



2026 Best Paper Procedures

In 1978, AIAA established the bestowing of a certificate of merit to recognize the technical and scientific excellence of technical papers published by AIAA and presented during a technical conference.

It is of the utmost importance that the best paper certificate of merit in no way duplicates or interferes with any award in the AIAA Honors and Awards Program and must not be referred to as “award.”

The following procedures do not apply to best paper student competitions or poster sessions which are considered to be a technical activity in connection with a forum, conference or other venue.

Administration

Responsibility for selection of a best paper lies with the Technical Committee (TC) in that particular discipline. TCs are encouraged to document their internal selection process and utilize well-defined, meaningful evaluation criteria. Overview of the best paper selection process falls under the purview of the Technical Activities Division (TAD).

TCs may form a best paper subcommittee or assign a best paper chair to perform the selection process. However, an author under consideration for the best paper certificate of merit should not participate in the selection process.

A best paper need not be selected each year if there are no qualified worthy candidates.

A best paper may be named to honor a person, place or object only after legalities have been satisfied and written permission from an authorized party has been provided to TAD, subject to TAD approval.

Author Eligibility

Published best papers authored by professionals or students are eligible. AIAA membership is not required, but it is highly desirable that at least one author be an AIAA member in good standing.

Call for Papers - Notice

If permitted by the Forum technical chair, the TC may place a notice in the Call for Papers about selection of a best paper and bestowing of a certificate of merit during the next forum.



Selection of Best Paper

Selection of a best paper is conducted in total by the TC, who is considered to have expertise in that technical discipline. Candidates for best paper may be selected from session chair reports, from published forum proceedings, or through direct nomination by TC members. Forum 360 or oral presentation only papers are not eligible.

- Session chairs input session reports on site via a special computer station. AIAA compiles the reports and will distribute them to TC soon after the forum.
- TC may obtain copies of papers from published proceedings via the publications/proceedings area of AIAA's web site. In some cases, AIAA staff may provide one-time access to papers with the understanding that the papers are to be used only in the selection of a best paper.

A TC may select two papers as best paper co-recipients, or an Honorable Mention, however, this should be infrequent and not standard procedure. A TC may select a best professional and best student paper, but a TC should not select multiple papers from the same event in different "technical categories", or an overall paper for the year derived from several previous winners.

Honorable Mentions will not be recognized at the Awards Recognition Event, but a certificate can be provided and presented by the TC at their meeting. If the TC misses a year in reporting or presenting a best paper, it is not possible to make up the following year.

Best Paper Notification to AIAA Due Dates

AIAA Forum Where Certificate is to be Presented	Forum Date	Submission Portal Opens	Submission Portal Closes (Decisions Due)
SciTech (Orlando, FL)	January	N/A	1 October 2025
ASCEND (Washington, DC)	May 2026	1 November 2025	10 January 2026
AVIATION (San Diego, CA)	June 2026	7 January 2026	1 April 2026

The TC Chair (or best paper chair) must submit their nomination to AIAA staff via the online submission form located at www.aiaa-awards.org at least 90 days prior to the start date of the Forum where the certificate will be presented. Standard deadlines are shown in the table above.

This allows ample time for the author/s to obtain authorization and arrange travel to attend the venue where the certificate will be presented as well as allows AIAA staff time to prepare for the presentation.



AIAA staff will confirm receipt of best paper information to the reporting TC. The TC Chair or designee will send the notification to their awardees once they receive the certificate file and draft letter from AIAA staff. The presentation venue of the award will be communicated to the Best Paper or Honors and Awards Subcommittee Chair and TC Chairs. If at an external event, the TC will be responsible for scheduling with the external event organizers.

Late submissions, within a 30-day window of the event, will not be granted.

The responsible TC must also inform AIAA staff whether the author/s will receive any honorarium and the dollar amount to be provided out of custodial monies held for the TC by AIAA. It is up to the TC to determine the amount of honorarium. It is the TC's responsibility to ensure there are enough funds in the TC custodial account prior to offering such honorarium. Contact Angie Lander or Mali Goebel (angiel@aiaa.org; malig@aiaa.org; bestpapers@aiaa.org) for your current custodial balance.

If for a student best paper, the TC should indicate which student author is to receive the honorarium. AIAA does not split the amount between authors. The recipient will receive the honorarium after verification of the author's current mailing address and compliance with any relevant IRS regulations. If the honorarium is to be provided with monies maintained by the TC external to AIAA, the TC is responsible for providing such honorarium to the author/s and compliance with IRS reporting requirements.

Author Notification

The TC Chair or other designee will formally notify the author(s) and invite the author(s) to receive the certificate at the specified Forum. The notification letter may state any honorarium and the author who will receive that honorarium. Copies of the notification letter will be distributed to the reporting TC.

AIAA staff shall record best paper recognition in each author's AIAA member record.

Certificate of Merit

A standard form of the certificate of merit will be prepared by AIAA Staff. Each author identified at the time of paper submittal to AIAA, the title of the paper, and the venue where the paper was presented shall be named on the certificate. The certificate will be signed by the Chief, AIAA Technical Activities Division and the President of AIAA.

In lieu of a certificate, the TC may elect to provide a plaque or other item at the Committee's expense. The TC must inform AIAA Staff of their intent 60 days prior to presentation and are responsible for transporting such items to the venue and supplying them to AIAA staff onsite the day prior to presentation.



Presentation

Certificates of merit will be presented during the Forum specific Awards Recognition Ceremony. If the TC prefers, the certificate of merit may be mailed direct to the author/s in lieu of a peer presentation. A digital certificate is presented to authors who do not request a mailed certificate.

Joint Society Best Papers

Best papers sponsored jointly by AIAA and a society may be included in the presentation if the society is a co-sponsor of the AIAA technical forum.

In most cases, AIAA staff prepares an appropriate certificate. However, the joint society may opt to provide their own plaque/certificate. In the latter case, it is the responsibility of the joint society to provide the award and transport it to the venue.

Announcement

Recognition of best paper authors after the fact will appear in the year-end issue of *Aerospace America*, posted on the AIAA Forum web site, etc. Responsibility for supplying this data resides with AIAA Headquarters.

A list of best papers may be maintained by the sponsoring technical committee.

The responsible TC is encouraged to post best paper information and tag recipients on their social media accounts. Please include #AIAA and the relevant Forum hashtag in your posts.

AIAA Staff Points of Contact

Michael Lagana
Director, Technical and Integration Communities
michaell@aiaa.org

Mali Goebel
Member Communities Specialist
malig@aiaa.org

Questions can also be sent directly to the Best Papers mailbox.
bestpapers@aiaa.org