easier for a potential endorser to say "no" if approached by the nominator rather than by the candidate, which is obviously preferable to a tepid endorsement.

Provide endorsers you select with a copy of the final section of this document ("Advice to Endorsers").

Don't assume that the endorsers you select will know what an endorsement should contain. Even if they have provided award endorsements before, the information below will help them produce a stronger one.

Encourage your endorsers to send you copies of their letters in advance of the submission deadline.

Even though you have provided your endorsers with guidance for creating a strong endorsement, they may not heed it. Obviously, it is preferable for you to correct any shortcomings while there is still time to correct them or, if necessary, to substitute an endorsement from a "backup" endorser.

Nominators should be especially alert for endorsements that too closely resemble letters supporting a tenure case. Such letters are regrettably common. Verify that endorsements speak (only) to the nomination.

Pay close attention to the specific requirements for the award and address them explicitly in the nomination.

Here is some guidance for specific awards.

For Advanced Member Grades:

Advanced Member Grades have requirements for duration of ACM membership. In addition, Advanced Member Grades require sufficient years of professional experience, which vary with the grade. These are checked by the award committee; there is no point in wasting everyone's time with a nomination that fails to meet these requirements.

For ACM Fellow:

A nomination for ACM Fellow must include:

- The candidate's most significant professional accomplishments and their foundational, technical, commercial, or other achievements (limited to 750 words).
- Up to 8 specific contributions epitomizing the significance and lasting impact of those accomplishments (limited to 300 words).
- The candidate's most significant leadership roles in ACM or other service activities (limited to 300 words).
- Formal professional recognition the candidate has received for his/her contributions, such as awards or other honors (limited to 300 words).

Don't omit any of these sections. Remember that "contributions" need not be publications and explain why the contributions, roles, or recognition are significant. As noted above, don't assume the committee members will just know.

The ACM Fellow designation "recognizes the top 1% of ACM members for their outstanding accomplishments in computing and information technology and/or outstanding service to ACM and the

larger computing community." The nomination must therefore speak to contributions within the computing community; contributions outside the field are not relevant to the nomination. The committee takes a broad view of computing to include cognate areas. However, success in an executive position unrelated to computing (e.g., as Provost at a University or manager of a non-IT unit in industry), or voluntary work unrelated to computing will not carry much weight. Avoid devoting nomination space to such activities.

Most successful ACM Fellow candidates are selected chiefly on the strength of their scientific and technical contributions. A small number is selected chiefly on the strength of outstanding service to the ACM community. However, candidates are expected to have contributed both.

A nomination for ACM Fellow must present a convincing case that the nominee is a stand-out in the field. Computing is a global field; the ideal nomination positions the candidate in that context. For a candidate from a country with a smaller computing community, the nomination package is greatly strengthened by having endorsers of another nationality. The committee needs to know how famous the candidate is in their field of expertise, not how famous they are in their country.

Strong nominations for ACM Fellow often use endorsers that can testify to the importance of different contributions. One might focus on service, while others address different aspects of the technical contributions. The right mix will depend on the types of contributions and their relative importance to the nomination.

Endorsements are convincing when written by people who work in the candidate's field of specialty and who have made use of the candidate's work. If the candidate co-created a key result in their field, having at least one of the collaborators as an endorser is recommended. Such a collaborator might be in the same organization as the candidate, and while that is acceptable, breadth in the selection of endorsers is desirable, so having only collaborators as endorsers should be avoided. Additionally, it is best to avoid endorsers from the same organization who are not closely connected to the candidate's work and endorsers who have an obligation to the candidate (e.g., a former grad student or current supervisor).

Having all endorsers chosen from a narrow community (a small sub-specialty or a small national community) should be avoided. There is often a natural trade-off between familiarity of the endorsers with the candidate and the breadth and diversity of the community they collectively represent. For a successful Fellow nomination, the nominator will find a good balance. If you cannot find five endorsers that are ACM Fellows or have equal standing while balancing these considerations, then the nomination is likely premature.

For the ACM Prize in Computing:

The description of this award includes this characterization of eligibility [*emphasis added*]:

> The ACM Prize in Computing recognizes an *early to mid-career* fundamental, innovative contribution in computing that, through its depth, impact, and broad implications, exemplifies the greatest achievements in the discipline. The award is given for achievements during the *early years of an individual's career*, although enough time must have passed to clearly establish evidence of impact (i.e., *candidates are typically within 8-16 years of the terminal degree*, with consideration made for interrupted or second careers).

While the emphasized provisions give the committee some flexibility, this award is not intended for senior members of the field, and nominations that ignore this requirement will be unsuccessful.

For the ACM A.M Turing Award:

The description of this award includes this characterization of eligibility:

> It is presented annually to an individual who has made lasting contributions of a technical nature to the computing community.
>
> Although the long-term influences of the nominee's work are taken into consideration, there should be a particular outstanding and trend-setting technical achievement that constitutes the principal claim to the award.
>
> Successful Turing Award nominations […] provide clear evidence of the candidate's lasting impact.

Though the above description says the award is given to "an individual", the award has frequently been given to pairs or trios of individuals who worked closely together and whose contributions are regarded by the committee as inseparable and instrumental to the technical achievement being recognized.

The phrase "particular outstanding and trend-setting technical achievement" is important. The Turing Award is not a lifetime achievement award, and the nomination must make the case principally based on a specific achievement, which may nevertheless be broadly characterized corresponding to the scope of its impact.

Because lasting impact is a requirement, the Turing Award is typically granted to senior members of the field, though history offers several counterexamples.

Although the award description does not explicitly say so, nominated candidates may, at the committee's discretion, remain in consideration for a few years after their nomination.

Advice to Endorsers

A nomination is a narrative explaining why a candidate is worthy of recognition with an award. Endorsements support that narrative with the first-hand knowledge of the endorsers. The success of a nomination depends first and foremost on the quality of the candidate, but that must be adequately conveyed in the narrative and supporting endorsements. Decisions on candidates will be based almost exclusively on the information provided in the nomination and endorsements, so the quality of these documents is paramount. While a good nomination package may not help a weak candidate, a weak one will certainly sink a good candidate. This document seeks to help nominators and endorsers avoid the most frequent deficiencies.

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Write a knowledgeable endorsement.

An endorsement speaks to portions of the nomination for which the endorser has personal knowledge, and it elaborates on the nomination based on that knowledge. If you lack such knowledge, do not agree to be an endorser, as you cannot help and will likely hurt the nomination.

An endorsement often speaks to the impact of the work described in the nomination, and the endorser should generally explain why they are able to assess that impact. In some cases it may be obvious based on the endorser's position and the achievement being recognized; in other cases, the endorser may need to briefly explain their relevant background for the committee.

Write a meaningful endorsement.

Endorsements generally have space limitations. A substantive, thoughtful, convincing endorsement containing sufficient detail for credibility will generally use most of the available space. Don't expend space repeating material in the nomination; use that space to augment it.

An endorsement of the form "I am famous and trust me on this one" will do more harm than good.

Don't confuse an endorsement with a letter supporting tenure.

Academic promotion and ACM awards have significantly different criteria. While some criteria may overlap, a warmed-over tenure letter will fail to address relevant award criteria and will weaken the nomination.

Where promotion and award criteria overlap, relevant material from a tenure letter may be included if rephrased appropriately. At the very least, go to the trouble to remove phrases like "recommended for promotion in your department".

Give a draft of your endorsement to the nominator in time for any necessary adjustments.

Your endorsement naturally focuses on your area of knowledge pertaining to the nomination. The nominator has an overall view of the nomination case, which may have several components that need to be balanced. By providing an early draft of your endorsement, you help the nominator achieve that balance and both of you have the time to make any adjustments necessary to strengthen the package.

For ACM Fellow, be aware of the limit on endorsements in any given year.

An endorser may endorse at most four nominations for Fellow in a year. While this limit rarely poses a practical problem, it is cruel to a nominee (and nominator) to have a nomination fail for a violation of this rule. Additionally, endorsing more than two candidates in a year for the same award may weaken the endorser's impact.