

ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES

AGLS Exemplary General Education Program Award

2026 Focus: Program Improvement

Award Information and Application

National and international education officials, accreditors, and faculty leaders increasingly associate “quality” education with student learning outcomes and continuous quality improvement processes. Moving away from the view of education as a simple act of passing a static body of knowledge from faculty to students, they value education practiced as a commitment to a set of collectively-practiced, ongoing activities: making *institutional choices* about the most important goals for student learning and defining the learning in terms of desired outcomes; developing a shared faculty commitment to *actions* such as high impact, active learning strategies and faculty development designed to increase student achievement; making informed *judgments* about student achievement and the impact of various general education program support processes; and ensuring continuous *improvements* in the educational program. Despite the commitment of academic leaders and accreditors to these processes, too few institutions have succeeded in applying systematic improvement processes to the general education program. As a result, discussions about higher education accountability and improvement conclude that higher education can benefit from models of innovative, effective, and systematic general education program improvements and assessments.

The Association for General and Liberal Studies is the national organization whose mission is singularly committed to quality general education programs and their vital role in the liberal education of students. The organization invites institutions to apply for the 2026 AGLS Exemplary General Education Program Award. The Award promotes institutional commitment to continuous quality improvement, recognizes faculty and institutions that practice quality behaviors, and provides much needed examples of effective general education improvement processes.

Applicants in 2026 will be focusing on their institutions commitment to successfully implementing program revisions that led to verifiable general education learning achievement through the efforts to improve the program. Prompts in the application form are directly related to questions in *An AGLS Guide to Assessment & Program Review*.

AGLS will recognize no more than three institutions in 2026 that have successfully and collegially implemented a significant program revision that is systematically producing evidence of general education learning. The selection committee will be particularly interested in how the institution measured the revision efforts are producing desired results. In other words, the institution should include evidence that they can ‘close the loop’ between the implemented program revisions and actual learning outcomes.

The Awards will be presented during the 2026 Annual AGLS Constitute, September 25 & 26, Charlotte, NC. Recognized institutions will be required to provide information for a feature in a fall e-news update and will be encouraged to facilitate a virtual Live Chat session on their program improvement’s challenges and successes. Recipient institutions will receive the following: a plaque recognizing their successes; a digital medallion for use on their website; recognition on the AGLS website and in a fall issue of our e-news; and a complimentary 2026-27 institutional membership.

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Award Selection and Criteria

Applications will be reviewed by an Awards Committee comprised of AGLS Council members, members of accrediting associations, and leaders in general education. The application narrative questions are based on the Systems Analysis questions found in the AGLS publication, *Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Program Review* (see www.agls.org for a free download).

Award evaluation will focus on the innovative and systematic qualities of the institution's reform efforts to reinforce or accomplish the goals of general education, how well the application describes the full 'loop' of the process, and on how well the institution's process can serve as a practical model for other institutions. In 2026, the evaluation will be on the extent to which an institution demonstrates a commitment to common student learning objectives through their development of a new program (**Guide question C1**).

Previous recipient applications and the *AGLS Guide* can be found on the AGLS website: www.agls.org.

Application Format

To be considered for the award, the institution applying has successfully and effectively revised and/or improved their general education (aka liberal education, core curriculum, etc.) program in the past three years (2023 to 2026).

In addition, an applicant on behalf of an institution should complete:

- Section #1: Contact information for individual submitting the application
- Section #2: Institutional endorsement by either the chief executive or academic officer
- Section #3: Application summary (one page or less)
- Section #4: Responses to prompts based on *Guide* question C1; limited to two pages per prompt.

Examples of Evidence for Award Criteria

Evidence of merit requires answering the questions under each of the criteria listed in the application below. Evidence should focus on specific activities and processes that employ the continuous quality improvement principles discussed in the AGLS publication *Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Program Review*. The application should clearly present the creative solutions and leadership methods used to address the issues, concerns, and goals relevant to improving student general education learning through assessment. ***Supporting material can be summarized as part of the application and narrative but limit your explanations to two pages per prompt. Please do not use links to data and analysis reports; a narrative summary of your key results and processes, within the***

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application, is preferable to links that eventually become inoperable. AGLS offers model narratives as examples of success and assumes that recognized institutions will share with interested institutions additional data or information about recognized processes. Acceptance of the Award implies a willingness to share information and suggestions with other institutions.

Award Timeline

Jan 15	Application materials available on AGLS website
May 1	Applications received in AGLS office via email
May 10	Materials distributed to award review panel
Jun 15	Applicants notified of 2025 award recipients
Sep 25	Award recognition ceremony

Suggested Reference Material

Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Learning is available for free download at: www.agls.org. Supporting literature (from regional and specialized accreditors and from AAC&U) is listed in the *Guide*.

Application Submission

Applications may be submitted as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat format, sent to the Executive Director at execdir@agls.org.

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Section #1: Please provide the following information of the person submitting application:

NAME	
TITLE	
INSTITUTION	
DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM	
STREET ADDRESS (building, room, etc. as necessary)	
CITY, STATE ZIP CODE	
OFFICE PHONE	
EMAIL	
SIGNATURE	

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Section #2: Please provide the following information of the Chief Executive Officer or Chief Academic Officer for institutional endorsement

NAME	
TITLE	
INSTITUTION	
DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM	
STREET ADDRESS (building, room, etc. as necessary)	
CITY, STATE ZIP CODE	
OFFICE PHONE	
EMAIL	
SIGNATURE	

Section #3: Application Summary

Attach a summary of the award application. Please begin the narrative with a brief description of your institution and the time frame for the process. Briefly explain your process and why you think it equates with quality. The summary should not exceed one typed page.

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Section #4: Award Prompts – responses should not exceed two typed pages for each prompt

Criterion 1: Identifying the need for new program creation or revision

An exemplary application should clearly describe why a program development or review process was undertaken. In addition, the application should clearly describe why the program is important to stakeholders. The application should clearly detail the processes essential to engaging all key players in a dialogue to operationally define the goals of the program revision.

Provide a description of how your institution identified its need to design or revise a general education program and committed to common general education outcomes. Address the following issues:

- The learning needs at your institution, including the context for the issue and the relevance of the need to institutional mission and values
- The process your institution used to identify the need (e.g., review of assessment practices by a campus committee, visit by an accrediting agency, etc.) and operationally define this need
- The way your institution communicated this need to faculty, staff, students, and other interested parties, and the process the institution used to create ownership of the issues

Criterion 2: Identification of Goals and Procedure Used to Address Needs

An exemplary application clearly delineates a research-based process to address the identified needs of the institution, and how the goals of the new program align with institutional mission. In addition, the application should clearly describe a model that engages a substantial number of stakeholders and decision-makers in the program development process.

Describe how your institution identified and approved its new goals, and the procedure used to address the need identified in Criterion 1 above. Address the following issues:

- The research used to identify the desired goals and the procedures to address the need most effectively
- The participants who identified the new program learning goals and related instructional practices
- The alignment of the desired program goals and related instructional practices to the institution's mission
- The consistency of the review and approval procedures with existing processes and any new activities or processes required to gain approval

Criterion 3: Actions Taken

An exemplary application clearly details the steps used to implement the new or revised program and ensure that implementation remained on track. It should also include a detailed description of the individuals required for implementation, and how their support was garnered.

Describe the actions taken by your institution to achieve the goals and implement the program designed to address needs. Address the following issues:

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- The participants involved in the implementation process
- The process used to gain faculty, staff, and administrative support for and participation in the implementation, and the consistency of the process with existing institutional processes
- The action steps identified and taken to implement the program, including professional development
- The activities used to check and maintain the progress on the new program implementation

Criterion 4: Evidence of Improvement and Continuing Commitment to the Processes

An exemplary application clearly describes a program that produces evidence of learning and a process that is not a “one-time” implementation, but a core program built around a continuous improvement process. An exemplary application should provide evidence from multiple years of assessment.

Provide evidence of the success of your improvement strategy and your institution’s continuing commitment to the goals and processes used. Address the following issues:

- The evidence of student learning and the analysis of the results
- The relevance of the results the general education program needs identified by the institution
- The communications used to inform faculty, staff, administration, and students of the results
- The evidence of on-going commitment to the planned improvements and checks on the improvements

Evaluation Rubric

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2026 Option: Program Improvement--Revision or Enhancement of Core Program

Introduction: As indicated in the application, the AGLS Awards for Improving General Education are intended to recognize institutions committed to the principles and practices described in the AGLS *Guide*. The general evaluation descriptions below reflect the assumption that the Awards are intended to serve as models of how to achieve innovative reform, enhanced learning, strong leadership, and institutional commitment to on-going, evidence-based improvement. *Preference will be given to programs that are fully developed and implemented with an improvement cycle; these are programs that develop and provide faculty ownership activities, check the impact, and consider improvements.*

Criterion #1: Identification of the Problem

Excellent Model: Application clearly presents a history and context of the problem that relates to the institution's mission and provides a good example of processes essential to developing a dialogue between all key players and aimed at identifying the problem or need. Provides specific, practical, innovative methods to understand needs and communicate them to all relevant faculty, staff, administrators, and other stakeholders.

Acceptable Model: Application presents a historical and mission-related context for the problem, and a process involving all key players is explained. The processes offer some insight into effective improvement processes and activities, but might offer limited development of both or lack either a description of effective processes for identifying the problem or clear evidence of effective communication with all relevant and essential parties.

Developing Model: Application presents limited history or context for the need. A need is identified, but the explanation of the processes used to identify the need lack detail or the creativity essential for a practical model for others. Communication of the need and issues and/or process for engaging key stakeholders is limited, or methods described suggest limited effectiveness.

Criterion #2: Identification of Learning Goals and Procedures Used to Address Needs

Excellent Model: Application shows the key institutional members were actively involved or supporting involvement in the process of selecting learning goals and related instructional practices, and the identification of implementation plans. Methods for engaging key stakeholders are clearly described. Research is detailed, extensive, and current, and significant numbers of decision makers were involved in the review, and the learning and implementation plans are reflective of the mission and values. Clear evidence of a well-considered, creative process for selecting goals and related instructional practices, for a systematic implementation, and for winning broad support for the goals and procedures is detailed and represent a model that others might use to achieve success. Evidence of broad support for new goals is provided.

Acceptable Model: Application makes clear that key players were involved in the process of identifying goals and procedures to address needs, but may leave questions about the level of support by key players or, in general, across the institution. Some quality research is identified; might be questions about how widely it is shared or its role in the improvement process. The processes used for selecting learning goals and activities, and for implementation procedures and for winning broad support are given and can offer some insight to others, though the effectiveness of some processes might not be fully or effectively described. The relevance of plans to mission and values is given, but might not detail and intentional institutional effort to make the connections.

Developing Model: Application does not clearly show all key players are involved in or supportive of the process of identifying goals that address needs, selecting implementation procedures, and winning support

for the goals. Limited research is described or the app. describes very limited use of the research. Processes used for selecting goals, implementation procedures, and/or for winning support are described but fail to inspire or fail to offer creative solutions for people wrestling with similar problems. Questions exist about the level of support for the new goals or the relevance to mission and values.

Criterion #3: Actions Taken

Excellent Model: Application clearly identifies key players and their roles in the improvement activities. The key action steps taken reveal creative approaches to gaining broad consensus and successful implementation, and they are consistent with continuous quality improvement principles and practices—they will likely encourage future improvement activities. Evidence of broad ownership of and support for the improvements is given. Progress was checked by appropriate individuals who are clearly given responsibility for checking progress and keeping the process moving forward. Key leadership roles and efforts (faculty, staff, and administration) throughout this stage are helpfully described.

Acceptable Model: Application identifies key players and action steps taken. Leadership is exhibited and evidence of broad-based commitment is described, but evidence might leave questions about the effectiveness of action steps or about the level or breadth of commitment and leadership. Steps taken seem to work for the institution, but might offer limited use to others or might fail to reflect the principles and practices of institutions committed to continuous quality improvement. Progress was checked and evidence of progress is provided. The methods used to check progress might not make clear that progress will continue.

Developing Model: Application identifies individuals involved in the process and the actions taken, but does not clearly identify leadership efforts and might not make clear the level of broad-based support or the sort of efforts required for successful improvement. Processes used might not suggest a commitment to continuous quality improvement and lack the creativity needed to inspire others. Evidence that progress was being checked is not given or the effectiveness of the progress-checking processes is unclear.

Criterion #4: Evidence of Improvement and Continuing Commitment to the Process

Excellent Model: Application presents strong evidence of success, including assessment results, which reveals that needs are effectively addressed. A description is given of goals met or being met. Evidence strongly suggests that student learning is improved as a result of the effort. The institution clearly describes a plan that reveals an on-going commitment to continuous improvement, and the leadership and support for the continuing improvement is described.

Acceptable Model: Clearly the institution is moving forward and has been improved by the efforts. A process is in place to produce evidence that goals are being met and needs addressed, but the evidence of success or student learning is limited or yet to be achieved. Commitment to on-going improvement is offered, but questions exist about the future success of the plans or about support for these efforts. Overall, there is sufficient success to provide some insight to other organizations.

Developing Model: Application does not provide clear explanation of how the institution was improved by the process, and fails to provide sufficient evidence of how the process has produced positive learning results, although the institution might be set up for improved learning. Commitment to on-going improvements is either not provided or not developed enough to be helpful as a model for others.