AWARD SUBMISSION GUIDE

TLFT Awards 2026

This document provides an overview of the submission structure, and judging criteria for the TLFT Awards 2026.

It is intended to help entrants identify which categories most align with their work and to shape the initial thinking and entry drafting.

While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the information presented here should not be treated as a definitive replica of the awards platform, and there may be minor differences in the online submission form.

We strongly recommend that entrants access and review the official requirements at their earliest opportunity, before finalising their entry.

TLFT Awards 2026: Categories

Thought Leadership Brand Elevation Award

Focus: Reputation and relationships

Thought Leadership Industry Catalyst Award

Focus: Relationships and real-world impact

Thought Leadership Commercial Excellence Award

Focus: Revenue

Thought Leadership Research Innovation Award

Focus: Research and analysis

Thought Leadership Storytelling Award

Focus: Storytelling

What are judges looking for?

Here is a simplified version of the TLFT Awards judging rubric.

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1. Revenue:

▶ ROI and impact on revenue growth
▶ Changes in sales pipeline value
▶ New market opportunities identified or captured
▶ Decrease in customer acquisition cost
▶ Increase in customer lifetime value
▶ Improvements in conversion rates
▶ Impact on lead generation and sales performance
▶ Alignment of thought leadership content with business objectives
▶ Integration of thought leadership into marketing and sales strategies

2. Reputation:

▶ Brand perception and media sentiment improvements (pre-initiative vs. post-initiative)
▶ Changes in share of voice
▶ Net Promoter Score (NPS) improvements
▶ Growth in subscriptions or followers
▶ Engagement metrics (e.g., time spent, social shares)
▶ Increase in press mentions and external citations
▶ Impact on brand awareness, trust, and perception
▶ Search volume of brand-related terms
▶ Social media engagement and website traffic
▶ Customer loyalty metrics
▶ Qualitative evidence (e.g., client testimonials, industry feedback)
▶ Quality and consistency of thought leadership content

3. Relationships:

► Improvements to external relationships evidenced by:
  → Increased share of wallet
  → Growth in referrals
  → Network expansion (quality and quantity)
  → New partnerships formed
  → Invitations to industry speaking engagements
  → Participation in key events

► Improvements to internal relationships evidenced by:
  → Collaboration with Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)
  → Improved dialogue with suppliers or other stakeholders

► Development of new audiences

4. Real-world impact:

► Impact on clearly defined target stakeholders
► Explanation of how the initiative was intentionally designed to achieve this impact
► Evidence of:
  → Changes in industry standards or practices
  → Policy changes influenced
  → Economic impact on target audiences or communities
  → Environmental impact
  → Social impact metrics

► At least one detailed case study attachment demonstrating clear view of what was achieved and how
► An offer of realistic guidance on how others might replicate the impact

5. Research and analysis:

► An overview of data gathering methodologies, including:
  → Diversity and reliability of data sources
  → Sample sizes and sampling techniques
  → Data quality measures
  → Ethical considerations (consent, privacy)

► An explanation of data interpretation, including:
  → Statistical analysis methods
  → Identification of patterns, trends, and outliers
  → Consideration of potential biases and limitations

► Data communication examples:
  → Key insights derived from data analysis
  → Use of data visualizations to enhance understanding

► How data informed the overall thought leadership strategy
► Practical implications and potential applications of findings
► Suggestions for future research development

6. Storytelling:

► A clear and compelling narrative structure
  → Considered and coherent use of sequencing, pacing, and tension
  → Continuity and connection across written, visual, or multimedia elements

► Engaging and creative storytelling
  → Effective use of language, imagery, visual composition, rhetorical devices, and persuasive techniques
  → Intentional use of media and formats
  → Proof of sustained audience interest

► Seamless inclusion of quality research
  → Ability to synthesize and incorporate primary and secondary data sources into the narrative
  → How effectively and creatively data, insights, evidence are integrated to strengthen the core argument

► Extent to which the content reinforces and elevates the brand
  → How successfully the narrative engages with core brand themes, speaks to key audiences, and strengthens brand credibility and distinctiveness

Submission requirements

All categories:

Organization information

▶ Organization name
▶ Address
▶ Website
▶ Primary contact person (name, title, email, phone number)
▶ Secondary contact person (name, title, email, phone number)

Executive summary (up to 200 words)

A concise summary of your thought leadership initiative, including its main objectives, audience, strategies, and outcomes.

Description (up to 350 words)

A slightly longer overview of your initiative, to highlight key features in more detail. For example, you may choose to emphasize any combination of the following:

▶ **Background and context**
 → The market situation or challenge it addressed
 → Rationale for the thought leadership initiative
▶ **Strategy and implementation**
 → Overall thought leadership strategy
 → Key messages and themes
 → Research methodology and data sources
 → Content creation process
 → Distribution channels and formats used
 → Timeline of key activities
▶ **Target audience**
 → Primary and secondary audience segments
 → Audience engagement strategies
▶ **Innovation and creativity**
 → Unique aspects of your approach
 → Any novel methodologies or technologies employed

Category-specific requirements: Impact and results

(recommended 300-800 words total)

The impact and results section aims to draw out your initiative's strengths across the defining characteristics of successful thought leadership.

There is space for you to add details about each of these elements, and it invites you to provide more detail on the most important criterion (or criteria) to the award category.

Note that total word count for this section should not exceed 800 words; entries that significantly exceed this limit may not be reviewed in full. To this end, we encourage you to use the judging rubric and weighting (included below) to guide your word count for each subsection.

Thought Leadership Brand Elevation Award

Focus: Reputation and relationships

This award honors organizations that have successfully used thought leadership to build and enhance their brand presence. As such, its focus is on how thought leadership content has contributed to brand recognition and trust within the industry and among customers. Entries should highlight

▶ Quality and consistency of thought leadership content.
▶ Measurable impact on brand awareness, trust, and perception.
▶ Use of multiple channels to disseminate content.

Category criteria and weighting

1. Revenue (up to 250 words) / 20%

Share how your initiative generated financial success (e.g. revenue growth, new market opportunities, improved sales metrics, alignment with business goals).

2. Reputation (up to 350 words) / 25%

Demonstrate how your thought leadership strengthened or evolved your organization's reputation, credibility, distinctiveness, or trust with key audiences.

3. Relationships (up to 350 words) / 25%

Explain how the initiative helped to build deeper relationships with customers, prospects, partners, or communities, and why those relationships matter to your brand.

4. Real-world impact (up to 250 words) / 10%

Highlight the initiative's effect on specific stakeholder groups and share evidence of change (e.g. in standards, practices, or policies) and impact (e.g. on an economy, environment, or society).

5. Research and analysis (up to 250 words) / 10%

Share your approach to data collection, analysis, and communication, highlighting the role of data in your strategy and the potential applications of your findings.

Thought Leadership Commercial Excellence Award

Focus: Revenue

This award recognizes organizations that have used thought leadership to achieve specific business goals, such as lead generation, sales growth, and market expansion. The emphasis is on the alignment of thought leadership with commercial priorities, such as

▶ Alignment of thought leadership content with business objectives.
▶ Demonstrable impact on lead generation and sales performance.
▶ Integration of thought leadership in marketing and sales strategies.
▶ ROI and business outcomes attributable to thought leadership efforts.

Category criteria and weighting

1. Revenue (up to 400 words) / 45%

Share how your thought leadership directly contributed to your organization's economic objectives, such as revenue growth, improved sales performance, or pipeline development

2. Reputation (up to 250 words) / 15%

Share how the initiative improved brand trust (e.g. improved brand perception, positive engagement, earned media).

3. Relationships (up to 250 words) / 20%

Explain how the initiative forged new relationships and/or improved existing ones internally or externally.

4. Real-world impact (up to 250 words) / 10%

Highlight the initiative's effect on specific stakeholder groups and share evidence of change (e.g. in standards, practices, or policies) and impact (e.g. on an economy, environment, or society).

5. Research and analysis (up to 250 words) / 10%

Share your approach to data collection, analysis, and communication, highlighting the role of data in your strategy and the potential applications of your findings.

Thought Leadership Industry Catalyst Award

Focus: Relationships and real-world impact

This award recognizes organizations whose thought leadership has shaped industry discussions and influenced the direction of the sector. The focus is on the broader impact of thought leadership on peers, competitors, and industry bodies, captured through:

► Influence on industry trends and practices.
► Recognition by industry bodies and media.
► Audience engagement and feedback.
► Adoption of thought leadership insights, frameworks, and/or terminology by peers and competitors.
► Demonstrable impact on industry standards and policies.

Category criteria and weighting

1. **Revenue (up to 250 words) / 10%**

   Share how your initiative generated financial success (e.g. revenue growth, new market opportunities, improved sales metrics, alignment with business goals).

2. **Reputation (up to 250 words) / 15%**

   Share how the initiative improved brand trust (e.g. improved brand perception, positive engagement, earned media).

3. **Relationships (up to 350 words) / 30%**

   Describe how the initiative built, strengthened, or reshaped relationships across the wider ecosystem and how those relationships contributed to shared progress or change.

4. **Real-world impact (up to 350 words) / 30%**

   Highlight how your thought leadership led to tangible change beyond your organization, such as influencing industry practices, standards, behaviors, or decision-making.

   We recommend including at least one case study that demonstrates what was achieved and how.

5. **Research and analysis (up to 250 words) / 15%**

   Share your approach to data collection, analysis, and communication, highlighting the role of data in your strategy and the potential applications of your findings.

Thought Leadership Research Innovation Award

Focus: Research and analysis

This award spotlights organizations that have used new or creative research approaches to strengthen their thought leadership. It recognizes innovation in how research is designed, carried out, or analyzed to enhance an initiative's ability to deliver original insights and real-world impact. Share your:

▶ Research or analysis approaches that use new technologies or novel combinations of methodologies
▶ Insights that would have been difficult to glean from traditional research or analysis methods
▶ Evidence of how this innovation improved the quality, credibility, or usefulness of the thought leadership

Category criteria and weighting

1. **Revenue (up to 250 words) / 15%**

   Share how your initiative generated financial success (e.g. revenue growth, new market opportunities, improved sales metrics, alignment with business goals).

2. **Reputation (up to 250 words) / 15%**

   Share how the initiative improved brand trust (e.g. improved brand perception, positive engagement, earned media).

3. **Relationships (up to 250 words) / 15%**

   Explain how the initiative forged new relationships and/or improved existing ones internally or externally.

4. **Real-world impact (up to 250 words) / 15%**

   Highlight the initiative's effect on specific stakeholder groups and share evidence of change (e.g. in standards, practices, or policies) and impact (e.g. on an economy, environment, or society).

5. **Research and analysis (up to 400 words) / 40%**

   Share how a novel approach to data collection, interpretation, analysis, or communication was able to generate new insights; how your methodology informed the overall thought leadership strategy; and the practical implications of your findings.

Thought Leadership Storytelling Award

Focus: Storytelling

This award celebrates the art of storytelling as demonstrated through clear and engaging prose, skilful use of language, and the capacity to capture and maintain reader interest. Show off your:

▶ Ability to explain complex concepts in a clear, logical manner.
▶ Consistently impeccable grammar, punctuation, syntax, and style.
▶ Originality and creativity in presenting ideas.
▶ Command of writing to convince, influence, or inspire action among readers.
▶ Seamless incorporation of different elements—including data visualizations, research, and expert insights—into the narrative without compromising readability.

Category criteria and weighting

1. **Revenue (up to 250 words): 10%**

   Share how your initiative generated financial success (e.g. revenue growth, new market opportunities, improved sales metrics, alignment with business goals).

2. **Reputation (up to 250 words): 10%**

   Share how the initiative improved brand trust (e.g. improved brand perception, positive engagement, earned media).

3. **Relationships (up to 250 words): 10%**

   Explain how the initiative forged new relationships and/or improved existing ones internally or externally.

4. **Real-world impact (up to 250 words): 10%**

   Highlight the initiative's effect on specific stakeholder groups and share evidence of change (e.g. in standards, practices, or policies) and impact (e.g. on an economy, environment, or society).

5. **Research and analysis (up to 250 words): 10%**

   Share your approach to data collection, analysis, and communication, highlighting the role of data in your strategy and the potential applications of your findings.

6. **Thought Leadership Storytelling Award (up to 400 words): 50%**

   Describe what made your approach to narrative and/or visual storytelling original, creative, persuasive, and relevant to your business and audience.