

Grid Forward Unveils 2026 Grid Innovator Award Winners at Annual Meeting

Southwest Power Pool, Amperon, and Paul Lau Honored for Pioneering Contributions to Grid Modernization

PORTLAND, OR, UNITED STATES, July 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Grid Forward](#), a member-based non-profit organization promoting grid modernization, announced the winners of the [2026 Grid Innovator of the Year Awards](#) during its Annual Member Meeting on June 30. This year's honorees, Southwest Power Pool (SPP), Amperon, and SMUD CEO Paul Lau, were recognized for their exceptional leadership and impactful contributions to driving electric grid innovation.



SPP Grid Innovator Winners

“

Grid Forward is proud to recognize leaders who are actively shaping the future of our energy systems.”

Bryce Yonker

“Grid Forward is proud to recognize leaders who are actively shaping the future of our energy systems,” said Bryce Yonker, Grid Forward CEO and executive director. “From SPP's forward-looking market design and Amperon's mission-critical forecasting to Paul Lau's decades of transformative utility leadership, each honoree is making a lasting impact in advancing a more resilient and modern electric grid.”

The annual awards honor outstanding commitment to grid modernization across the western U.S. and Canada. Winners are selected by a panel of prior award recipients across three distinct categories.

2026 Grid Innovator Award Winners:

Grid Operator: Southwest Power Pool (SPP)

SPP has shown extraordinary leadership this year in advancing market design and enabling the next generation of grid flexibility. Through initiatives like the CPP, CHILLS and HILLS tariff

frameworks, SPP has established a clear and forward-looking approach to integrating new generation and large, flexible loads while supporting reliability and economic growth across its footprint. Coupled with its innovative use of advanced technologies—including AI-enabled interconnection studies developed with partners like Hitachi and NVIDIA that aim to reduce analysis timelines by up to 80%—SPP continues to set a benchmark for faster, more efficient grid expansion.

“Through initiatives like CPP, CHILLS, HILLGA and HILLS, we’re charting a clear path to more quickly integrate new generation, firm and flexible loads, and transmission infrastructure,” said Larry Nickell, President and CEO of SPP. “We thank our innovative partners Hitachi, NVIDIA and Electric Power Engineers, whose advanced technologies are bringing speed and efficiency to our grid planning efforts.”

□ Other Category Finalists: SRP and Trico Electric Co-Op.

Solution Provider: Amperon
Amperon was honored for its standout AI-powered forecasting platform, which helps utilities, retailers, operators, and market participants plan with confidence. By converting complex grid, weather, and market signals into clear demand, renewable, and price forecasts, Amperon enables the industry to navigate an increasingly volatile energy landscape.



Paul Lau, Grid Innovator Winner



Amperon, Grid Innovator Winner

"Forecasting has become mission-critical as utilities and grid operators navigate load growth, extreme weather, market volatility, and the rapid adoption of new technologies," said Sean Kelly, CEO of Amperon. "We're grateful to Grid Forward for its leadership in accelerating grid innovation."

□ Other Category Finalists: Clean Power Research and Heimdall Power.

Individual Lifetime Achievement: Paul Lau

Paul Lau received this individual honor in recognition of his nearly 45-year career at SMUD, where he championed grid modernization, clean energy, and forward-thinking leadership. As CEO, he led the development of SMUD's nation-leading 2030 Zero Carbon Plan, proving that ambitious decarbonization can coexist with affordability and reliability.

"At SMUD, our 2030 Zero Carbon Plan is helping lay the groundwork for the grid of the future," said Paul Lau. "Over the nearly 45 years that I've served at SMUD, I've had the honor of working alongside extraordinary employees whose dedication, talent and passion have shaped SMUD into a nationally recognized leader."

□ Other Category Finalists: Steve Nadel and Senator Lisa Murkowski.

By celebrating these milestone achievements, Grid Forward continues to spotlight the collaborative spirit and technical ingenuity required to transition to a cleaner energy future. The pioneering work of SPP, Amperon, and Paul Lau serves as a blueprint for utilities and solutions providers navigating the complexities of load growth, decarbonization, and extreme weather. Through ongoing innovation and shared expertise, these honorees are successfully laying the groundwork for a more resilient, reliable, and affordable modern electric grid.

About Grid Forward

Grid Forward is a 501(c)(6) non-profit, member-driven trade association dedicated to promoting and accelerating innovation on the electric system. We deliver community, expertise and resources for leaders who are working to modernize the grid across the western U.S. and Canada. More information can be found at gridforward.org.

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