

Marketplace and Celebration 2026

Awards Categories – Eligibility and Definitions

Please note initial eligibility for entering the awards is that your business must have engaged with Enterprise Oxfordshire (formerly OxLEP Business/the Growth Hub) since April 2022. Support does not need to have been continuous from this date but must have been received between April 2022 and the current date.

Your business must also be a registered Oxfordshire-based SME (fewer than 250 employees) of any legal status (e.g. Private Limited Company (Ltd), a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP), Sole Trader, Community Interest Company, Community Benefit Society, Charitable Incorporated Organisation or any other).

The Headline Sponsor, will select an overall winner of the event from the winners of each category.

Category	Definition/Eligibility	
Business Leader of the Year, sponsored by Institute of Directors	<p>Any business founder, director, manager or in any other leadership position.</p> <p>This award celebrates leadership and vision in the business community.</p> <p>Running a small business can be challenging, but the right leadership can set the business up for success. Are you driving a successful business? Have you had to overcome any challenges? Can you</p>	<p>Has the entrant demonstrated their eligibility for the award? i.e. they are in a leadership position in their organisation.</p> <p>Has the entrant shown their leadership within their organisation? Have they shown commitment to their vision and strategy?</p> <p>Has the entrant shown, with example(s), how their leadership has paved the way to success for their business? Have they overcome any challenges or had to change their leadership style? Can they show how</p>

	show how your contribution as a leader has led to success?	their leadership skills have created a business that is sustainable and can grow?
Start-up of the Year, sponsored by Cypher	<p>Any new, registered business that has started trading since 1st April 2024.</p> <p>This award is dedicated to celebrating emerging businesses that have recently launched and can already demonstrate success and stability.</p> <p>How was the business created and why? What challenges did you have to overcome? What are your plans for the future success of your business?</p>	<p>Has the entrant demonstrated their eligibility for the award? i.e. the business is a new, registered business that has started trading since 1st April 2024.</p> <p>Has the entrant explained how the business was launched? How have they achieved the success and stability to date? Particularly in light of wider economic challenges.</p> <p>Has the entrant clearly described why they started the business? Have they detailed their challenges and the learning from these? What are their plans for the future of the business – how will they ensure continued success?</p>
Environmentally Sustainable Business of the Year, sponsored by Velocity Cycle Couriers	<p>Any business with environmental sustainability commitments.</p> <p>This award recognises businesses that have demonstrated commitment to and</p>	<p>Has the entrant demonstrated their eligibility for the award? i.e. the business has environmental sustainability commitments?</p> <p>Has the entrant demonstrated an exceptional commitment to and achievement of environmental</p>

	<p>achievement of environmental sustainability.</p> <p>Small business can and should put sustainability at the heart of their operations. Are you striving ahead of your competition and showing the bigger companies how it should be done?</p>	<p>sustainability? Have they made measurable improvements in the sustainability of their business?</p> <p>Has the entrant clearly shown, with example/s, this commitment to sustainability throughout the operations of their business? Is a sustainable approach clearly embedded and core to the business and its aims? Do they have a sustainability policy or plan/plans in place?</p>
<p>Socially Responsible Business of the Year, sponsored by Tap Social</p>	<p>Any business with socially responsible commitments.</p> <p>This award recognises businesses demonstrating exceptional commitment to ethical and socially responsible practices.</p> <p>Are you tackling an important local or global social issue as well as conducting the rest of your business in responsible ways? Is your business showing the potential to be</p>	<p>Has the entrant demonstrated their eligibility for the award? i.e. the business has socially responsible commitments?</p> <p>Has the entrant demonstrated an exceptional commitment to and achievement of ethical and socially responsible practices? Can they show improvements in the practices of their business?</p> <p>Has the entrant clearly shown, with example/s, this commitment to social responsibility throughout the operations of their business? Is a socially responsible</p>

	<p>an industry leader? Are you inspiring others and showing them how it is done, whether customers or other businesses?</p>	<p>approach clearly embedded and core to the business and its aims?</p>
<p>Growth Business of the Year, sponsored by Olamalu</p>	<p>Any business that was registered and trading before 1st April 2023 (i.e. that is not a Start-up).</p> <p>This award recognises and celebrates more established businesses that have achieved strength and stability.</p> <p>Your business is more established and is no longer in the start-up phase. How have you created the foundations for growth? What are your goals for your business and how are you succeeding in delivering against these?</p>	<p>Has the entrant demonstrated their eligibility for the award? i.e. the business was registered and trading before 1st April 2023.</p> <p>Has the entrant demonstrated how their business has achieved strength and stability?</p> <p>Has the entrant clearly shown, with example(s), how they have grown their business? Can they show how their business planning has led to their growth? What are their business goals? What has been achieved already and what are they working toward achieving in the future?</p>
<p>Innovation in Customer Experience of the Year, sponsored by Stephen Spencer and Associates</p>	<p>Any business using innovation in their customer experience.</p> <p>This award recognises businesses that have demonstrated commitment to and</p>	<p>Has the entrant demonstrated their eligibility for the award? i.e. the business can show innovation in their customer experience.</p> <p>Has the entrant shown an exceptional commitment to customer experience? Can</p>

	<p>achievement of innovation within customer experience.</p> <p>Innovation is about doing something different, or better, adapting an idea from one sector and using it in another, refreshing the existing customer experience, using technology to drive genuinely enhanced customer experience. Are you offering an experience for customers that makes your business stand out? How are you using innovation to showcase your business?</p>	<p>they demonstrate how they have achieved innovation in their customer experience?</p> <p>Has the entrant clearly shown with example(s) their innovation in customer experience throughout their business? Is it evident throughout the customer journey? How are they using innovation and how are they differentiating themselves? Can they demonstrate the use of different approaches or adaption of ideas to deliver an outstanding customer experience?</p>
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With thanks to our 2026 award sponsors.