



## 2026 AWARD CATEGORIES

### COMPANY PERFORMANCE AWARDS

*The Company Performance Awards recognize tech companies that have demonstrated outstanding achievement, growth, and impact over the past year. These awards spotlight companies that are scaling rapidly, launching innovative products, expanding market reach, creating jobs, and making meaningful contributions to the state's tech ecosystem. Applicants must be a tech company and should be headquartered or have a significant presence in the state.*

**IT Services Company** An IT services company that has demonstrated strong performance and/or achieved a milestone of notable success over the past year (e.g., increased revenue, employee growth, product launch or recognition, etc.).

**Software Solutions Company** A software company that has demonstrated strong performance and/or achieved a milestone of notable success over the past year (e.g., increased revenue, employee growth, product launch or recognition, etc.).

**Tech Company of the Year** A tech company headquartered in NC with outstanding performance in revenue, product innovation, market penetration, sales growth and employment expansion. Additionally, the company is giving back in ways to positively impact the community/state.

**\*Top Tech Startups to Watch (10 Winners)** A tech startup founded in NC within the past four years that has demonstrated a foundation for success (e.g. funding, product development, customer acquisition, etc.).

### CORE INNOVATION AWARDS

*The Core Innovation Awards celebrate the most transformative and forward-thinking technology solutions emerging from North Carolina's dynamic tech ecosystem. These awards recognize companies and organizations that are harnessing cutting-edge technologies to solve complex challenges, disrupt industries, and drive measurable impact. Applicants should be headquartered or have a significant presence in the state.*

**AI, ML + Data Innovation** A company or organization that has developed and/or used artificial intelligence, machine learning and/or data analytics to innovate and significantly improve what they do and how they do it (e.g., internal operations, customer engagement, product development, etc.). with outcomes that improve efficiency and/or enhance customer experience.

**BioTech / HealthTech Innovation** A company or organization that has developed and/or implemented a solution to improve outcomes for animals and humans such as biomedical, biotech, diagnostics, drug discovery, medical and dental devices, medical software, medical technology, mobile health, robotics, tele-health, and wearables.

**Culture + People in Tech** A company or tech operations that demonstrates exceptional commitment to cultivating an inclusive, engaging, empowering, and innovative workplace culture.

**Cyber Security Innovation** A company or organization that has developed and/or implemented an innovative product or solution to detect, mitigate or contain cyber breaches or attacks.

**FinTech / InsurTech Innovation** A company or organization that has developed and/or implemented a solution in the field of financial or insurance services such as blockchain, customer support, digital banking, fraud protection, insurance, investments, lending, payments, and personal finance.

**Public Sector Innovation** A government, education or public entity that has developed and/or utilized technology tools to execute a project that delivers value, efficiency, and ease of use for students or citizens.

**Purpose Driven Innovation** A company or organization that has developed and/or utilized technology to help make the world a better place to live, learn and to improve quality of life – the impact can be wide reaching or to specific population.

**Sustainable Tech Innovation** A company or organization that has developed and/or utilized technology to promote environmental sustainability, reduce ecological impact, or enable more efficient use of resources.

**Tech-Driven Business Transformation** A company or organization that has leveraged technology to fundamentally improve how it operates, delivers value, or serves customers and employees.

## **INDIVIDUAL AWARDS**

*The Individual Awards recognize leaders for their accomplishments and impact. Applicants must be based in and have made a positive impact in NC and their employer should be headquartered or have a significant presence in the state.*

**Beacon Award (Outstanding Achievement)** An individual who over their career has helped advance the tech sector and has a history of significant personal achievement. (e.g., aimed at recognizing a leader with NC ties whose impact has been statewide, national, or global)

**Chief Information Officer (CIO) of the Year** (Private Sector + Public Sector) A CIO or equivalent who has primary IT leadership responsibility and demonstrated leadership, driven innovation, and delivered value to their organization (e.g., revamped IT organization, contributed to employer's mission/profit/efficiency in a major way, etc.)

**Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) of the Year** A CISO or equivalent who has primary IT Security leadership responsibility and demonstrated leadership, driven innovation, and delivered value to their organization by establishing and maintaining the enterprise vision, strategy, and program to ensure information assets and technologies are adequately protected.

**Public Leader of the Year** A public official who has provided leadership in the use of technology to advance NC, and/or has supported the innovation economy through public policy efforts.

**Tech CEO of the Year** A Founder/CEO or a NC headquartered tech company who has achieved a significant milestone within the past year (e.g., taken a company public, led a merger/acquisition, significantly boosted a company's presence in the state, authored a book, etc.)

**Tech Difference Maker of the Year** A public sector, education, or community leader/group who has made improved the community/state (i.e. building the tech ecosystem, enriching the pipeline of workers, narrowing the digital divide, utilizing tech to serve others, etc.)

**Tech Woman of the Year** A woman in tech who has made significant contributions throughout her career to her company, industry and community (e.g., reached a professional milestone such as being named a CXO, demonstrated track record of being a groundbreaker or visionary, inspiring and mentoring others, etc.)