

Ten ways to make a Charter Awards application stronger

1. Show before and after images

It's great to show a wonderful image of a building, a street, or a public space. But the jury needs to see what was there before to understand fully how the project transformed a site. If you don't show the "before" image, the jury is left to wonder.

2. Focus on the urbanism, not just the building

The Charter Awards are design awards sometimes given at the scale of individual buildings. But they are also urbanism awards, so it helps to show how a building or buildings improves the public realm or larger urban area. Make sure to show images of the public realm, especially the streetscape, that allow jurors to visualize that improvement.

3. Tell the urban strategy

In the text and images, make clear to the jury how the project is meant to transform an urban area and how the project fits into a strategy for change. A Charter Award winner is not just about an individual site, but the larger context. Focus on the thinking behind changing the larger context of a neighborhood, city, or region.

4. Describe the ripple effects

Don't ignore how the project will have positive impacts long into the future and well beyond the site. Don't assume the jury can figure this out for themselves. If the project has positive ripple effects, make them clear in text and images.

5. Involve project leaders, not just the marketing department

Successful submissions are usually assembled with the substantial involvement of the project leaders. Unless the marketing department is extraordinarily capable and informed, winning a Charter Award generally requires a level of storytelling and public communications found among design team or project leaders. Could your marketing team present the project publicly? If not, don't simply hand off the submission to them.

6. Present a clear plan

For many, if not most, submissions, the most important image is the illustrative plan. Make sure this plan is clear and not hard to read. If the jury has to redraw the plan in their minds to understand how the streets, blocks, public spaces, etc., work together, you have probably lost them.

7. Avoid identical images for different submissions

Firms often submit more than one project for consideration, and sometimes firms win two or more awards. That's a great outcome for a Charter Awards team. However, if multiple projects come in with similar or identical-looking images, the jury may be less inclined to give both or all of them awards.

8. Tell the story well

You may have the greatest project ever, but don't assume it is so good that you can present one or two images, and the jury will be bowled over. Many very good projects don't make the cut because they do a mediocre job of telling the story. If you have a great project, ensure the text and images reflect all the great aspects.

9. Consider the theme

Every Charter Awards year has a theme, such as "the public realm," or "restorative urbanism." Projects that address the theme will have a better chance of rising to the top. Don't oversell it, but if the jury is likely to miss the connection with the theme, explain how the project addresses it.

10. Don't give up if you don't win

Many terrific projects are submitted several times before they win. The Charter Awards are competitive, and whether a project wins depends on many factors, including the competition or level of implementation. Consider resubmitting a project, especially if more of the project has been built in the meantime.