

ADVANCING WOMEN

Women & the Order of Australia

Our Community

Our Community is a world-leading social enterprise that provides advice and tools for Australia's 600,000 community groups and schools. Our Community: where not-for-profits go for help.

Women's Leadership Institute Australia

The Women's Leadership Institute Australia exists to catalyse and inspire innovative partnerships, action and system-changing solutions to achieve gender balanced representation in Australia. It is dedicated to breaking through the barriers of unconscious bias, cultural and structural issues in Australia to ensure equal opportunity for women to attain leadership positions.

Advancing Women: Women and the Order of Australia

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Foreword

Together, Our Community and Women's Leadership Institute Australia are working to challenge and change women's role in society by pushing for systems changes and helping to empower women at all levels to take their place in all parts of Australian society.

We want to help open the doors to areas previously off-limits, while also ensuring that those areas in which women have traditionally worked are accorded appropriate value.

Much work is required to ensure women are fairly represented in leadership positions in all parts of Australian society. While it is true that women are already demonstrating leadership in many areas, often their contribution is less valued or more opaque.

Since the Australian honours system was introduced in 1975, a great number of deserving Australians have been recognised and rewarded, yet women remain under-represented in the number of nominations, and this under-representation flows through to the number of women who receive honours.

Public awards such as those conferred through the Australian honours system can assist in bringing about the cultural, unconscious bias shift that is required for women to achieve due recognition and leadership equality. The awards recognise extraordinary contribution, not executive title or remuneration. The ranks of awardees ought to include an equal number of women *today*.

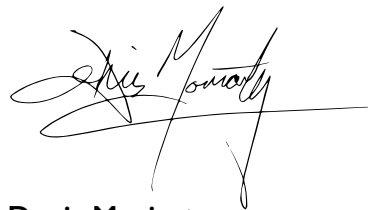
Thankfully, our honours system has been uniquely designed to ensure that any member of the community can nominate an Australian citizen for an award. We encourage every person who reads this guide to nominate at least one great woman for an Australian honour.



Carol Schwartz AM

Chair

Women's Leadership Institute Australia



Denis Moriarty

Group Managing Director

Our Community

I. Australian Awards

Australia is lucky. We have a lot of generous people who are out there every day helping their communities in a million different ways – sustaining the environment, serving on not-for-profit boards, giving disadvantaged groups a helping hand, or pushing the envelope professionally.

They're not in it for the money or the honour or the glory. They're putting in the time because they've seen a job that needs to be done and they've stepped up to do it.

They might get a little bit of thanks. Most of the time that's enough for them.

As a community we couldn't keep going without people like this. We all know that, but we're not always very good at showing it.

Every now and again the community does take time out to say 'thank you' properly. That's what the Australian honours system is all about.

The awards recognise people who have demonstrated achievement at a high level; made a contribution over and above what might be reasonably expected through paid employment; and made a contribution to the community that stands out from others.

The kinds of people who do the selfless work on which our community so depends generally aren't the kinds of people who push themselves forward. That's why it's important that those of us who know and appreciate what they do make sure they get the recognition they deserve.

Anybody, and any organisation, can nominate someone for an Australian award. In fact, institutional support for a nomination is a strong lever. Institutions power nominations, and women are under-represented at the highest level of institutions.

Each and every one of us most probably knows at least one person who would qualify for an Australian honour. We – and the organisations we're associated with – owe it to them, and to the community at large, to put their names forward.

The Australian honours system celebrates the outstanding achievements and contributions of extraordinary Australians in a diverse range of fields and areas of endeavour. It recognises those people in the community whose service and contributions have had the effect of making a significant difference to Australian life, or, more broadly, to humanity at large.

The Australian honours system recognises the actions and achievements of people who go above and beyond what could be reasonably expected, and in doing so, encourages national aspirations and ideals of the highest community standards and values.

Recipients are people from all spheres of the community. Any individual, community organisation, professional body or similar group can nominate an Australian citizen for an award.

In the Australian honours system, the Order of Australia is the pre-eminent means of recognising outstanding achievement and contribution by Australians. It rewards people who have made a significant difference to their community or their country, or at an international level.

The Order of Australia has four levels:

- Companion of the Order (AC) – for eminent achievement and merit of the highest degree in service to Australia or to humanity at large
- Officer of the Order (AO) – for distinguished service of a high degree to Australia or to humanity at large
- Member of the Order (AM) – for service in a particular locality or field of activity or to a particular group
- Medal of the Order (OAM) – for service worthy of particular recognition.

<http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/>

2. Women and Australian Honours

There is an increasingly obvious problem in the distribution of awards in Australia. Fewer women – many fewer women – than men are nominated, and that means fewer women than men get the awards.

According to *The Australian Honours and Awards Branch: Report 2012-16*, women made up only 27.8% of all Order of Australia nominees from 1975 to 2016, and only 30.3% of all recipients (see www.gg.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/honours/HonoursBranchReportFinalOct2016.pdf).

And things aren't getting any better. At the time of publication, the 2017 Queen's Birthday honours list had recently been announced, and the gender breakdown of female nominees and recipients continued to flatline at roughly 30%.

It's time we changed that.

Of course, this is not a problem confined to the Australian honours system. Women are starting behind the pack virtually everywhere else in Australian society.

Australian honours represent the things that we, as a community, believe to be deserving of recognition – believe, in fact, to be honourable. We honour people who deserve it. There's no reason why women should not make up half the honours lists.

If you know a woman who's doing work that you admire, put her forward for an award. Australia will thank you.

Other groups are also under-represented, of course. People from non-English-speaking backgrounds, people with disabilities, unconventional people. Feel free to nominate a person from any of these groups (and if they're also a woman, all the better).

3. Australian Awards and you

Anybody can nominate a person for an Australian award. More to the point, you can. You yourself personally, or as a representative of a group, can nominate somebody who deserves it.

Who should you nominate?

- Who are the people you look up to?
- Who are the people without whom things would come tumbling down?
- Who are the people who drive the causes you support?
- Who are the people who have really made a difference?

Your nominee's contribution doesn't have to be nationwide, or world-shaking, or expensive. Big change in a small arena is as good as a small change in a big arena, or it should be.

Every day's obituaries feature women who have done a lot for their country, who have pushed the boundaries of the possible, who have been the first to reach and hold positions of influence. All of them could have had an award. Very few of them were nominated. And now it's too late.

The trouble is that the women who deserve awards – women who work without reward to change the world for the better – are not the kinds of people who seek accolades for their efforts.

Your prospective nominee may be one of them.

You don't have to ask for permission

It's good to be modest, but it's also important for people to have a realistic appreciation of what they're worth to the world. Don't take someone's reluctance to put their hand up as a sign they wouldn't appreciate receiving a public award.

Not many people turn down an award when it's offered, not after all the work that's been put into it and all the people who have come out in support. Generally, as one would expect, they regard it as a lovely and unexpected gift.

Remember too that it's not just about your nominee. Among other things, an award provides recognition and thanks for the work she's doing *and the people she's doing it with*. Everybody who gets an award represents all those who stand behind them. Nobody does it on their own.

You don't have to ask your nominee's permission – in fact, you're not supposed to. It's a confidential process.

4. What are your chances of success?

Approximately one Australian in 5 million has a Nobel prize (0.00002%), one Australian in 100,000 holds an Olympic medal (0.001%) and one Australian in 10,000 has won a million dollars in a lottery (0.01%).

One Australian in 1000 belongs to the order of Australia (0.1%). They're not bad odds!

The odds look even better when you realise that while each year about 10 million Australians play sports, and about 10 million play the lottery, only about 1600 Australians nominate someone for the Order of Australia. And about 1200 awards are handed out.

The chances that your nominee will receive an award are thus approximately 75%. The majority of people who are nominated get an award.

Australian awards aren't gambling tokens, of course, and comparing them with lottery tickets isn't really appropriate except to emphasise that we're not talking about an impossible dream here. Actually, the ratio of effort to benefit is fantastic. If you lay out your nomination properly, success is quite achievable – and well worth putting a bit of effort into.

It's within your reach.

Each year, the Council for the Order of Australia awards up to 35 Companions of the Order of Australia (AC); 140 Officers of the Order of Australia (AO); 340 Members of the Order of Australia (AM); and an unlimited number of Medals of the Order of Australia (OAM).

5. Nominating someone for an Australian award

How does it work, then?

In general, the nomination process involves going to the Australian honours website and filling out an online form: www.gg.gov.au/australian-honours-and-awards/nomination-forms.

Alternatively, you can telephone the Honours 24-hour answering service and leave your name and postal address, and you'll be sent the form in the mail: call 1800 552 275.

Or you can write to:

Secretary
Order of Australia
Government House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

There are a few rules, and a few other things you should be aware of to give your nomination the best possible chance at success.

Pick someone eligible

Award nominees have to be

- Australian citizens
- Alive (no posthumous nominations).

Keep it confidential

Don't tell anyone who doesn't have to contribute, and make sure the people you do tell know that they should keep this information confidential. You don't want anyone to be embarrassed at any stage.

If you need information that only the nominee has, you'll just have to be cunning and find it out some other way.

The worst thing that can possibly happen when you make a nomination is that 19 worthy people (the Council's panel) will think well of your nominee but not quite well enough, and it will go no further than that. There's not much of a downside.

6. Building your case

You have to be able to make your case. It's rather like a sales pitch. You have to be able to show why the Council considering the nomination should be as excited as you are by the story of what the nominee has done for Australia.

Your enthusiasm has to be infectious, your admiration has to be explained, and your conclusion has to follow indisputably from what's gone before.

You need to be able to link together the different sections of the application strategically so that it all hangs together and all the pieces contribute to a single impression.

Begin with a brief one-sentence statement that sums up the message.

*“Laura Threlfall is the founder and director of **Textbooks for Cancer**, and has worked tirelessly for decades to make sure that children with cancer have the educational support they need if they are not to fall behind in class.”*

Include a very brief biography – highlights only.

*Laura Threlfall was born in Yea in 1945. She graduated in economics from the University of Sydney, and has worked as an economist in the banking sector. She founded **Textbooks for Cancer** in 1985 when her young daughter developed a brain tumour and had to spend long stretches in hospital, adversely affecting her marks. Since then she has developed the organisation into a well-respected, award-winning, national association providing hundreds of textbooks to dozens of children across Australia each year.*

Explain how the person had made a difference in the world.

Textbooks for Cancer has relieved the anxieties of hundreds of children in critical and stressful times, and has allowed them to achieve their full potential despite facing some of life's toughest challenges at such an early age.

Recent contributions to Australian society are better than cold cases. Don't sit on a nomination for too long.

Make your points as briefly as possible, and try to make every single line and every single word reinforce the particular things the Council is looking for; namely:

- **How has the nominee demonstrated service worthy of recognition?**

Here's where the facts come in – numbers of clients, scale of finances, measurable success of the work.

- **How has the nominee's contribution impacted on either a particular field, locality, group, community or humanity at large?**

What they want to know is how she has changed the world for the better. Think big – but make it personal.

- **Has the nominee's contribution been recognised elsewhere (eg: in the media, by other awards, professional/interest groups or through local government)?**

Outline prior awards, previous publications, media recognition, and public support, but don't mistake them for the punch line: impact.

- **What makes this person stand out from others?**

You don't just have to show that your nominee is good, and you don't want to get caught up in trying to show that she's better than someone else; what you need to do is show where she's different, innovative, *distinctive*.

7. Telling the story

Try not to just stack one fact on top of another. You want to convince the Council, and the way to do that is to tell a story. A simple narrative can be very powerful.

Your story might be structured along these lines:

- There was a problem, a serious problem
- That nobody else could fix, though they tried
- Then someone special stepped forward, and was chosen
- And struggled bravely against great odds at the head of their field/band/fellowship/army/club...
- Making many sacrifices, and enduring many hardships,
- Overcoming many difficulties, and triumphing over monstrous foes
- To defeat the problem (or at least diminish it or mitigate it or gain on it)
- Returning to receive their reward – and this is the bit that remains to be completed.

That's the story of the Lord of the Rings, and Robin Hood, and the Odyssey, and the quest for the Holy Grail, and your local school's last lamington drive. It's universal, because it works. It has a shape that everybody can recognise.

The Council has to read more than a thousand sets of forms, so give them a break: don't bore them, don't use jargon, don't use vague words, and don't write in long, flowery sentences.

Make your words come to life. Write with enthusiasm (but don't lapse into hyperbole). Use lively adjectives (though not too many). Quote someone who's been helped.

Above all, show why the world is a better place because your nominee did what she did. Make sure the Committee knows that it wasn't easy.

The more you can engage and impress the reader, the more chance you have of winning their assent.

The following sample nomination touches on all the points suggested in the nomination form.

Sample response: ‘Activities undertaken by the nominee’

I would like to nominate Christine Buford for an Order of Australia award.

Approximately a quarter of a million Australians have severe communication disabilities that leave them unable to communicate without assistance. *[There was a problem.]*

For many years these people have been at grave risk of being misdiagnosed as intellectually disabled and denied their human rights. *[That nobody else could fix.]*

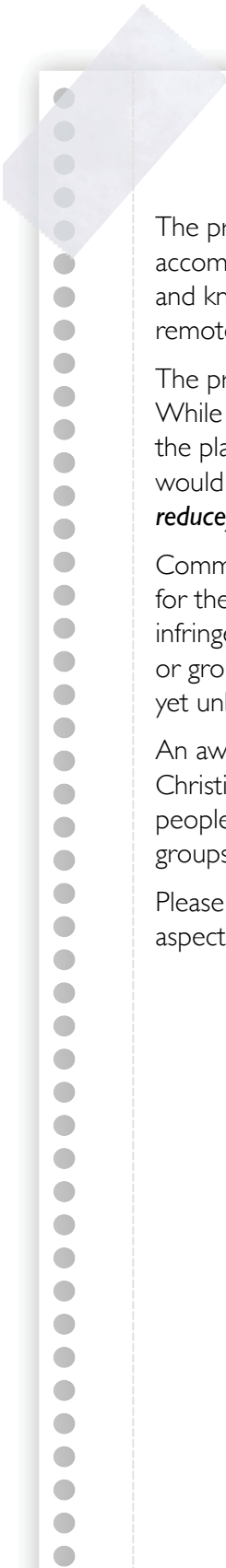
For 30 years Christine has been the core of the effort to give a voice to these voiceless people and to protect their human rights against systems that see them merely as obstacles and nuisances. Her leadership has been inspirational. *[Then someone stepped forward.]*

Communication Key (CK) is the only specialist advocacy service within Australia representing the interests of these people, and Chris Buford, its president, is the heart and soul of the organisation.

She has been active in the disability sector for over 30 years. Since 1986 Christine has been a strong advocate for the rights of people who have little or no speech and has authored many publications in this area.

Christine has been unflagging in her upholding of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, disability discrimination legislation and government disability policies to ensure these people can enjoy their rights without fear of judgement or exclusion. *[And struggled bravely against great odds.]*

She has tirelessly written submissions to government, spoken to the media on behalf of people without speech, and pressed for justice in many, many individual cases of injustice. *[Making many sacrifices.]*



The pressure of indifference and reluctance to make accommodations is inexorable, and only such a continuous and knowledgeable advocacy can keep the playing field remotely level. ***[Overcoming many difficulties.]***

The protection of human rights is Chris Buford's guiding star. While much remains to be done, without her contribution the place of people without speech in Australian society would be significantly worse than it now is. ***[To defeat (or reduce) the problem.]***

Communication Key strives for a world free of discrimination for the people we represent. It bears witness to human rights infringements; it takes action with, or on behalf of, individuals or groups; and it brings necessary change to protect children yet unborn.

An award would be not only much-deserved recognition for Christine Buford but an acknowledgement of the plight of people without speech and the importance of all people and groups working in this area. ***[Returning to receive their reward.]***

Please contact me if you wish for further information on any aspect of this nomination.



8. Organising the process

Nominating someone for an Australian honour doesn't require a huge amount of work, but it does require *some* work.

It helps if your organisation takes an interest in its image. Surf Life Saving Australia, for example, has an awesome record, and secures an average of five awards each year for its members, year after year. This keeps the organisation in the public eye, buffs its public image, and gives its members an extra incentive to stand up for governance duties. Your organisation can do this too. One tiny disability organisation has got three nominations through in five years. You've got to be in it to win it.

An organisation has already got the basic structure in place. It knows everybody's contact details, it has a story that it wants to tell, and it's already holding meetings that can be used to get the work done. Your group should have "Awards" on the board's agenda at least once a year.

Even if you don't have an organisation behind you, though, don't let that stop you. You could do it all yourself, but it's better to get a few people together so that you have people to bounce ideas off, share the workload, and check each other's work.

Set up an ad hoc committee. Hand out copies of the form. Swear everybody to secrecy.

Now you have to line up the tasks, discuss who's going to be best at each, and set the timelines. You'll want to assign someone to

- get the information together – names and dates and positions held
- chase up the referees
- do the writing
- oversee the bringing together of the pieces
- monitor the process.

Write a list saying who's got to do what by which date, and put in another row of dates to show when someone's going to check that they've been done. Set a few meeting dates so that people can fill in their diary around them. Organise email lists.

When you have all the pieces, get someone who writes well to patch them together. Then rewrite and rearrange until it all hangs together and all contributes to the overall arguments. Circulate the drafts for comment.

Tweak the final draft, checking off each of the selection criteria against your nomination. Proofread it all again. Get someone who's never seen it before to check it. Ask them if they're convinced.

Paste the final version into the online form and click "submit".

Or, if you're sending it by post, print a final copy, get stamps and an envelope, and send it off.

9. Lining up referees

The nomination form provides space for you to provide details of four referees – individuals who are in a position to comment directly on the nominee's service or contribution to Australian life.

At one time you used to have to get your local member of parliament to sign off on the nomination, but that requirement has been dropped. There are now no compulsory inclusions, and you can pick any referee you think is suitable, though an MP is still a handy inclusion if they know your nominee.

Don't draw all your referees from the same group; don't have all MPs or all work colleagues or all clients, for example. Don't provide referees from only one side of politics, either – try to draw from across the gender, social and political spectrum.

Aim to present the views of a cross-section of the community, each telling one piece of the story.

Referees have to be either

Weighty: Eminent, respected, recognised (perhaps with honours of their own), the kinds of people whose opinion members of the Council would defer to;

or

Significant: The people best placed to judge the value of her work, the people who can vouch for the truth of the story, a memorable voice from the people who know firsthand how much good her work has done.

Ideally, of course, you'll have both types of people represented in the mix.

You're not absolutely bound to four referees, and if you think you have to include more to cover all aspects of the story then do it. But don't pad.

The form doesn't ask for referees' reports to be submitted with the nomination, because the Council likes to write to the referees themselves. You should still put in some preparation, however. First write to each of the potential referees outlining your plan, sharing the basic story, and letting them know where their reference would fit in the scheme of things.

Once you've spoken to each of them and lined up a definite list of referees, write to each one again, confirming everything you've agreed on.

If possible, when they are contacted by the Council, have a look at an early draft of their submission. If they're at a loss, or look unsure, supply some dot points to get them started.

Following are examples of letters to potential and confirmed referees.



Sample letter to potential referee

Dear Sandra,

I think Kathy McMurdo has been doing a wonderful job as president of the Justice for Refugees group and as the general life and soul of our refugee welcome program, and I'm going to nominate her for an Australian honour.

You've worked closely with her over several years and have had a good view of her operation – could I ask you to be one of the referees for this? Basically, you'd be asked to say a few words in answer to these questions:

- **How has the nominee demonstrated service worthy of recognition?**

What she does for the program.

- **How has the nominee's contribution impacted on either a particular field, locality, group, community or humanity at large?**

What the program does for the refugee community, and how important her part in that is.

- **Has the nominee's contribution been recognised elsewhere (eg: in the media, by other awards, professional/interest groups or through local government)?**

I'm handling this bit, so you wouldn't have to know much about these details.

- **What makes this person stand out from others?**

What you need to do here is show where she's different, innovative, distinctive. I think it's her fire-in-the-belly drive and her incredible persistence against all the odds – you'll probably have other ideas to throw into the mix. Do ring me on 03 9302 4567 or email me on margorobin@LNRinc.org.au if you want to discuss this.

Once she's nominated there's a very high chance she'll get up, I think; she's just the kind of unselfish quiet achiever that they seem to like. I hope you agree that she's been doing a wonderful job and deserves some recognition – and, of course, some of that will rub off onto the group, which should help us next time you're arguing with an unsympathetic bureaucrat.

You don't have to do anything until the people from the Governor-General's office come round following it up, which probably won't be for a few months, so you'll have plenty of time to think about what you're going to say.

Oh, and don't mention this to her! The Awards people insist that successful candidates aren't told till the very last minute, and unsuccessful candidates aren't told at all.

In any case, give me a ring or an email over the next few days so I know your wishes.

Best wishes,

Margo



Sample letter to confirmed referee

Dear Sandra,

Thanks very much for agreeing to act as a referee for Kathy McMurdo in her nomination for an Australian honour.

I've talked to a lot of the people involved, and I've set up three other referees. My suggestion would be that we divide up the job more or less like this:

Nominator – Me, giving the basic contact details and general background.

Referee 1 – You, filling in the benefits her work has had for the refugee community and the impact her advocacy has had on the public debate.

Referee 2 – Mohammed Ghazni, with a more personal account of how Kathy helped them integrate into the local community.

Referee 3 – Gary King, with a tribute to her administrative skills and the way her fundraising got us out of the financial mess Ethel left us with.

Referee 4 – I've got the local MP to put in a good word based on the speech she gave when he came to the Australia Day citizenship ceremony last year.

I think I've covered most bases, but if you think there's anything vital I've missed, do get back. I'll get the forms in in the next couple of weeks, and the awards office will follow it up with you some unknown time after that. I'll send you a copy of the nomination when I get it in so you can see what I've said about it all; it may help you with your bit, though I'm sure you'll be more convincing.

I've got your contact details as

Ms Sandra Diamanta,
c/o Refugee Action Coalition
99 A'Beckett St, Melbourne 3003
4917 235 964
SandraD778@gmail.com

Is that OK? And under 'Connection with nominee' I'll put 'Co-campaigner'.

Remember, not a word! I don't think she suspects yet, anyway.

Give me a ring or an email if there's anything else you want to discuss.

Love,

Margo

10. Who do we have to convince?

Decisions on who gets an Australian award are made by an independent panel that can't be swayed by money, political influence, family considerations, or prejudice. They never leak details of their discussions, they never talk to the media, and they are as absolutely impartial as it's possible to get.

The Council for the Order of Australia is an independent body that considers all nominations for appointments and awards in the General Division of the Order.

The Council makes recommendations for appointments direct to the Governor-General.

The Council meets twice a year. There are 19 members including representatives of every state and territory, public office holders (ex-officio) and community representatives.

The community representatives on the Council are appointed by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.

www.gg.gov.au/australian-honours-and-awards/order-australia

In 2017, 13 out of 17 occupied positions on the Council for the Order of Australia (76%) were occupied by men. Two of the 19 Council positions were vacant.

The male majority for 2017 was not an anomaly, but business as usual on the Council. From 1975 to 2016, the gender split of all persons appointed to the Council was 78.8% male, 21.2% female.

This overwhelming male majority may not be the cause of the gender disparity problem surrounding the Australian honours system, but it's certainly an example of it.

These and other statistics can be found in *The Australian Honours and Awards Branch: Report 2012-16* (www.gg.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/honours/HonoursBranchReportFinalOct2016.pdf).

The names of the current members can be found at www.gg.gov.au/council-order-australia.

11. What comes next?

After you've sent in your nomination, sit back and wait (they go through the applications in date order, so it can take a while).

Council staff will contact the referees and get their considered opinions in writing. Sometimes they also seek additional references from people or organisations that work in the same sphere as your nominee. Other checks may also be made. Then they pass the names on to the Council to make a decision.

The whole process takes between 18 months and two years – so the sooner you get started the better.

There are two award distributions each year – one on Australia Day (26 January) and one in June on the Queen's Birthday holiday. As a nominator, you'll be informed of the outcome, yes or no, a week before whichever one of these the person's nomination was considered for. Successful nominees are informed before the big day; unsuccessful nominees need never know.

The associated insignia is handed over by the state governor at a ceremony a few months later.

I 2. Using awards to further your cause

The kinds of people who get Order of Australia awards (and the people and organisations who nominate them) are often the kinds of people who want to promote the causes and the organisations that they are passionate about. If your nominee wins an award, hooray! Here's what they can do with it:

- **Spread it around.** Use it to motivate the members of the organisation. "I owe it all to you," the award recipient might say; "It's really recognition of the wonderful work you're all doing" (and in a way it is, too), "and I would have been nowhere without you." It helps others to feel part-owners of the award.
- **Talk it up.** This is a really good chance for the recipient to promote their cause more widely. Put out a media release (embargoed until the awards day) and offer interviews and photo opportunities.
- **Build the 'brand'.** Having letters after your name does give a person extra credibility. Your nominee (and associated organisations) should feature the award as much as they can in their dealings with partners, bureaucrats, regulators, supporters, funders, donors, and the media. It can be added to background information on the organisation's website, letterhead, business cards, and funding submissions.
- **Pass it on.** Once successful, your nominee might be inspired to nominate other women for an award, or act as a referee for others (bringing to bear the prestige that their own award can lend to the nomination).

