

## AIPM AI Project of the Year Award: Operating Rules

**Edition 1 (2026).** Status: release candidate, pending fold-in of the subgroup comments due 2026-07-15. This document is the ambassadors' recommendation for the founders' forum to ratify; nothing in it is presented as already decided by the forum. Every design choice is a proposal for ratification.

This document is the single source of truth (SSOT) for the award. The nomination form, the judge guide, the finalist feedback template, and the public award page all derive from it. Where any derived document appears to conflict with these rules, these rules prevail. It is written so that a Lead Nominator can read it top to bottom and know exactly what to do at each step, and what each rule means.

House-style note: this text avoids the em-dash and the en-dash by design; commas, parentheses, and colons carry the same work. Where a specific number is not yet fixed by these rules, the rule is stated at the principle level and the exact value is deferred to the nomination form (Wave C) or the judge guide (Wave B).

Four decisions remain open for the forum. They appear as clearly marked pending-ratification boxes at the clauses they affect, each carrying a recommended option and an alternative. Until the forum ratifies, the recommended option is a proposal only.

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### 1. Purpose and positioning

**1.1 Positioning.** The AIPM AI Project of the Year Award recognizes AI-enabled projects that demonstrate responsible innovation, strong project delivery, measurable value, human-centered adoption, and positive organizational, community, or societal impact.

**1.2 Nature of the initiative.** The award is a thought-leadership and capability-building initiative. It is not a vendor showcase, and it is not a credential to be purchased.

**1.3 Guardrails.** The award operates under four hard constraints. Every rule below is subordinate to these guardrails, and any interpretation of these rules must preserve them.

**1.3.1 Original.** The award may borrow award mechanics from established programs, but it must never borrow PMI branding, naming, or visual identity.

**1.3.2 Non-commercial.** The award is free end to end. There is no entry fee, no judging fee, and no charge for the badge, the certificate, the logo use, or any proof of winning.

**1.3.3 Practice-grounded.** The award recognizes AI applied inside real, delivered, or operationalized project work. It does not recognize ideas, models, tools, demos, or hackathon prototypes.

**1.3.4 Community-first.** Finalist feedback, case-study publication, and community learning are central to the value the award delivers.

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## 2. Definitions

For the purposes of these rules, the following terms carry the meanings set out here.

**2.1 Entry (nomination).** A single project submitted for consideration, comprising the first-gate summary, the structured questionnaire, the evidence pack, the short video, and the required authorizations and consents.

**2.2 Lead Nominator.** The single named individual who owns an entry, serves as the point of contact for all communication about it, and holds responsibility for the truthfulness and authorization of the entry.

**2.3 Region (macro-region).** One of the three geographic groupings used for the first judging tier in edition 1: Americas, EMEA (Europe, Middle East, and Africa), and Asia-Pacific.

**2.4 Tier 1 (regional round).** The first judging layer, conducted within each macro-region, in which entries are screened for eligibility and scored against the rubric.

**2.5 Tier 2 (global round).** The second judging layer, in which the entries promoted from the regions are re-scored from zero by the global jury, which designates the overall winner and the special recognitions.

**2.6 Cut-off score.** The published minimum score an entry must reach in Tier 1 to be eligible for promotion to Tier 2. The cut-off is set and published before judging opens. Slots are never filled below the cut-off.

**2.7 Finalist.** An entry that clears the Tier-1 cut-off, is promoted by its region, and is therefore judged in Tier 2. Finalist status is what confers the right to a feedback report and to case-study publication.

**2.8 Evidence pack.** The body of supporting material that substantiates the claims in an entry (documentation of outcomes, responsible-AI practice, adoption, delivery, and community contribution), submitted alongside the structured questionnaire and the short video.

**2.9 Feedback report.** The written, criteria-anchored report of strengths and improvement areas that every finalist receives, consolidated from the jury comments against the published rubric.

**2.10 The three recognitions.** The single overall award (AI Project of the Year) and the two special recognitions (Excellence in Responsible AI and Excellence in Agentic AI), all drawn from one submission funnel and one rubric, as defined in Section 3.

**2.11 The forum (founders' forum).** The founders, Ricardo Vargas and Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez, who ratify these rules and decide the open decisions. Nothing in this document is settled until the forum ratifies it.

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### 3. The three recognitions

**3.1 Single funnel, single rubric.** There is one submission funnel and one scoring rubric. All entries are assessed against the same six criteria (Section 8). The two special recognitions are not separate application tracks; a nominee does not apply for them.

**3.2 AI Project of the Year.** The overall winner. One winner is selected from the global finalist pool.

**3.3 Excellence in Responsible AI.** A special recognition designated by the global jury to the finalist that best demonstrates responsible AI governance, human accountability, and trustworthiness. It is designated from the finalist pool, not applied for.

**3.4 Excellence in Agentic AI.** A special recognition designated by the global jury only where a finalist uses agentic or autonomous AI responsibly. If no entry qualifies, this recognition is not awarded in edition 1. It is a bar to clear, not a slot to fill.

**3.5 Designation authority.** The two special recognitions are designated by the global jury from the finalist pool. They may be conferred on the overall winner or on other finalists, at the global jury's determination, subject to the qualifying condition in clause 3.4 for the agentic recognition.

**3.6 Scope guardrail (year one).** Edition 1 does not implement a full multi-category architecture. A five-category split, sector tracks, and size tracks are deferred to edition 2. A separate person-level award is recommended for deferral to edition 2 (an open decision; see the pending-ratification box below).

**PENDING RATIFICATION (Decision: Person-level award). Recommended:** keep edition 1 project-only. **Alternative:** add or prepare a separate AI Project Manager of the Year (a person-level axis), recommended for deferral to edition 2 because it would roughly double the year-one operational load. The forum decides.

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### 4. Eligibility

Eligibility is stated in three blocks: Eligible, Ineligible, and Participation and conflict of interest. An entry must satisfy every applicable rule in all three blocks.

#### 4.1 Eligible

**4.1.1** AI must be a meaningful component of the project, not a decorative add-on.

**4.1.2** The work must be beyond proof of concept: completed, delivered, piloted in a real setting, or operationalized, with evidence.

**4.1.3** The award is global from the first edition. Entries from any region are eligible.

**4.1.4** The project must have been completed or operationalized within the approved eligibility window, measured at the nomination deadline (see the pending-ratification box below).

**4.1.5** The entry must include responsible-AI evidence (governance, risk, ethics, transparency, privacy, and bias mitigation, together with human oversight where applicable).

**4.1.6** The entry must include adoption evidence, not only deployment evidence. Showing that something went live is not enough; the entry must show it was taken up and used.

**4.1.7** Publishable case-study consent is required at entry, subject to the confidentiality safeguards in Section 12.

**4.1.8** Joint vendor-plus-practitioner entries are eligible, provided the spotlight is on the practitioner or the delivery team leading adoption (see clause 4.3.3).

**PENDING RATIFICATION (Decision #2: Eligibility window). Recommended:** 18 months at the nomination deadline, measured from project completion or operationalization. **Alternative:** 24 months, for a wider first field. The forum decides.

## 4.2 Ineligible

**4.2.1** Ideas, concepts, models in isolation, tools, demos, and hackathon prototypes are not eligible; the award recognizes AI applied inside real, delivered, or operationalized project work (see clause 1.3.3).

**4.2.2** Work that has not moved beyond proof of concept is not eligible (see clause 4.1.2).

**4.2.3** Entries in which AI is a decorative add-on rather than a meaningful component are not eligible (see clause 4.1.1).

**4.2.4** Entries that fall outside the approved eligibility window are not eligible (see clause 4.1.4).

**4.2.5** Entries that rely on any material (including a video link or a permitted supporting link) that is not accessible without a login may be disqualified (see clause 6.5).

**4.2.6** Entries that lack the required responsible-AI evidence or the required adoption evidence are not eligible (see clauses 4.1.5 and 4.1.6).

**4.2.7** Entries for which publishable case-study consent is withheld at entry are not eligible (see clause 4.1.7).

## 4.3 Participation and conflict of interest

**4.3.1 Vendor neutrality.** The award is vendor-neutral. No bonus is given for any particular technology, platform, or supplier.

**4.3.2 Self, peer, and joint nomination.** Self-nomination, open peer nomination, and joint entries are permitted, subject to Section 5.

**4.3.3 Joint entries.** Where an entry is joint (for example, a vendor together with a practitioner or delivery team), the spotlight is on the practitioner or delivery team leading adoption, and a single Lead Nominator owns the entry (see clause 2.2).

**4.3.4 Juror conflicts.** No juror judges their own entry, employer, client, or any materially connected project. Conflicts are handled under the integrity rules in Section 9.

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## 5. Nomination flow

**5.1 Lead Nominator.** Each entry is owned by a single named Lead Nominator, who is the sole point of contact and who holds responsibility for the entry's authorizations, consents, and truthfulness (see Section 6).

**5.2 Who may nominate.** Nominations may be made by self-nomination, by open peer nomination, or as a joint entry. In every case a single Lead Nominator is identified.

**5.3 First gate (summary).** Screening begins with a lightweight first gate: a summary of at most 180 characters. This allows the organizers to triage an entry before the full evidence pack is assembled. The exact wording rules for the summary are set in the nomination form (Wave C); the 180-character limit is fixed here.

**5.4 Draft-then-final flow.** Entries follow a draft-then-final flow: a Lead Nominator may prepare and revise a draft before submitting the entry as final. Only the final submission is judged.

**5.5 What is submitted for judging.** After the first gate, a complete entry comprises a structured questionnaire, an evidence pack, and a short video (see Section 6).

**5.6 Finalist presentation.** Finalists deliver a live online presentation followed by questions and answers, as part of Tier 2 (duration per clause 7.4.2).

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## 6. Evidence pack requirements

**6.1 Components.** A complete entry for judging comprises: (a) a structured questionnaire; (b) an evidence pack (see clause 2.8); and (c) a short video. The nomination form carries the evidence; the core content of the form does not rely on external links (see clause 6.6).

**6.2 Signed authorization.** The Lead Nominator must be authorized to submit the project and to consent to case-study publication. Where the project belongs to an organization, a person with authority provides a signed authorization. This authorization is lighter than a director-signature-plus-stamp requirement, but it must be genuine and verifiable.

**6.3 Truthfulness declaration.** Each entry must include a truthfulness declaration by the Lead Nominator.

**6.4 Audit rights.** AIPM reserves the right to verify any information in an entry and to request supporting evidence during evaluation. Material misrepresentation disqualifies the entry.

**6.5 Accessible without login.** Any material a nomination relies on, including a video link and any permitted supporting link, must be accessible without a login, or the entry may be disqualified. This rule is adopted from the PMI global program.

**6.6 Anti-gaming: layout and length.** To keep entries fair and comparable, and adapting the PMI-GO approach in a lighter form than its 22-page ceiling, the following principles apply:

**6.6.1** The nomination form itself carries the evidence; the core content does not rely on external links (the PMI-GO no-links-in-form rule).

**6.6.2** A fixed form layout applies to every entry.

**6.6.3** A per-section length budget applies, so no section can crowd out the others.

**6.6.4** Bracketed guidance in the form must be deleted before submission.

**6.6.5** A page limit and a maximum video length apply. The exact page count and the exact video length are set in the nomination form (Wave C); this document fixes the principle and defers the numbers.

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## 7. Judging process and calendar

**7.1 Two-tier model.** Judging runs in two tiers, from regional to global.

### 7.2 Tier 1 (regional, October 2026).

**7.2.1** Entries are judged within their region, by that region's ambassadors as the first layer, alongside criterion-eligible external jurors for that region.

**7.2.2** Each region promotes up to 2 or 3 entries to the global round, and only entries that clear the published minimum cut-off score are promoted. Slots are never filled below the cut-off: the cut-off is a floor of quality, not a seat count (see clause 2.6).

**7.2.3** The numeric cut-off threshold is set and published before judging opens.

**7.3 Macro-regions.** Edition 1 runs three macro-regions: Americas, EMEA, and Asia-Pacific. Entries are assigned by affinity, not only by residence, so that thinner benches can be deepened. A fuller regional split is the edition-2 growth path.

### 7.4 Tier 2 (global, November to December 2026).

**7.4.1** The regional winners (about six to nine entries across the three regions) pitch live online to the global jury.

**7.4.2** The finalist pitch is a 10 to 15 minute live online presentation with questions and answers (see clause 5.6).

**7.4.3** The global jury designates the overall winner and the two special recognitions (subject to clause 3.4 for the agentic recognition).

**7.5 Global jury composition.** The global jury comprises Ricardo Vargas, Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez, and the ambassadors who passed the judge-selection criterion for the global award. A sponsor juror joins only if Decision #8 is taken (see the pending-ratification box in Section 9).

**7.6 Tier-2 zero re-score.** Regional rank qualifies an entry for the global round, but the global jury re-scores every global finalist from zero under the same rubric. Regional scores do not carry into the global round. This rule, imported from the PMI Brasil chapter-to-national precedent, avoids cross-panel calibration bias.

**7.7 Cross-panel calibration.** Before scoring, panels calibrate against a shared worked example, so that a score of 9 out of 10 means the same thing across regions.

**7.8 Panel composition (each tier).** Each panel is a mixed, not all-academic, group of about seven jurors, within the founders' 5-to-10 range, drawn from AIPM ambassadors and external experts, covering project management, AI governance, business value, ethics and risk, and sector representation. The detailed judge-selection criteria and formation process are set in the judge guide (Wave B); these rules state the composition principle and point to that guide.

**7.9 Calendar.** The award runs on the following calendar. The phases and months are fixed.

**7.9.1 July 2026:** finalize the charter, rubric, rules, jury, and platform; run a pre-announcement and teaser that opens an interest-and-intent list, so the nomination window opens warm.

**7.9.2 Mid-August 2026:** public launch; nominations open; the rules, rubric, and timeline are published on pmairevolution.com and the AIPM channels.

**7.9.3 End of September 2026:** nominations close (about a six-week window).

**7.9.4 October 2026:** Tier-1 regional judging (eligibility screening, written and evidence assessment, regional scoring, up to 2 or 3 promoted per region above the cut-off).

**7.9.5 November to December 2026:** Tier-2 global judging (regional winners pitch to the global jury), followed by the live online ceremony in December, announcing the winner and the two special recognitions.

**7.9.6 December 2026 to January 2027:** feedback reports issued to every finalist; Story-of-Success cases published into the case-study library and routed to the webinar cadence.

**7.10 Eight-stage process.** For reference, the award follows an eight-stage process: (1) charter and criteria; (2) call for nominations; (3) eligibility screening; (4) written and evidence assessment; (5) Tier-1 regional judging; (6) Tier-2 global judging and finalist pitch; (7) announcement and live online ceremony; (8) feedback and lessons.

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## 8. Scoring

**8.1 Rubric.** Entries are scored against six weighted criteria. Each criterion is scored on a scale of 1 to 10. The weights are published before the call opens.

| # | Criterion                                      | Weight      |
|---|--|-------------|
| 1 | Outcomes, benefits and impact                  | 25%         |
| 2 | Responsible AI governance and Human-in-Command | 20%         |
| 3 | Adoption and change management                 | 15%         |
| 4 | AI solution fit and innovation                 | 15%         |
| 5 | Project management and delivery rigor          | 15%         |
| 6 | Learning and contribution to the community     | 10%         |
|   | <b>Total</b>                                   | <b>100%</b> |

**8.2 Design principle.** The rubric rewards durable change and real adoption over model novelty. Criteria 1, 2, and 3 carry 60% of the weight combined, so a technically impressive AI solution cannot win without credible evidence of outcomes, responsible governance, and real adoption.

**8.3 Weight-shape acknowledgment.** The 25/20/15/15/15/10 weight-distribution shape is a project-management-industry norm (the PMI PMO of the Year program uses the same shape with different criterion names). The criteria themselves are AI-delivery-specific to this award.

**8.4 Scoring anchors.** The same 1-to-10 anchor scale applies to every criterion.

| Band   | Level                  | Description  |
|--------|------------------------|--|
| 1 to 2 | Minimal or unsupported | Mostly assertion, little or no evidence, major gaps against the criterion. |
| 3 to 4 | Notable gaps           | Some relevant content, but evidence is                                     |

| Band    | Level       | Description   |
|---------|-------------|---|
|         |             | weak, incomplete, or not yet operationalized.   |
| 5 to 6  | Adequate    | Meets a reasonable baseline, evidence exists, but impact or maturity is limited.                      |
| 7 to 8  | Strong      | Well-evidenced and credible, shows strong practice and transferable lessons.                          |
| 9 to 10 | Exceptional | Outstanding evidence, durable value, responsible practice, and high learning value for the community. |

**8.5 Claims versus evidence.** Judges must distinguish claims from evidence. Unsupported assertions score in the 1 to 2 band.

**8.6 Cut-off.** In Tier 1, only entries that reach or exceed the published cut-off score may be promoted, and each region promotes at most 2 or 3 such entries (the cut-off is a floor of quality, not a seat count; see clause 2.6). The numeric cut-off is set and published before judging opens (see clause 7.2).

**8.7 Tier-2 fresh score.** In Tier 2, every global finalist is re-scored from zero under the same rubric and anchors; regional scores do not carry forward (see clause 7.6).

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## 9. Integrity rules

All integrity rules are published, and all are zero-cost.

**9.1 Conflict of interest.** A conflict-of-interest rule applies, combining auto-decline with disclose-and-recuse. No juror judges their own entry, employer, client, or any materially connected project. A juror with any such connection declines the assignment automatically, and any residual conflict is disclosed and the juror recuses from the affected entry.

**9.2 Anti-AI-ghostwriting.** Entries must be human-authored. AIPM reserves the right to use detection tools. Responsible use of AI tools by nominees is disclosed where permitted by the final rules.

**9.3 No contact with judges.** During the judging period there is to be no contact with judges by nominees or their representatives. Breach results in disqualification.

**9.4 Claims versus evidence.** Judges must distinguish claims from evidence, and score unsupported assertions accordingly (see clause 8.5).

**9.5 Juror confidentiality.** Jurors give confidentiality undertakings (see clause 12.3).

### **PENDING RATIFICATION (Decision #8: Sponsorship posture).**

**Recommended:** owner-funded, no sponsor for edition 1. **Alternative:** accept sponsors via the CloudFest sponsor-to-charity decoupling. Under this model a

sponsor funds recognition or a charity scholarship in return for brand exposure, and no cash reaches any winner. If a sponsor is taken, a sponsor juror from a technology company or a venture-capital firm may join the global bench, under a published sponsorship-does-not-influence-judging firewall and under the same conflict-of-interest rules as every other juror. **Sponsor firewall (live only if the alternative is ratified):** sponsorship funds recognition, ceremony, or a charity scholarship only, and does not influence judging, scoring, promotion, or the designation of any recognition. Any sponsor juror is bound by the same conflict-of-interest, disclose-and-recuse, confidentiality, and no-contact rules as every other juror, and holds no additional weight in any decision; sponsorship does not buy a score, a finalist slot, or any influence over the result. The forum decides.

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## 10. Recognition package

**10.1 Free package.** The recognition package is free in full and reuses existing AIPM assets.

### 10.2 Components.

**10.2.1** A Credly-style digital badge, adapting existing AIPM badge designs, with the earning criteria published.

**10.2.2** A digital certificate.

**10.2.3** Logo and mark use.

**10.2.4** A live online ceremony, as the community moment.

**10.2.5** A finalist Story-of-Success publication into the case-study library.

**10.3 No cash prize.** There is no cash prize, in line with the field norm.

**10.4 Optional in-kind prize (model only).** An optional, non-cash, in-kind career-capital prize is available as a model (the PMI Madrid pack, about USD 267), if the founders wish to offer a tangible prize. This is a model for the forum to consider, not a fixed feature of edition 1.

**10.5 Ceremony detail.** The detailed ceremony format is set in Wave D; these rules state the package.

#### **PENDING RATIFICATION (Decision #5: Community Choice vote).**

**Recommended:** a jury-only main award, plus an optional secondary Community Choice recognition, voted by the public only on the jury-vetted finalist shortlist (never on raw nominations), with basic fraud controls (one vote per verified account, audited tabulation), and clearly labeled as secondary. **Alternative:** defer all public voting to edition 2 (jury-only in edition 1). The main award is never put to a public vote under either option. The forum decides.

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## 11. Feedback reports

**11.1 Finalist feedback.** Every finalist receives a written, criteria-anchored feedback report of strengths and improvement areas. The report is assembled from the jury comments, consolidated against the published rubric.

**11.2 Non-finalist boundary.** No individual feedback is given to non-finalist nominations. This boundary follows PMI precedent.

**11.3 Template.** The detailed feedback template is set in Wave D and derives from these rules and from the rubric in Section 8.

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## 12. Data, consent, and confidentiality

**12.1 Case-study consent.** Publishable case-study consent is required at entry, with confidentiality safeguards and the ability to withhold specified confidential details.

**12.2 Data-forwarding consent.** The Lead Nominator consents to forward a regional entry's data to the global jury. This clause is adopted from the PMI-GO consent-to-forward-data clause.

**12.3 Juror confidentiality.** Jurors give confidentiality undertakings covering the entries and deliberations they see.

**12.4 Personal data.** Personal data is handled in accordance with the applicable data-protection norms.

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## 13. Amendments and governance

**13.1 SSOT status.** This document is the single source of truth for the award. The nomination form, the judge guide, the feedback template, and the public award page derive from it. Where a derived document could drift from these rules, these rules prevail, and the derived document is corrected.

**13.2 Owner.** The Community and Growth stream owns the operating plan, under lead Eugene De Wee.

**13.3 Working team.** The edition-1 working team, formed 2026-07-09, is: Vitor (Lead), Farhad Abdollahyan (deputy lead), Tooran Khosh, Marcin Nowakowski, Maria Antonieta Huertas, and Mohammed Al Hadeeth. Fabricio Costa serves as peer reviewer.

**13.4 Pending-ratification items.** Four decisions remain open for the forum, and are carried as pending-ratification boxes at the clauses they affect:

**13.4.1** Decision #8 (Sponsorship posture): Section 9.

**13.4.2** Decision #5 (Community Choice vote): Section 10.

**13.4.3** Decision #2 (Eligibility window): Section 4.

**13.4.4** Person-level award: Section 3.

**13.5 Nothing is decided until the forum ratifies.** Every design choice in this document is the ambassadors' recommendation. Nothing is decided until the founders' forum (Ricardo Vargas and Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez) ratifies it. Once the forum ratifies, the recommended or alternative option chosen for each open decision is folded in, the pending-ratification boxes are resolved, and the corresponding values are propagated to the derived documents.

**13.6 Amendment procedure.** Amendments to these rules are made through the working team and the owning stream, and are reflected in the derived documents so the SSOT and its derivatives stay aligned. After the nomination window opens (mid-August 2026), no change is made that would alter the rules, rubric, weights, or eligibility for entries already in progress.