



Tech Industry Alliance Leaders Awards 2026

Briefing Document - Awards Categories, Eligibility Criteria & Judging Process

Introduction

Leader's Awards is an annual event recognising the leading companies in the South West region of Ireland. From global multinationals to schools and start-ups, the Leaders Awards recognise those who have showcased their unique talents in the use of technology in their respective organisations and businesses.

The 2026 Tech Industry Alliance Leaders Awards will take place on the **13th of November** in The Great Southern Hotel Killarney. Nominations for the Tech Industry Alliance Leaders Awards open on 07 August 2026 and will remain open until the 04 October 2026 (unless otherwise stated). Finalists must be available during the week of 02 – 06 November 2026 for virtual interviews with the Judging Panel. All finalists must be available to attend the Leaders Awards Ceremony on November 13 at The Great Southern Hotel Killarney.

All nominations received by Tech Industry Alliance must have satisfied the eligibility criteria as set out in this document on the date of application. This document also outlines the judging process for evaluation of all nominations.

Who can apply?

The Tech Industry Alliance awards are typically of interest to technology or technology related organisations that operate in or from the South West region of Ireland. However, Tech Industry Alliance also welcomes nominations from across the Munster region. If you have any questions about nominating a company, please contact info@techindustryalliance.ie with your query.

Award Categories

There are 12 different award categories for the 2026 Tech Industry Alliance Leaders Awards:

1. **AI Award**
2. **Best Learning Workplace Award**
3. **Cybersecurity Award**
4. **ESG Award**
5. **Excellence in Education Award**
6. **Multinational of the Year Award**
7. **Small Indigenous Company of the Year Award**
8. **Smart Technology Innovation Award**
9. **Tech Scale Up of the Year Award**
10. **Tech Start Up of the Year Award**
11. **Chairperson Award**
12. **Tech Person of the Year Award**

1. AI Award

The 'AI' award goes to an organisation that has developed, implemented or integrated artificial intelligence (AI), demonstrating excellent technological innovations, responsible deployment, and measurable impacts in the South-West region.

Criteria:

- Substantial AI development/implementation activities in the South-West region.
- The AI's scalability and its potential for value creation, jobs and social impacts.
- Ethical and responsible use of AI to enhancing the South West's reputation.
- The application must demonstrate clear AI or machine learning (ML) components beyond conventional automation and analytics, developed/deployed within the past 36 months.
- The AI system is in compliance with the European Union AI Act and relevant regulatory standards.

2. Best Learning Workplace Award

The Best Learning Workplace Award will be presented to an organisation that embraces a holistic approach to Learning and Development; with encouragement, opportunity, and support for people to grow in skills, confidence, and resilience in the workplace in the South West Region.

Criteria:

- This award is open to all technology or technology-related organisations that operate in or from the South West region of Ireland.
- Be able to demonstrate commitment to upskilling and professional development.
- Be able to demonstrate a positive culture that is mindful of people's mental health and wellbeing.

3. Cybersecurity Award

The Cybersecurity Award recognises an organisation that has developed, implemented, or integrated outstanding cybersecurity solutions, practices, or services, demonstrating technological excellence, responsible security leadership, and measurable impact in the South-West region.

Criteria:

- Substantial cybersecurity development, implementation, or service delivery activities in the South-West region.
- Demonstrated innovation in protecting systems, data, infrastructure, users, or organisations from cyber threats.
- Scalability of the cybersecurity solution or approach, including its potential for value creation, job creation, skills development, and wider social or economic impact.
- Evidence of responsible, ethical, and privacy-conscious cybersecurity practices that enhance the South-West's reputation as a secure and trusted technology region
- The application must demonstrate clear cybersecurity components beyond standard IT support, compliance, or routine system administration, developed or deployed within the past 36 months.
- The organisation must show alignment with relevant cybersecurity standards, regulatory requirements, and best practices, including GDPR, NIS2 where applicable, and other relevant EU or national cybersecurity frameworks.

4. ESG Award

ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) represents a company's stance and actions on environmental impact, social responsibility, and governance practices. It is a framework for assessing how a company's operations align with sustainable development and societal goals. In a world increasingly conscious of the impacts of corporate actions, ESG provides a critical measure of a company's commitment to operating responsibly.

Criteria:

The ESG award may be for stand-alone initiatives run by an organisation, or as part of a long-standing, structured program. The company should be able to demonstrate ESG activities in each of the three pillars.

- Environmental: This pillar is related to an organisation's impact on the earth, encompassing waste management, resource conservation, and climate change mitigation.
- Social: The social pillar involves the company's relationships with employees, suppliers, customers, and communities, including labour practices and human rights.
- Governance: This area relates to the company's leadership, audits, internal controls, and shareholder rights.

5. Excellence in Education Award

This award recognises the efforts of a school that achieves “Excellence in Education” through the development of student and / or teacher IT skills. The awards will go to the school that can demonstrate an outstanding technology initiative that benefits the school and / or the South West region.

Criteria:

- Award is open to primary and post primary sectors.
- Schools must be based in the South West.
- Initiatives which enable students to develop software and / or hardware design and development skills will be prioritised.

6. Multinational of the Year Award

This award goes to a multinational company with a substantial presence in the South West region that has shown a real commitment to the future growth of the technology sector in the South West.

Criteria:

- A company with a strong Technology focus and team in the region.
- A company that has a technology offering, i.e. a product or service that is tech based.
- A company with an international presence with over 250 employees.
- Must have substantial, meaningful presence in the South West region (or have plans for same).
- Strong contributor to the economy.
- Can demonstrate long term plans for their organisation in the region.
- The company must demonstrate a base for that technology offering in the South West region. i.e. they have a customer facing or product development function in the South West region, not just a financial base.

7. Small Indigenous Company of the Year Award

This award goes to an Indigenous company with a substantial presence in the South West region that has shown a real commitment to the future growth of the technology sector in the South West.

Criteria:

- A company with a strong Technology focus and team in the region with less than 250 employees.
- Must have substantial, meaningful presence in the South West region (or have plans for same).
- Strong contributor to the economy.
- Can demonstrate long term plans for their organisation in the region.

8. Smart Technology Innovation Award

This award category spotlights the pioneers of emerging technologies, the award goes to an organisation that has developed and/or implemented a technological innovation in the South West region which will reshape the way we live and work in our cities and regions.

Criteria:

- The innovation can be a product, process, service, project, or a business model.
- The innovative nature and creativity of the application.
- The innovation improves life opportunities and experiences for people in the workplace or wider society.
- The innovation advances the adoption of immersive and transformative digital experiences.
- Innovation in the application of machine learning, automation, and intelligent systems.
- The innovation's economic viability and its potential for job creation OR the innovation's social impact on the region.
- It's application to enhancing the South West's reputation as a Smart Region.

9. Tech Scale Up of the Year

This award goes to a company who are on the cusp of a major leap forward in their business. Nominees may include companies that are making waves, established businesses about to go global, or perhaps a business that has gone through a period of transformation and now emerged as a serious player in their sector.

Criteria:

- Market validated product.
- Can demonstrate significant growth in the business.
- Full time management team in place.
- Can articulate a breakthrough in business strategy.
- Large market opportunity.
- Resources available to grow.

10. Tech Start Up of the Year

This award goes to a start-up in the region that is developing and marketing innovative technology products or solutions. In particular this award celebrates companies that are disrupting traditional business models in new ways.

This award recognises an early-stage venture in the Munster region that demonstrates excellence in developing market-validated, innovative technology solutions with significant commercial potential. The recipient must show evidence of product differentiation, addressable market opportunity, and a scalable business model that positions them for growth and continued investment.

Criteria:

- The business is under 3 years old (from date of incorporation).

- At least 1 fulltime founder.
- Compelling Customer Value Proposition.
- Validated market opportunity.
- Validated business model.
- MVP developed and validated.

11. Chairperson Community Award

The Chairperson Community Award is nominated by the Chairperson of Tech Industry Alliance.

12. Tech Person of the Year Award

The Tech person of the Year award will be selected by the Tech Industry Alliance Executive Board and goes to an individual who has demonstrated many years commitment to the tech industry in the South West region.

Judging Process

Tech Industry Alliance is committed to ensuring that the judging process is both objective and transparent. The Leaders Awards applications are reviewed by a panel of three judges in each category. The judging panel is made up of independent experts in the field of IT and business leaders from the South West region. Judges are provided with detailed scoring criteria information in advance of the judging process.

First Process of the Judging Panel

The judging panel reviews all applications in their award category. The judges review the applications independently and provide a score. This judging panel then meets to discuss the highest scoring entry and create a shortlist of the strongest applications. These entrants are then invited to attend a virtual interview.

Second Process of the Judging Panel

The judging panel will conduct **virtual interviews** with the three finalists in which each finalist will be expected to give a 15-minute presentation followed by a Q&A session. **Finalists must be available during the week of 02nd – 06th November for virtual interviews with the Judging Panel.** Afterwards the judges will independently review the finalists, using the score-card criteria, and then meet to confer and decide on the category winner. The winner in each category will be announced on the night. All finalists must be available to attend the Leaders Awards Ceremony on November 13th at The Great Southern Hotel Killarney.

Entering the Awards This year

You can nominate a company for any of the award categories (except Tech Person of the Year and Chairperson Community Award) at: www.techindustryalliance.ie , all nomination forms will be sent to the judging panels for review.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- You may only submit one entry per category.
- Every section of the nomination form must be filled out completely. Evaluating and scoring will be based solely on the quality of information submitted in the nomination form.
- There is a strict word count which must be adhered to.
- Images and attachments will not be accepted in the online application. Images and headshots will be requested at a later date if necessary.
- Companies who have won an award in the previous three years are not eligible to enter that category in 2026.
- You can self-nominate, and / or be nominated by others.

If you have any questions about nominating a company, please contact info@techindustryalliance.ie with your query.

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