

Modernizing Scientific Recognition at Scale

How APS Increased Volunteer Engagement by 100% with OpenWater

OVERVIEW

The American Physical Society (APS) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing and promoting the knowledge of physics through its publishing, education, outreach, and advocacy efforts.

APS administers more than 200 active honors and recognition programs, engaging thousands of participants annually and awarding approximately \$1 million each year in support of scientific and professional achievement.

PROBLEM

Staff handled more than 200 recognition programs using manual processes for nominations, eligibility checks, and conduct disclosures across departments without a central platform, creating inefficiencies and administrative burden. Reviewers and applicants encountered inconsistent submission and evaluation processes.

Without standardization, APS struggled to scale operations, ensure fairness, and enforce governance. The setup also made it difficult to gather feedback, refine programs, and manage \$1 million in annual prizes, grants, and stipends.

AT A GLANCE



INDUSTRY

Scientific Professional/Trade Association

SOLUTIONS

OpenWater

MEMBER SIZE

50,000+

WEBSITE

aps.org

“With OpenWater, we now engage over 1,000 volunteer reviewers and committee members annually—double the number we reached just a year ago.”

- Assistant Director, Member Engagement and Recognition at APS

THE IMPACT



100s

**Hours of Administrative
Hours Saved**



**Reduced Costs by
Eliminating External
Platforms**



100%

**Increase in Annual
Volunteer Participation**

SOLUTION

OpenWater unified APS' 200+ recognition programs, standardized workflows, and automated key tasks such as application tracking, volunteer onboarding, and conduct disclosure management. Staff eliminated the need for legacy tools and manual follow-up, while reviewers and applicants benefited from a consistent, user-friendly experience. The platform also enabled APS to collect feedback, enforce governance policies, and manage program updates more efficiently. These improvements supported APS's strategic goals around volunteer engagement, operational efficiency, and program integrity.

- ✓ **Centralized** over 200 recognition programs into one streamlined system.
- ✓ **Automated** tasks such as application acknowledgements, volunteer onboarding, and conduct disclosures.
- ✓ **Standardized** workflows to ensure consistent processes across all departments and programs, improving user interface.
- ✓ **Empowered** efficient program updates using user feedback and nomination data.

“ OpenWater is more than a platform, it is a collaborative partner in APS's mission to celebrate and elevate physics around the world. ”

- Assistant Director, Member Engagement and Recognition at APS