



Élan

A W A R D S

2026

BE RECOGNIZED INDUSTRY-WIDE

AS A **LEADER IN**
CARD INNOVATION
AND DESIGN

ICMA's Élan Awards showcase the
world's best cards and technology



International Card Manufacturers Association

icma

The ICMA Élan Awards offer a premier opportunity to showcase your organization's excellence. Widely regarded as the most prestigious recognition in the global card industry, the Élan Awards honor the exceptional achievements of ICMA's manufacturer, personalization/fulfillment and supplier members. Celebrating superior design, exemplary quality and technological innovation, these coveted awards spotlight the advancements shaping the industry's future. We invite you to submit your entries for this year's competition and ensure your work receives the distinguished recognition it deserves.

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 18, 2026

SHOWCASING THE WORLD'S BEST CARDS AND TECHNOLOGY

Now in its 29th year, the ICMA Élan Awards gather entries from around the world to recognize innovative card designs, technologies, and other criteria that establish the global vanguard for card manufacturing. The distinction of an Élan Award offers significant promotional opportunities for high-profile industry recognition and visibility.

Open to ICMA members only, the Élan Awards will be presented at the ICMA EXPO Awards Dinner in Orlando, Florida on April 21, 2026. With the exception of the People's Choice award, an independent panel of card industry experts recognize one winner and two finalists for each award category. Awards are bestowed upon and issued to both winning manufacturers, personalizers, and their customers.

CATEGORIES:

Feature Cards: These include Biometric Transaction Cards, Eco-Focused Cards and Metal Cards. There will be an award winner for each Feature Cards segment – biometric, eco-focused and metal cards.

Secure Payment Cards: These include Financial, Retail or Gas/Petrol branded cards from secure issuing organizations like Visa, Mastercard, American Express, Discover, UnionPay or Retailers like Macy's, WalMart, or Gas/Petrol companies like Shell, Exxon, BP. The card can be magnetic stripe and/or smart chip with debit, credit or prepaid as long as it bears the branding logo of a recognized secure issuer.

Loyalty, Promotional, Gift Cards: Includes cards for airline, hotel, car rental and grocery loyalty programs. Also, gift cards with a prepaid value usually initiated at check out. Cards must be printed on card stock of 24 to 30 mil thickness and can be magnetic stripe or smart chip.

ID Cards: Includes government-issued cards like healthcare, drivers license or national ID cards.

Access Control Cards: Includes cards for access control such as door keys, access ID badges or cards for entry/access.

Unique Innovation: Most innovative technical achievement in card functionality or Personalization/Fulfillment product or service that demonstrates novel, unique or expanded functionality in response to customer application requirements. Entries must be card industry based products or services.

Prototypes / concept cards developed between February 28, 2025 and January 31, 2026 will be judged in a separate Unique Innovation Prototype category.

Personalization Product, Service or Project: P&F bureaus can enter a personalized card that was launched into the card market this past year.

Fulfillment Product, Service or Project: P&F bureaus can enter a new card-based fulfillment product, service or project that was launched into the card market this past year. There will be an award winner for each fulfillment segment - custom (manual) and machine packaging.

Best Supplier/Vendor New Product, Service or Innovation:

Associate members can enter your own product, service or innovation that was utilized in the card and/or personalization & fulfillment industry this past year. There will be an award winner for each supplier category segment - materials, software and equipment.

People's Choice (selected by ICMA EXPO member delegates): Attendees at the EXPO (exclusive of spouses or guests) will select their favorite Card or P&F Product or Service from all of the entries received in any of the above categories. These entries will be displayed without identification of the ICMA member entrant.

Unique Component Supplier: Judges may select the most unique component from all of the entries received in any of the above categories. The supplier of the component will win an Élan Award.

Best Regional Card: Judges may select the best overall cards from Europe, North America and Asia. The manufacturers of those cards in those regions will win an Élan Award.

CARD MANUFACTURER JUDGING CRITERIA

Graphical Design: Creative, attractive design elements and layout to convey information or create an effect.

Printing: Utilization of litho and silk screening and other specialized printing techniques and processes to obtain maximum impact relevant to the card's graphic design.

Complexity: Utilization of the multiple manufacturing steps, processes, materials and components available including printing, lamination, die cutting/card reduction, hot stamping, embedding and other processes.

Technology: The application of science, knowledge, tools and methods in the development and creation of the card.

Quality: Overall card manufacturing quality including printing, lamination, die cutting, magnetic stripe positioning, foiling, signature panels, holograms, photos, chips or any other enhancement.

Innovation: The utilization of a new technique, method, process or material to develop cards that have been produced and accepted in the marketplace.

Uniqueness: Attributes that enable the card to be the only type of its kind. It should be without an equal – unparalleled and special.

Practicality: Useful, workable and sensible attributes which facilitate market use and acceptance.

Security (if applicable): Application of visible and covert techniques for human verification or instrument or lab verification of a card's authenticity.

PERSONALIZATION & FULFILLMENT JUDGING CRITERIA

The application of science, engineering, knowledge, tools and methods in the development and creation of the new product, service or innovation. Must have useful, workable and sensible attributes which facilitate market use and acceptance.

SUPPLIER JUDGING CRITERIA

The application of science, knowledge, tools and methods in the development and creation of the new product, equipment or material. Must have useful, workable and sensible attributes which facilitate market use and acceptance.

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Enter to showcase your company and customer's best work!

ENTRY RULES:

- ICMA reserves the right to re-categorize entries and review submissions to ensure they meet eligibility requirements.
- The same card can be entered into multiple categories however each entry is considered a separate stand-alone entry.
- **Eligible cards and products must have been manufactured and issued after February 28, 2025 and before January 31, 2026. The supplier/vendor new product must have been introduced at your company after February 28, 2025. Issued cards are branded and being utilized in the marketplace. Only cards and P&F products that are manufactured for an issuer customer and issued into the marketplace are eligible for all categories except Unique Innovation.**
- Entrants must be current 2026 ICMA members.
- Eligible cards must have been manufactured by the entrant and eligible Personalization & Fulfillment services performed by the entrant. It is the responsibility of the entrant to obtain all necessary permissions to participate.
- There is an entry fee of \$195 (USD) per entry.
- **All cards and P&F products become the property of ICMA and will be destroyed unless security rules require them to be returned to the entrant. If so, please write on the back of the entry "return to entrant" and include a self addressed envelope for return. Note that card manufacturers and P&F service providers are responsible for return shipping costs.**
- Customer/issuer authorization for submitting the cards is the responsibility of the ICMA member entrant. Please use the sample letter on the ICMA website and type it onto your own letterhead with the card-specific information to obtain any necessary customer approval. ICMA is not responsible for any action relating to any unauthorized duplication, copyright infringement, etc. that may arise from the award contest.

ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS:

The Entry Form is located online at www.icma.com. All entries must be filled out and payments submitted via this online form.

Step one: Fill out the necessary information on the Entry Form for each individual entry and make payment. Entries for multiple cards can be done in one step.

Step two: Prepare your cards and P&F products to ship and arrive at ICMA by the February 18, 2026 deadline.

Once you have filled out the online form, each entry will be assigned an Entry ID number by ICMA Headquarters, which will be e-mailed to you. This number should be clearly labeled on the back of each card being sent in. Please do not use clear labels. Cards that are not labeled will be disqualified.

2026 ENTRY GUIDELINES

For each entry, submit **four** identical samples. Put each card sample in an individual plastic sleeve. Send to ICMA Élan Awards, 50 Millstone Road, Building 200, Suite 215, East Windsor, NJ 08520 USA.

Include with the cards or P&F products, on company letterhead, a list of the cards or P&F products being entered using the following format:

- Card/P&F Name / Customer / Entry number assigned by ICMA
- Card/P&F Name / Customer / Entry number assigned by ICMA
- Card/P&F Name / Customer / Entry number assigned by ICMA
- Card/P&F Name / Customer / Entry number assigned by ICMA

Contact person: NAME, PHONE NUMBER, E-MAIL ADDRESS

Credit card payments via the online Entry Form are preferred. If you must submit payment by wire transfer, please contact ICMA Headquarters at info@icma.com. A \$50 processing fee will be added for paying by bank wire. If payments are not received by March 18, 2026, your entry will be disqualified.

**Entry form and cards must be received
at the ICMA office by February 18, 2026.**

SHOW US YOUR BEST!

ICMA Élan Awards for Card Manufacturing Excellence

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 18, 2026

Visit: ICMA.com • Email: info@icma.com • Call: 1 (609) 799-4900

TESTIMONIALS:

Entering the Élan Awards is not just about winning—it's your chance to stand out, gain recognition, and leave a lasting impression on your peers, customers, and the broader industry. Join us in celebrating the ongoing legacy of ICMA and showcase the groundbreaking innovations shaping the future of card technology. This is your moment to help define what's next for the industry. Don't miss the opportunity to be a part of it!

- Jeffrey Barnhart, Executive Director & Founder, ICMA

It's a very important award for us because it really represents the ultimate recognition of excellence in the industry. And our brand is all about striving to go over and above for our customers. We are very proud when we are recognized with an ICMA Élan Award because it really does give us that feedback and recognition that we're doing it right.

*- Todd Wawryk, Vice President and General Manager,
Driver and Vehicle, Canadian Bank Note Company, Ltd.*

JOIN THE RECENT WINNER AND FINALIST MEMBER COMPANIES:

Austria Card GmbH

Canadian Bank Note Company, Ltd

Chutian Dragon Co., Ltd

CompoSecure L.L.C.

CPI Card Group

Eastcompeace Technology Co. Ltd

Ellipse

*Giesecke+Devrient (China)
Technologies Co., LTD*

*Giesecke+Devrient
Mobile Security GmbH*

Goldpac Limited

Hengbao Co, Ltd

ICK International Inc.

IDEMIA Secure Transactions

Placard Pty Ltd.

SPS IN Groupe

Thales

Thomas Greg & Sons Mexico

Variuscard GmbH

*Wuhan Tianyu Information
Industry Co., Ltd*