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## About the Catalyst Award

Each year, the Rachel's Network Catalyst Award provides women environmental leaders of color with personal (\$15,000) and organizational (\$10,000, if applicable) grants, wraparound leadership services, and public recognition.

Awardees are also offered: virtual community connections; compensated speaking opportunities; professional development opportunities and participation in other Rachel's Network programs and events.

## Eligibility

To qualify, candidates must:

1. Identify as a woman of color\*
2. Live in the US or US territories\*\*
3. Have focused on environmental issues for at least 10 years.\*\*\*

Elected officials and those currently running for elected office are not eligible.

While the list below is not exclusive, potential awardees might be:

- Writers and poets documenting the beauty of our natural world
- Organizers defending their communities, neighborhoods, and land
- Educators nurturing young advocates
- Farmers creating a just food system
- Documentarians and journalists covering environmental injustice
- Faith leaders communicating the moral imperative for change
- Lawyers working to protect our air, lands, water, and wildlife
- Champions of good nutrition, wellness, and health
- Scientists, researchers, and academics helping us better understand our planet
- Entrepreneurs creating social and economic change

*\* Our definition of "women" is spacious and includes people of color who may identify as non-binary, genderqueer, gender expansive, or otherwise not conforming to the gender binary. We trust the self-identification of award candidates regarding their gender, race, ethnicity, and heritage. We hope candidates can see themselves in this award and we trust them to engage if they do.*

*\*\*The United States comprises contemporary and ancestral lands and territories, much of which has been forcibly stolen from Indigenous people through colonization. We acknowledge that the traditional custodians of this land have endured many legacies of displacement, migration, settlement, and trauma that have shaped where we are today.*

*\*\*\*We expect evaluators to take a broad view of what has traditionally and historically been considered "environmental" work. We understand*

*individuals come to environmental protection through and alongside issues pertaining to public health and safety; arts and culture; social, racial, or economic justice; and more. We are defining mid-career as an individual with expertise and experience beyond entry level, but with significant opportunities to grow before the end of one's career.*

## **Evaluation**

Candidates will be evaluated by:

- How clearly they explain their vision and its importance in the broader environmental movement;
- How persistent they are in engaging with environmental work; and
- The potential for our network to play a catalytic role in the candidate's work, defined as how impactful our award—prize money, networking/connections, and leadership opportunities—would be to a candidate, their work, and the community they represent. *This measurement aims to prioritize candidates who may be coming from under-resourced communities or working at under-resourced organizations/coalitions. Preference for this award will be given to candidates whose career could benefit from receiving this award.*

Rachel's Network commits to diversity, equity, inclusivity, and justice, and an award process that is respectful, transparent, and fair. We celebrate the diversity of backgrounds and experiences among candidates and those involved in the selection process. Please see [Our Commitment to Racial Justice](#) for more.

We ask that all evaluators bring a compassionate heart and mind to the process and be respectful of the experiences, time, and remarks shared by applicants. Specifically, we expect evaluators to:

- review with an intersectional lens; understand that social, economic, gender-based, racial, and environmental issues are interconnected and interdependent
- consider any privileges and biases that may influence the fairness of reviews in a thoughtful, respectful, and honest way.

## 2025 Selection Process Timetable

<b>February</b>	Applications open <b>February 20.</b>
Applications Open	
<b>March</b>	Applications close <b>March 30.</b>
Applications Close	Staff assign applications to reviewers and reviewer teams through OpenWater (our application platform). Each candidate's materials will be read by multiple reviewers.
<b>April &amp; May</b>	Reviewers and reviewer teams will submit evaluations or recommendations for each applicant through <b>May 11.</b> Reviewer teams will be responsible for self-governing their decision-making.
Reviewer Evaluation	
<b>May &amp; June</b>	Staff review recommendations and confirm 15 finalists. Staff conduct and record 30-minute interviews with finalists and share materials with the Selection Committee.
Interviews	
	<b>Interviews: May 19- June 6</b>
<b>June- July</b>	Committee members review applications and submit evaluations in OpenWater by <b>August 12.</b> Finalists will be reviewed by all committee members.
Selection Committee Orientation	
Selection Committee Evaluation	<b>Selection Committee Orientation Meeting- beginning of June</b>
	Note: Rachel's Network staff will be on summer sabbatical July 29 – August 9.

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## **August & September**

## **Awardee Selection Meetings: August 12-30**

### **Awardee Selection**

*Committee meets to recommend five awardees. Selection Committee members who cannot make the group call will be able to cast a vote virtually but cannot impact the final selection decision.*

*Staff notifies awardees and finalists of their prizes in early September*

## **Announcement made in September**

### **Application Instructions**

To apply to the award, [create an account on our application portal here](#) and click **"Applications are now open"** (if you applied to the award in past years, you will also be able to login and view your previous applications). Fill out your responses in the application form and click "Save" at the bottom of the page to save a draft in process. To submit your final application, click "Save and Submit."

### **2025 SAMPLE Application Questions**

For reference, below are a few sample questions that applicants are asked in the application. To submit your responses, see application instructions above.

### Prompts/Questions

- A. Tell us about yourself, your ancestral roots and cultural heritage, and any legacy you may be carrying forward in your environmental work. (400 words or less)
- B. What are you trying to achieve in your environmental work? Why is it important to you? (400 words or less)
- C. Knowing that this work is important and challenging, how do you persist? What consistently keeps you going? (400 words or less)
- D. What have you learned about your leadership style since you started your career? In what ways do you hope to grow? (400 words or less)
- E. What big dreams do you have and what barriers keep you from achieving them? How would receiving the Catalyst Award help support you and your work? (400 words or less)

## FAQs

- [How are you defining “woman” and “woman of color”?](#)
- [I applied before. Can I reapply?](#)
- [How are you defining mid-career?](#)
- [I've been nominated. Do I still need to apply?](#)
- [I'm not a US citizen. Can I apply?](#)
- [I'm currently an elected official or I'm running for elected office. Can I apply?](#)
- [Are there limitations for how I use my prize money?](#)
- [What types of affiliated organizations are eligible for funding?](#)
- [If I leave my job with a 501\(c\)\(3\) during my award period, where would the organizational funding go?](#)
- [Are there expectations for award winners?](#)
- [Who will be evaluating my application?](#)
- [Are there other award programs I can apply to?](#)
- [What is Rachel's Network?](#)

### **How are you defining “woman” and “woman of color”?**

Our definition of “women” is spacious and includes people of color who may identify as non-binary, genderqueer, gender expansive, or otherwise not conforming to the gender binary. We trust the self-identification of award candidates regarding their gender, race, ethnicity, and heritage. We hope that candidates can see themselves in this award and we trust them to engage if they do.

We acknowledge the painful ways individuals have been excluded, devalued, or inhibited in the mainstream environmental movement due to their race and gender, and we strive to balance our aspiration for inclusivity with the understanding that the experiences of people of color are not the same. We may never complete our understanding of the unique, nuanced, and intersecting ways race and gender shape us and our systems, but we commit to the journey of growth and support.

### **I applied before. Can I reapply?**

Yes! As long as you still meet our eligibility requirements, go for it.

### **Why focus on “mid-career” women?**

Our network elevates women leaders at all stages, but we are prioritizing the award to women at the midpoint of their careers, generally defined as an individual with at least ten years expertise and experience. These individuals are beyond entry level, but with significant opportunities to grow before the end of one’s career. We found no formal pathways for mid-career women of color to advance to leadership positions. Many are overlooked for promotions, hitting a “green ceiling.” Many leave the environmental movement entirely. As funders, we want as many people as possible working to protect our planet and we want to help women of color feel like they can thrive and so, preference for this award will be given to candidates whose career could benefit from receiving this award.

### **I've been nominated. Do I still need to apply?**

Yes. All candidates must apply to the award to be considered.

**I'm not a US citizen. Can I apply?**

Yes, however, you must be a resident of the United States, American Indian and Alaska Native areas, or US Territories (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands). The United States comprises contemporary and ancestral lands and territories, much of which has been forcibly stolen from Indigenous people through colonization. We acknowledge that the traditional custodians of this land have endured many legacies of displacement, migration, settlement, and trauma that have shaped where we are today.

**I'm currently an elected official or I'm running for elected office. Can I apply?**

We are so grateful for your commitment to environmental stewardship through your public service. But, as a 501(c)(3), Rachel's Network cannot provide prizes to those currently running for an elected position or serving as an elected official. Please consider connection with our c4 organization, [Rachel's Action Network](#).

**Are there limitations for how I use my prize money?**

There are no restrictions on how the personal award may be used, however organizational grants are subject to 501(c)(3) rules.

**What types of affiliated organizations are eligible for funding?**

Eligible organizations include: 501(c)(3) nonprofits, organizations fiscally sponsored by 501(c)(3)s, and tribal governments.

**If I leave my job with a 501(c)(3) during my award period, where would the organizational funding go?**

During the award period, organizational funding follows the awardee, as long as the affiliated organization is eligible to receive funds. So, if they start a new job at X, their grant that year would be sent to X. Organizational funding can also be used to launch new nonprofits or initiatives, as long as they are eligible.

**Are there expectations for award winners?**

There are no expectations, but awardees are encouraged to engage in cohort programming (e.g., events, retreats, webinars). We also hope awardees will serve as members of our award selection committee and participate in program evaluation, to improve the experience and impact of this award.

**Who will be evaluating my application?**

A committee of former Catalyst Awardees selects our awardees. Your application will also be reviewed by Rachel's Network advisors, members, staff, and vetted friends of the network with expertise in equity and environmental justice (speakers, consultants). Everyone involved in the award process must abide by our award's guiding principles.

**Are there other award programs I can apply to?**

Check out our list of other award programs for environmental leaders here: [BIPOC Environmental Funding Resources](#).