2026 Models of Excellence Program Awards

Models of Innovation Award

The Federal Research Transition Team

When federal research funding was disrupted in 2025, Penn's Federal Research Transition Response Team rallied with speed, creativity, and determination to ensure that leading-edge research could continue. They developed systems to track hundreds of stop-work orders and grant terminations and reestablished critical payments despite government agency system outages. They successfully appealed dozens of funding cuts, resulting in multiple award reinstatements. Collaborating across finance, legal, and research administration functions, the team ensured uninterrupted payroll, maintained compliance, and provided steady and trusted guidance to Penn's research community. Their innovative, unified response transformed unprecedented national disruption into a lasting model of operational resilience.

1. Beth Alioto, Division of Finance
2. Ravindra Avvari, Information Systems and Computing
3. Montana Beeson, President's Center
4. Jacqueline Binstead, Division of Finance
5. Nicholas Bolger, Division of Finance
6. Jessica Buchanan, Division of Finance
7. James Clavin, Division of Finance
8. Ashley Del Bianco, Division of Finance
9. Keith Dixon, Division of Finance
10. Richard Flom, Division of Finance
11. Kim Garrison, Division of Finance
12. April Johnson, Division of Finance
13. Meghan LeCates, Division of Finance
14. Stacia Levy, Division of Finance
15. Vanessa Madden, Perelman School of Medicine
16. Marissa McGeehan, Division of Finance
17. Julie Meyer, Information Systems and Computing
18. Ernestine Nemetz, Division of Finance
19. Elizabeth Peloso, Division of Finance
20. Jennifer Rowan, Division of Finance
21. Leo Ruzzi, Division of Finance
22. Mark Siciliano, Information Systems and Computing
23. Robert Speakman, Division of Finance
24. Denene Wambach, President's Center
25. Kyle Wolfe, Division of Finance

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Models of Innovation Award

Peter Harnish, School of Arts and Sciences

Peter Harnish, Laboratory Instruction Coordinator in the School of Arts and Sciences, introduced major innovations in conceiving and implementing the Physics Department's introductory lab courses and other teaching labs. He instituted a regimen in which students present each experiment in a different mode of communication to prepare them for the various professional situations where they will need to express their ideas effectively. Besides the students, every research group in the department has benefited significantly from these new practices. Peter also organizes and delivers community outreach through Penn's summer Physics Research Academy and annual Physics Demo Show for area high school students. He added several new, high-visual-impact experiments to these programs along with a more engaging narrative and historical context for younger learners.

Chambrel Jones, School of Engineering and Applied Science

Chambrel Jones, Chief of Staff, School of Engineering and Applied Science, transformed Penn Engineering's culture through initiatives that elevate transparency, staff engagement, and community service. Chambrel launched the school's staff onboarding program and monthly staff coffee hours. She enhanced managers' and directors' meetings to foster collaboration and connection. Her signature event, Staff Appreciation Week, distinctively celebrates staff excellence, building morale and retention. Through these self-initiated efforts, Chambrel's dedication to service reflects and promotes Penn's values, inspiring others to lead with empathy, strengthen community, and advance Penn Engineering's mission locally and globally.

Penn Med Standardized Patient Program

The Penn Med Standardized Patient Program developed and implemented new training sessions for Penn Med Hospice employees that allow them to build skills required to lead caring and effective end-of-life conversations. The program staff trained standardized patients (SPs) to act as bereaved family members. The SPs traveled to Penn Medicine practice locations to co-lead large group workshops and perform realistic one-on-one encounters with clinicians. This live, experiential learning enabled hospice employees to receive individualized feedback from the caregivers' perspective and ultimately have more productive and empathic interactions with real-life patients and family members in the Penn community.

1. Catherine Hagele, Perelman School of Medicine
2. Denise LaMarra, Perelman School of Medicine
3. Cori Maskart, Perelman School of Medicine
4. Janice Radway, Perelman School of Medicine

2026 Models of Excellence Program Awards

Pillars of Excellence Award

Timothy Grogan, Facilities and Real Estate Services

For more than three decades, Timothy Grogan has demonstrated uncommon leadership, innovation, and service as an Electrician Chargeperson in Facilities and Real Estate Services. His expertise ensures the flawless execution of major University events — from Commencement and Convocation to athletic competitions and Irvine Auditorium performances. His forward-thinking approach to technology and safety has enhanced system reliability, improved operational efficiency, and strengthened collaboration across departments, making him an indispensable contributor to Penn's mission and community.

Molecular Pathology & Imaging Core (MPIC) Team

The MPIC Team consistently demonstrates exceptional initiative and technical expertise, achieving outstanding results with remarkable efficiency and precision in histology, the microscopic study of living tissue. Their dedication ensures the success of many of Penn's most complex and demanding research projects. Many researchers, vendors, and collaborators seek out MPIC specifically because of their exemplary support. These colleagues highly respect the MPIC Team's professionalism, reliability, and collaborative spirit. By embracing new technologies and expertly navigating challenging week-long protocols, the MPIC Team embodies service excellence and is invaluable in advancing Penn's research mission.

1. Rebecca Ly, Perelman School of Medicine
2. Jem Palma, Perelman School of Medicine

Caitlyn Molony, School of Veterinary Medicine

As the Head Veterinary Nurse for Penn Vet's colonies of dogs and cats with ultra-rare human genetic diseases, Caitlyn Molony plays a vital role in developing treatments that may help fight these illnesses in children. Caitlyn supervises a team of part-time veterinary and undergraduate assistants to provide daily medical management of these uncommon and fragile animals. She has an extraordinary ability to take independent initiative while always coordinating her actions with the faculty. Caitlyn's insightful clinical observations and commitment to quality ensure that the animals receive the best care.

2026 Models of Excellence Program Awards

Pillars of Excellence Award

PARCC: Doubling Penn's Computing Power to Drive Innovation

In under two years, the team created the Penn Advanced Research Computing Center (PARCC), one of the most ambitious academic computing resources in the country. The system can perform over 8 quadrillion calculations per second and is expected to be listed among the world's top 500-class supercomputers. Optimizing an investment of $25 million, PARCC harnesses advanced processors, ultra-fast networks, and 5 petabytes of storage to support multi-disciplinary research, including AI. It replaced fragmented systems with a resource open to all Penn schools and launched a cohort-based training model that helps new users learn together. PARCC positions Penn to accelerate innovation across disciplines.

1. Dawn Augustino, Executive Vice President
2. Jeffrey Ballentine, Information Systems and Computing
3. Marta Bartholomew, Provost's Center
4. Michael Borda, Provost's Center
5. Christine Brisson, School of Arts and Sciences
6. Kenneth Chaney, Provost's Center
7. David Cohen, Information Systems and Computing
8. Amy Collins, Provost's Center
9. Jaime Combariza, Provost's Center
10. Keith Duvall, Information Systems and Computing
11. Jeffrey Edwards, Information Systems and Computing
12. Steven Fredricks, Information Systems and Computing
13. Garick Hamlin, Information Systems and Computing
14. Tiffany Hanulec, Information Systems and Computing
15. Corinn Harrell, School of Arts and Sciences
16. Gregory Hartley, Information Systems and Computing
17. Monica Heater, Provost's Center
18. Lokke Highstein, School of Arts and Sciences
19. Chris Hyzer, Information Systems and Computing
20. Donna Jacobs, Information Systems and Computing
21. Rick Kahley, Division of Finance
22. John Lee, Information Systems and Computing
23. Steven Mak, Information Systems and Computing
24. Chris Masotti, Perelman School of Medicine
25. Michael Matthews, School of Engineering and Applied Science
26. Andrea Mazzucchi, School of Arts and Sciences

2026 Models of Excellence Program Awards

Pillars of Excellence Award

PARCC: Doubling Penn's Computing Power to Drive Innovation

27. David Mongeluzi, Information Systems and Computing
28. John O'Brien, Information Systems and Computing
29. Daniel Prante, Information Systems and Computing
30. Reni Roberts, Information Systems and Computing
31. Jamie Schnaitter, School of Engineering and Applied Science
32. Dave Tarampi, Information Systems and Computing
33. Kristofor Varhus, School of Engineering and Applied Science
34. Tony White, Information Systems and Computing
35. Daniel Widyono, School of Engineering and Applied Science
36. Monesa Williams, Provost's Center

Model Supervisor Award

Marc Felice, Provost's Center

Marc Felice, Associate Director of Imaging Physics and Radiation Safety, Environmental Health and Radiation Safety, is a skilled leader who creates pathways for his team's professional growth and provides exemplary mentorship to the diagnostic medical physicists he supervises. Marc played an integral part in the creation of the Imaging Physics Residency Program at Penn, which provides clinical training to the next generation of diagnostic medical physicists. Marc works diligently to ensure that radiation is used safely in research and clinical spaces throughout the University, Penn Medicine, and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Elaine Papas Varas, Division of Finance

Elaine Papas Varas, Senior University Director of Student Financial Aid, is a visionary leader whose compassionate and student-centered approach has transformed financial aid and student support. She helped create Penn's Highly Aided Initiatives. This program has expanded resources for students, providing essentials like laptops, health insurance, and internship funding. Program participation has grown from 800 to 1,450 students. Elaine also revamped the service model for Graduate Aid, improving performance and satisfaction across schools. Amid unprecedented federal changes, her proactive communication and steady leadership have upheld excellence, access, and affordability, making Penn's financial aid program a national model of innovation.

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Model Supervisor Award

Lily Zhang, Penn Global

Lily Zhang, Director of Advising, Compliance, IT, and Operations in the International Student and Scholar Services Office of Penn Global, is a driving force behind Penn's success in immigration compliance and technological innovation. She has led transformative initiatives that modernized systems, streamlined regulatory processes, and enhanced service delivery for international students and scholars. Her strategic use of technology has improved efficiency and transparency, while her deep expertise in compliance ensures Penn remains a trusted institution for global engagement. Lily's leadership consistently fosters collaboration, precision, and forward-thinking solutions.