



Soroptimist Making a Difference for Women Award

Around the world, many women are working to improve the lives of women and girls. Some women work to improve conditions for women and girls through their personal or volunteer efforts; others do so through professional avenues. The Soroptimist Making a Difference for Women Award is designed to honor these women. Although not Soroptimists, their work helps promote the issues that are important to Soroptimists, while offering inspirational stories about how to make a difference in the lives of women. In the past, Soroptimists honored women and businesses through the three awards programs—Women of Distinction, Women Helping Women and Advancing the Status of Women. This new award streamlines the previous recognition program and makes it easier for clubs, regions and the federation to honor these women and publicize the program.

This award honors women who are making extraordinary differences in the lives of other women. Examples would be a woman who helps to establish a domestic violence shelter, a woman who starts a mentoring program for at-risk girls, or a woman who lobbies her company to provide on-site child care. This program will give the club and the entire organization the opportunity to say “thank you” and encourage others to explore ways to assist women. A Making a Difference for Women Award recipient should be a woman who:

- has worked to improve the lives of women and girls,
- has had a significant impact on the lives of women and girls,
- would inspire and encourage other women.

Not only does this program honor women, but it creates member recruitment and public relations opportunities as well. The award can be used as a recruiting avenue, as nominees will be women clubs would want to invite to membership and who are interested in the mission of the organization. Soliciting nominations, giving the award and holding an event to honor the recipient will raise the profile of the organization and help to further cement Soroptimist’s identity. Awards, particularly of this type, are newsworthy—they are a natural for media coverage.

The Soroptimist Making a Difference for Women Award begins at the local-level where clubs recognize a woman in their community. Clubs submit their entry to the region-level, where the region selects a woman to honor at the region conference. The regions submit their entries to the federation-level, where one woman is selected to receive a \$5,000 donation to her favorite charitable organization. The recipient will also be invited to accept her award at Soroptimist’s biennial convention or other federation meeting.

Participation in this program is simple and has many important returns for the club, including:

- further promotion of issues that improve the lives of women and girls
- networking
- honoring special women in the community
- membership recruitment
- public relations for the club

Eligibility

- A woman in the community who is improving the lives of women or girls through her professional or personal life is eligible for the award.
- By identifying and focusing on a need of women and girls, this woman has contributed to the improvement of their lives.
- Although clubs may honor a woman for a lifetime of good work, the majority of the work should have occurred within the past two years.

Previous award winners, Soroptimists, immediate family of Soroptimists and employees of Soroptimist are not eligible for the award.

Deadlines

The deadline for clubs to submit the names of their honorees to the region level is January 15th. Clubs can administer the program anytime throughout the year. For example, if the club administers the program in March through May, they should submit their club honoree on January 15th of the following year. The honorees should have been selected in the previous 12 months. It will be the responsibility of each club to set their own deadlines for nominations, judging and selection of recipient.

Sample Timeline

August – November

- Solicit nominations
- Place nomination advertisement

December 1st

- Club deadline to receive nominations

December – January

- Hold club-level judging

January 15th

- Submit club honoree to the region level
- Invite club honoree to speak at March 8th recognition event

March

- Hold a recognition event on or near March 8th, International Women's Day
- Solicit publicity for the recognition event
- Place congratulations advertisement

Recognition

Each club can decide what type of recognition to give their honoree. Consider the following:

- a donation to a charitable organization (that benefits women or girls) of the recipient's choosing
- a certificate (available from the SIA member's-only web site)
- a donation to Soroptimist in the recipient's name
- a service day of the recipient's choosing to benefit women or girls (For example, the club could paint rooms in a domestic violence shelter or spend a day assisting customers at a clothes closet.)
- a formal recognition event where she could be invited to speak and share her inspirational story. (See Step 4)

Step One: Download Materials from SIA's web site

In addition to these club instructions, the following materials are also available in the Library of SIA's member's-only web site:

- Nomination Form
- Nomination Advertisement
- Sample Nomination Solicitation Letter
- Judging Materials

- Club Transmittal
- Sample Publicity Materials
- Congratulations advertisement
- Certificate

Step Two: Solicit nominations

There are three goals of the nomination process:

- to receive eligible nominations for the award,
- to raise awareness within the community about the award, the club and Soroptimist,
- to receive information about potential members.

The club should solicit nominations in the community. Women can nominate themselves or can be nominated by others with their consent. Club members can nominate women, but if they do they should not serve as judges. Nomination forms, sample nomination solicitation letters and sample advertisements are available and can be placed in local newspapers, newsletters or magazines. The nomination form can also be made into a flyer that could be handed out at various community and club events.

Assemble a list of businesses, universities and organizations where eligible women might be found. Send these places a letter with nomination forms. Send a copy of the advertisement for inclusion in their newsletters. Also place the advertisement in local newspapers or magazines.

Giving this award is a wonderful opportunity to raise awareness about the club and Soroptimist within the community. Distributing nomination forms and advertisements raises awareness about Soroptimist to a large audience. Giving an award to women who improve the lives of other women also raises awareness about issues that are important to Soroptimist.

Finally, women who would be eligible for the award are interested in helping other women—the number one reason cited for joining a Soroptimist club. After the nomination process, it would be appropriate to extend an invitation to membership to these women. Explain that because of their interest in improving the lives of other women, the club thinks they would enjoy being a member of their club.

Step Three: Judge nominees

Form a judging committee within the club of three to five members. (If club members nominated women for the award, solicit non-Soroptimists to judge the award.) Using the enclosed judging sheet, have committee members score each nomination. After tallying the scores, narrow it down to the top two or three nominees if there is not one clear winner. Try to select the honoree by having further discussion, or use the judging sheet again. If the committee cannot come to a decision, present the top two candidates to club members and have the club as a whole decide.

Step Four: Hold an event to honor the recipient

Each year, the club gives out Women's Opportunity Awards, possibly a Violet Richardson Award and now a new recognition award. A wonderful way to honor all of these recipients at one time is to hold an event—a luncheon or a dinner—where club members can assemble, invite family and community members, give out awards, and celebrate a year of successful Soroptimist work.

A perfect day to hold this event is on or around March 8th, International Women's Day. International Women's Day is observed around the world and is rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to participate in society on an equal footing with men. Since the very beginning of this century, women around the world have used International Women's Day as a rallying point for coordinated efforts to demand women's rights and participate in the political process. It is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change, and to celebrate acts of courage and determination in pursuit of women's rights.

Form a committee to plan a recognition event. Consider the following when planning an event:

- What is the budget?
- Could the club sell tickets to offset the cost or even raise money?
- What type of event should it be—luncheon, dinner, buffet, cocktail party?
- Where will the event be held?
- Who will be invited? Draw up a list of local dignitaries, honorees and their guests, nominators, prospective members, news media, region leadership, etc.
- The program should include information about the event's honorees, information about the work of Soroptimist, and acknowledgments of judges, organizations or individuals that have donated funds to the club or sponsored the event.

Step Five: Publicity

The Making a Difference for Women Award provides an excellent avenue for publicity, as programs that focus on rewarding people for good deeds are very attractive to the media. Clubs should take advantage of this by publicizing the Making a Difference for Women Award to local newspapers, television and radio stations, and holding a special event to honor award recipients. In addition to helping clubs carve out an identity as an organization that improves the lives of women and girls, club participation will also help with identity building at the federation level.

After deciding to participate, clubs should arrange with local papers to run the nomination advertisement that is available from the SIA website. Due to the nature of the award, it is possible that papers may offer clubs reduced rates. Also customize the fact sheet, PSAs and news release soliciting honorees.

Regardless of whether an event is held to honor the winner, the club should reach out to the media to receive coverage about the program and the club's winner. Customize the news release and pitch letter for these purposes. In addition, consider taking out ad space in newspapers or magazines to run the congratulations advertisement available from the SIA website.

For more information or with questions about publicizing the Making a Difference for Women Award, contact the public relations coordinator at Soroptimist headquarters: kamali@soroptimist.org.

Step Six: Submit club-level honoree's information to the region by January 15th

Enclosed is a simple transmittal form. Submit the club winner's nomination form and the completed club transmittal to the designated region contact before the January 15th deadline to be included in the region-level judging. The regions submit their entries to the federation, where one woman is selected to receive a \$5,000 donation to her favorite charitable organization. The finalist honoree also will be invited to accept her award at SIA's biennial convention or other federation meeting.