TASFAA

encourage • promote • facilitate • inspire • motivate

2025-2026 Award Recipients

Financial Aid Star Award

This award recognizes outstanding efforts in the area of advising students by an individual in a student facing position in the financial aid office of a TASFAA member school. The emphasis of the advising efforts should be the area of financial aid application, file completion efforts, and budgeting. Other areas of advising that would benefit students will also be considered. Nominees should exemplify professionalism, innovation in advising students, use a number of communication methods to advise students, go above and beyond the normal duties, and have worked in the financial aid industry for at least two years.

2025 Financial Aid Star Award Winner

Audra Elsik
Texas A&M University

Financial Aid Support Award

This award recognizes outstanding efforts by an individual in a back-office support role (not student facing). Examples are those that process verification, do file loads, work on C Flags, etc. Nominees should exemplify professionalism, innovation, going above and beyond their normal duties, and have worked in the financial aid industry for at least two years.

2025 Financial Aid Support Award Winner

Imelda Buentello
Austin Community College

Carolyn J. Jones Teaching and Mentoring Award

This award recognizes someone who has demonstrated a commitment to teaching and mentoring other FAA professionals over a sustained period of time. Nominees should exemplify professionalism, a commitment to teaching/mentoring and have worked in the financial aid industry for at least 5 years. This award is named in honor of Carolyn J. Jones who was a dedicated TASFAA Member who always went out of her way to assist her fellow financial aid professionals.

2025 Carolyn J. Jones Teaching and Mentoring Award

JoEllen Price
San Jacinto College

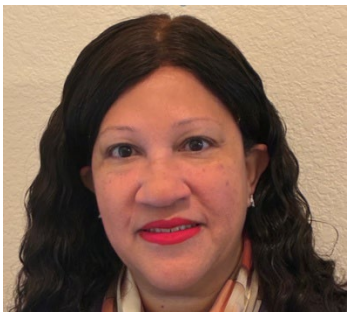
Diversity and Inclusion Award

This award recognizes outstanding efforts by an individual who is committed to providing exemplary service in a financial office of a TASFAA member school, while also overcoming

the challenges associated with being a member of an under-represented group in the association community (i.e., people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, individual with disabilities).

To be considered for the TASFAA Diversity & Inclusion Award, a candidate must:
• Be a member of TASFAA for at least one year and served in the financial aid industry for a minimum of 2 years.
• Be a member of a racial or ethnic minority group, an LGBTQ+ individual, or a person with a disability.
• Shows efforts towards diversity and inclusion outreach within the member school or within the community, organizations, etc.

2025 Diversity and Inclusion Award Winner



Donna Everson
University of Texas - Dallas

TASFAA Hall of Fame Award

The TASFAA Hall of Fame is an honorary group of current or former financial aid administrators who have served in Texas and who have been designated by TASFAA as having been exceptional in their dedication and service to TASFAA and the students of Texas. Each year the TASFAA Hall of Fame awards individuals in three distinct categories:

Service to TASFAA – Nominee must currently be or was affiliated with a school and meet membership criteria

Friend of TASFAA – Nominee has demonstrated a commitment to TASFAA's mission in the financial aid community, but is not from a school

Unsung Hero of TASFAA – This award recognizes a staff member that epitomizes TASFAA and the financial aid profession in their everyday work

Hall of Fame criteria include the following:

- **Seniority:** An inductee must have worked in financial aid administration for at least twenty years, a minimum of fifteen in Texas, for the benefit of Texas students.
- **Membership:** An inductee must have been a member of TASFAA for at least three years and have served as an officer or committee member or any other ad hoc position formally created by the President of the Board. The Service to TASFAA category requires at least five years of service.
- **Commitment:** An inductee must demonstrate an untiring commitment to encouraging qualified students to pursue higher education by assisting them in obtaining the financial aid needed to achieve this goal.
- **Integrity:** An inductee's behavior must have demonstrated a high standard of excellence when advising needy families, administering public funds, representing the school and working with colleagues.
- **Practice:** An inductee's actions must have demonstrated an effort resulted in lasting improvements in the policies and procedures of financial aid administration.

2025 TASFAA Hall of Fame Service to TASFAA

Denise Welch
Panola College

2025 TASFAA Hall of Fame Friend of TASFAA

Sergio Gonzalez
Sallie Mae

TASFAA Trailblazer

This award recognizes the “up and coming leader” of the association. It is to be selected annually by the TASFAA officers and Board. The Trailblazer must be a member of TASFAA and must have served TASFAA during the last three years, serving the higher education arena and students with creative energy, dedication, and commitment.

2025 TASFAA Trailblazer Winner

Sophia McGee
San Jacinto College