



PLANNING THE AWARDS EVENT

- ✓ Organize awards banquet/reception
- ✓ Design and mail invitations
- ✓ Print programs for awards event
- ✓ Prepare certificates and awards

“When our son’s name was called out at the awards ceremony, our entire family was filled with surprise, excitement, and pride!”

— *Parents of a student,
Napa, California*

ORGANIZE AWARDS BANQUET/RECEPTION

One of the most exciting and rewarding activities of the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest is the awards banquet or reception. Contest organizers have remarked that this event celebrates the ideals of the contest in a very special way. The awards ceremony honors the young people who have written award-winning essays, and it recognizes the hard work and dedication of all of the volunteers, teachers, and school officials who made the contest possible.

What is an awards banquet?

Many contest organizers believe that a “banquet-like” dinner elevates the importance of the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest, especially for the contest finalists and their families. For many of the young people who have authored a prizewinning essay, this may be the first time they have ever won anything! A banquet creates that special atmosphere.

What is an awards reception?

An awards reception does not include a sit-down dinner. Instead, light appetizers and refreshments are provided. Some contest committees have decided that an awards reception enables people to mingle and get to know each other better than a sit-down dinner. Cost is also a factor in determining whether to hold a dinner or reception.



Where and when should the awards event be held?

The contest committee should carefully consider where to hold the awards banquet or reception. Again, cost is often a consideration. Awards ceremonies have been held in hotels, banquet facilities, and local country clubs, as well as in community centers and church halls that have been decorated for the special event. Ceremonies have also taken place at local school board meetings, school assemblies, civic group lunches, and breakfast functions. When should the awards banquet/reception be held? We recommend you hold the event no more than two months after the essays have been collected. Make sure you select a date for the awards ceremony that does not conflict with other activities (community events, basketball games, etc.).

Who should be invited to the awards event?

The awards banquet/reception is the best way to publicize and promote the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest for future years. Contest organizers have told us that the event is the perfect opportunity to attract more people to the contest, especially potential funding sources. We have heard from many communities that inviting potential sponsors to the awards ceremony is a very useful strategy. Prospective donors are often so moved by the ceremony that they offer to help support the contest even before the banquet or reception is over!

Every attempt should be made to invite as many people as possible to the awards event. In particular, the following groups of people ought to be invited and encouraged to attend:

- ❖ Students who will receive a contest prize (including Honorable Mention), as well as two guests of their choosing (parents, friends, relatives)
- ❖ Teachers who participated in the contest
- ❖ Contest judges and their spouses
- ❖ Contest committee members and their spouses
- ❖ Potential contest sponsors
- ❖ Community and political leaders
- ❖ School officials (principals, superintendents)
- ❖ Members of the media



Miss America 2000 Angela Perez Baraquo, a champion of character education, lends her crown to top finalist Zac Theilen in the first Hawaii Statewide Contest.



Should anyone have to pay to attend the awards event?

No. Students, parents, volunteers, school officials, and community leaders should not have to pay to attend the awards banquet/reception. This is one of the out-of-pocket costs of the contest for which funds must be secured. Remember, the event is designed to honor the young people who have written award-winning essays as well as everyone else who has contributed in some way to the contest.

What actually occurs during the awards ceremony?

The awards ceremony is when the prizewinners are first announced! Usually, the winners are announced in reverse order, culminating in the announcement of the first-place winner. The top finalists should be strongly encouraged to read their prizewinning essays. At the ceremony, winners are usually presented with their prize, as well as a contest certificate or medallion (see page 49 of the Appendix for a sample certificate). The awards ceremony is also the time to recognize the teachers, school administrators, and anyone else whose hard work made the contest such a success. You may want to award them their own prizes (see the sample budgets on pages 15 -19 for teacher and school coordinator prizes).

Note: When you invite the students to the awards event, do not tell them what prize they will be receiving — only that they are among the winners. It adds suspense to the event!



High school senior Alicia Andrews reads her prizewinning essay during the awards ceremony for the Mississippi Laws of Life Essay Contest.



What have other contests included in their awards event?

- ❖ Student quartets have played classical and popular music before and after the awards ceremony
- ❖ Contest committees have invited distinguished guest speakers to address the audience
- ❖ Student vocal groups have entertained the audience
- ❖ Copies of the award-winning essays have been distributed

"I believe the awards ceremony is a great way to publicly recognize young people who have taken the time to reflect upon and write about their ideals and values."

— Vince Canero,
English Department Chair,
West Philadelphia
Catholic High School,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

DESIGN AND MAIL INVITATIONS

We have included a sample invitation to the awards event on page 47 of the Appendix. When you send out invitations, we recommend you include RSVP cards.

PRINT PROGRAMS FOR AWARDS EVENT

Please refer to page 48 of the Appendix for an example of how one contest committee designed their awards program. Programs usually include the names of the winners and their teachers, special thanks to the sponsors, a list of the contest committee members, and the names of all of the volunteers who made the contest possible. Some programs also include excerpts from a few of the prizewinning essays, as well as a brief description of the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest.

PREPARE CERTIFICATES AND AWARDS

Please refer to page 49 of the Appendix for a sample certificate. Some contests award every student who writes a *laws of life* essay a certificate of accomplishment. Other contests only give a certificate to the top finalists.