



Soar



**S.O.A.R AWARDS PROGRAM
GUIDELINES 2026**

**Fiscal Excellence Recognition for
Success in Operations, Accountability, and Reporting**



Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

*I*ntroduction

The Office of Internal Audit and Ethics with the support of the Audit and Ethics Committee developed the "Success in Operations, Accountability and Reporting" (S.O.A.R.) awards program to recognize fiscal excellence within the Tribal Government. The first awards were given in 2013. Awards are made annually and presented in the first quarter of each fiscal year.

*O*bjectives

The objectives of the SOAR award program are to encourage and promote:

- Fiscal Responsibility
- Sound Fiscal Decisions
- Best Business Practices
- Transparency

*A*ward Levels

★ Chief Noah Powell Fiscal Excellence



The Chief Noah Powell Fiscal Excellence Award is the highest level of recognition presented to only one nominee each year that demonstrated through their best business practices and accomplishments the **highest level of fiscal excellence**.

This award is in honor of the late Chief Noah Powell. Chief Powell was the 21st Principal Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Prior to becoming Chief, Powell served on Tribal Council for 4 years and as Vice Chief for 4 years. "Chief Powell was a very well-respected man of his community and Tribe. He believed in his people and what they could accomplish. He was a peacemaker and a tireless worker for what was true and right. All who met him even briefly were struck by his honesty, integrity and kindness". Those who knew him and

worked with him remember him as a Chief who demonstrated the upmost fiscal responsibility and transparency to his people.



★ Fiscal Commitment

Up to three fiscal commitment awards may be presented to nominees that demonstrated through their best business practices and accomplishments a serious commitment to striving for fiscal excellence.

★ Fiscal Recognition

All other nominees not selected for one of the above awards may receive a fiscal recognition certificate.



Eligibility

All tribal programs, divisions, offices, enterprises, component units and related entities of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians are eligible for participation in the SOAR award program. Awards will be made only when there are justifiable nominations submitted.

Criteria

Nominations must demonstrate through observable, measurable or tangible results outstanding success in one or more of the following areas:

- ★ **Operations** – Nominee must have developed and implemented an innovative approach or fostered partnerships to carryout primary function, to expand functionality and/or to address an unmet need that resulted in significant cost savings, revenue generation, increased productivity, and/or increased effectiveness and efficiencies within their program operations. Examples of specific items which may satisfy this area include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Successful completion of a significant project or program
 - Improved performance or enhanced operations
 - Relevant strategic plan and demonstrated accomplishment of strategic initiatives
 - Establishment of effective intergovernmental or external partnerships
 - Positive operational audit conducted by Internal Audit

- ★ **Accountability** – Nominee must have enhanced fiscal accountability through the development and implementation of internal controls such as a process, policy, or procedure that contributed to a strong control environment which can serve as a model for other tribal units. Internal controls must be properly documented, maintained and adhered to as well as provide reasonable assurance for safeguarding of assets, the reliability of financial information and the compliance with laws and regulations. Examples of specific items which may satisfy this include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Standard operating procedures are in place, are functioning as intended and have been communicated to staff

- Staff have an awareness of the expectation of a high level of integrity, personal and professional standards, and adherence to policies and procedures
- Leadership's philosophy and operating style promotes internal controls
- Staff understand the assignment of authority and responsibility
- Positive internal control review conducted by Internal Audit

★ **Reporting** – Nominee must have developed and implemented a reporting mechanism that demonstrates the effective dissemination of useful information to government officials and the public. Examples of specific items which may satisfy this area include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A narrative report that is easily read and understood and that demonstrates the achievement of meaningful goals and objectives
- The use of meaningful performance measures based on reliable information
- Executive dashboard reporting
- Effective on-going community events, newsletters, articles and/or reports
- Interactive website with links to useful information
- Positive performance audit conducted by Internal Audit

Nomination Process

1. Anyone may nominate an eligible government unit using the nomination form. A representative must be available for an interview.
2. The deadline to submit nominations is **June 12, 2026**. Late or incomplete entries will not be accepted.
3. The nomination eligibility, criteria and categories (see page 2) should be reviewed prior to completing a nomination form. Nominations may be entered for more than one category. Each nomination must identify only the specific actions/results for the category selected.
4. Send nominations clearly marked "SOAR Nomination" to:

OFFICE OF INTERNAL AUDIT AND ETHICS
PO BOX 455
CHEROKEE NC 28719

Nominations may be submitted electronically in PDF format to: uia@ebci-nsn.gov or using the [online form](#).



Selection Process

1. Nominations will be reviewed and evaluated by the Chief Audit and Ethics Executive and the Audit Manager or other designees.
2. A site visit and an interview will be scheduled with the nominee and other representatives.
3. The Internal Audit and Ethics staff may be asked to perform a limited review for added verification.
4. Nominations will be evaluated to determine alignment with award criteria for each category and then numerically ranked.
5. Recommendations for awards will be made to the full Audit and Ethics Committee for review and approval during the quarterly meeting in July or October.

Recognition Process

1. Nominees selected to receive an award will be invited to attend a recognition ceremony during the first quarter of the fiscal year in the Tribal Council chambers.
2. A press release identifying award recipients will be published in the Cherokee One Feather and on the Internal Audit and Ethics website.
3. The "Chief Noah Powell Fiscal Excellence Award" recipient's name will be placed on a perpetual plaque for public display at the Office of Internal Audit and Ethics or other locations. The recipient's name will also be placed on a perpetual traveling trophy which will be held and displayed by the recipient for one year.