



THE JOSEPH M. BRILLHART
IDEA Innovation
Award 2026

Showcasing technology, engineering and operational innovation
within the district energy industry.

To be presented at



The Joseph M. Brillhart IDEA Innovation Award recognizes the collaborative efforts of our members in delivering innovative projects that reduce energy use, improve efficiency, and strengthen reliability and resilience. These innovative, 'think outside the box' projects demonstrate replicable solutions with the potential for widespread application, delivering benefits to the communities they serve while also showcasing the value of district energy around the world.





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IDEA Innovation Award 2026

The Joseph M. Brillhart IDEA Innovation Award

highlights how collaborative district energy efforts deliver meaningful benefits across a wide range of constituencies, including customers, communities, institutions, stakeholders, the environment, and society at large.

The award provides a platform for IDEA members to share emerging best practices and collaborative applications that advance the industry. Its focus is on smaller-scale, practical initiatives—distinct from the IDEA System of the Year—that demonstrate processes, approaches, or programs that can be replicated and more widely adopted by others.

The Joseph M. Brillhart IDEA Innovation Award is not intended to promote a commercial technology, product enhancement, or proprietary innovation for the purpose of commercial recognition. While a technology or product may be part of a successful project, submissions should emphasize the collaborative application and outcomes rather than a product-centered or proprietary solution.

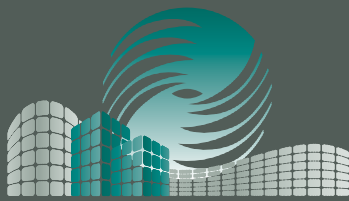
All submissions must be made by an IDEA member in good standing. There are no restrictions on member type—utility, campus, consultant, manufacturer, or other—reflecting IDEA’s commitment to broad participation and collaboration among operating systems, consultants, and business partners. Multiple submissions per member site may be accepted.



IDEA Innovation Award Committee Chair Bob Smith (far left) and IDEA President and CEO, Rob Thornton (far right) present NLine Energy and Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center with the 2025 IDEA Innovation Award.



IDEA Innovation Award Committee Chair Bob Smith presents Enwave with the 2024 IDEA Innovation Award.



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All information and images that are submitted must be publicly available information and able to be re-distributed without constraint of copyright or limitation. Submissions shall not be “commercial” in nature and not focused on proprietary technologies or applications.

Judging criteria will be weighted. Each of the four categories of Judging Criteria will be worth 25 points.

Applications will be reviewed and scored by a committee of senior IDEA members with a range of different backgrounds in the district energy industry.

Judging Criteria will include:

- 1 Innovation and Uniqueness**
The project/program should demonstrate a new innovation of operational ingenuity, either technical, operational or business practice.
- 2 Operational and Sustainable**
The project/program must be working and sustainable over time and should demonstrate improvement in energy efficiency and/or resource conservation.
- 3 Replicable**
The project/program should have the ability to be deployed in various locations, settings or applications and can be easily replicated.
- 4 Economic and Environmental Advantage**
The project/program should provide tangible economic and/or environmental benefits.



IDEA Innovation Award Committee Chair Bob Smith and IDEA President and CEO, Rob Thornton present CenTrio with the 2023 IDEA Innovation Award.



IDEA Innovation Award Committee Chair Bob Smith and IDEA President and CEO, Rob Thornton present Dalhousie University and FVB Energy the 2022 IDEA Innovation Award in Toronto.

To enter, please complete the form on the following page and email your completed submission as a PDF to idea@districtenergy.org with the subject line: “**2026 Innovation Award**” by the deadline of **Friday, May 1, 2026**. If you have questions, please contact IDEA at +1-508-366-9339 or visit <http://bit.ly/InnovationAwardIDEA>.



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IDEA Innovation Award

Beginning in 2024, as unanimously decided by the IDEA Board, the IDEA Innovation Award has been renamed **The Joseph M. Brillhart IDEA Innovation Award**.



Joe was a long-time, active member of IDEA. A world-class refrigeration expert, he served as a tremendous resource to IDEA over many, many years. He was often IDEA's "go-to" person for technical or operational questions from members on large chiller systems and complex cooling facilities. A frequent presenter, panelist, and moderator, in the early 2000's, Joe helped to spearhead IDEA efforts to expand district cooling globally.

Joe served on the IDEA Board for multiple terms and on the Executive Committee and as IDEA Chair in 2012-2013. It was Joe's singular idea to create the IDEA Innovation Award during his term as IDEA Chair in 2012-13. He felt that the annual IDEA System of the Year Award recognized excellence in our industry at the system level, but there was a need to bring greater visibility to the innovation and partnering that happens among IDEA members and business partners at a more granular level.

Under Joe's stewardship, we launched the Annual IDEA Innovation Award more than a decade ago. It has grown in participation and prestige ever since. As a memorial to Joe Brillhart, it is fitting and appropriate that going forward, we will continue to recognize his collegial and curious spirit by naming this prestigious award after Joe.



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IDEA Innovation Award 2026

The Annual IDEA Innovation Award Submission Requirements

Please provide the information requested, following the outline below and the stated word limits. Please send completed submissions as a PDF to: idea@districtenergy.org by the deadline of **Friday, May 1, 2026**.

1. Project/Program Title
2. Name and Location of District Energy System or Project
3. Name of System Owner
4. Name, relationship to the project/program, address, phone number & email of the person submitting the application
5. Executive Summary – In 700 words or less, summarize the project /program, demonstrating the key aspects of what was done and the overall benefits.
6. In 300 words or less, explain how the project/program is innovative and unique.
7. With supporting data, demonstrate the improved energy efficiency benefit offered by the project/program, in 250 words or less.
8. With supporting data and graphics, explain the financial advantages of this project / program in 250 words or less.
9. In 250 words or less, please provide any additional information about the project/program (What challenges did you face? What plans do you have for the future? How did your customer base or community react?, etc.)
10. Please provide 3 to 5 attachments as images, diagrams or photographs in jpeg format with identifying captions.

AUTHORIZATION REQUIRED: By submitting an application, the submitter and owner agrees that the copyright of the content of the application is vested in IDEA. It is understood that authors retain the right to give other publishers permission to republish the contents of the application in their entirety or as subsequently edited or abbreviated as long as the IDEA Annual Innovation Award is given as the source and the re-use is not before the presentation of the awards, during IDEA2026. The author(s) further agrees that IDEA may permit such use of its copyright publications, as it deems proper, upon judicious considerations, through abstracts, quotations or excerpts. The primary author is responsible for the accuracy of the material submitted.

Submitter Signature

Date

Owner Signature

Date

**Deadline: All submittals must be received by
Friday, May 1, 2026.**

