2026
BALDRIGE AWARD ALTERNATIVE ELIGIBILITY PROCESS
PATHWAY 3

Administered by

baldrigealliance.org

INTRODUCTION

ELIGIBILITY PATHWAYS

Thank you for your interest in the Baldrige Award process.

With the 2026 cycle, potential applicants may qualify to apply through one of two standard eligibility pathways:

- Receiving the Baldrige-based Top Tier Award of an Alliance Member Program within the last four years (2022–2025) or
- Receiving a Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) site visit within the last two years (2024–2025).

Applicants who do not meet either of these pathways may request consideration through an Alternative Evidence of Eligibility process, which requires submitting evidence of high performance that demonstrates sustained performance and improvement. Evidence includes submitting a "pre-application" that includes responses to 18 Organizational/Community Profile questions plus nine Results, which will be evaluated to determine eligibility to apply with a full application. Those questions are listed in this booklet.

In addition to the two standard pathways or the Alternative Evidence of Eligibility pathway, all applicants must also satisfy these six requirements.

1) The organization (or organizational entity submitting on behalf of a community) has existed for at least three years.
2) The organization or community is headquartered/based in the U.S.
3) If selected as a finalist, the organization or community agrees to host a site visit and make available necessary data, information, materials, and personnel.
4) If selected as a finalist, the organization or community backbone organization (the organization submitting on behalf of a community) agrees to a background check.
5) If selected as an Award recipient, the organization or community agrees to share nonproprietary best practices to help other organizations and communities, and the U.S. economy succeed.
6) The organization or community backbone organization is not under any current legal or regulatory sanctions that could negatively impact the Baldrige Award brand.

INSTRUCTIONS

To determine eligibility to apply for the Baldrige Award in 2026, complete the following process:

1) Complete the [Intent to Apply](#) form and submit by **Wednesday, April 15, 8:00 pm ET**.
2) Submit a non-refundable deposit of $2500 by Wednesday, April 15, at 8:00 pm ET. You may pay either by check, postmarked by April 15, made payable and mailed to:

   The Alliance for Performance Excellence
   P.O. Box 14051
   Parkville, MO 64152-9998

   Or submit payment by ACH/EFT electronically ([secure link is here](#)).

3) Create a "pre-application" by submitting a PDF that responds to the 18 questions listed in the Organizational Profile (pages 4-5) and the nine questions in the Results section (page 6). Technical requirements for your submission include:
   a. The application must be formatted to 8½ by 11-inch pages.
   b. Margins should be at least 1 inch all around.
   c. Times New Roman font in size 12 or Calibri font in size 11 should be used in running text.
   d. Font in tables should be a minimum of Times New Roman font in size 10 or Calibri font in size 9.
   e. Tables, graphs, and charts may be used to present information (and are encouraged when presenting your results, though you may also offer narrative commentary to explain your images). Tables, graphs and charts should be legible when printed. Examiners are instructed to disregard graphs and charts that are unreadable when viewed at 100%.
   f. There are space limitations for each question:

	Character Limit	Chart/Image Limit
Organization/Community Profile Questions	Up to 3000	Up to 3
Results Questions	Up to 4000	Up to 4

4) The application must be submitted as a PDF file by email to info@baldrigealliance.org.

Eligibility Pathway 3 applications will be reviewed within a week of submission. If your organization/community is determined eligible, you will be invited to submit a full application through our applicant portal (the portal will be available on or around April 15, and full applications are due July 1).

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

The information requested in this category provides a high-level snapshot of your organization. Be sure the information in the Organization Profile (OP) is consistent with the results in the following categories. The OP should not include information about key processes or results.

ORGANIZATIONAL DESCRIPTION QUESTIONS

Examiners will use the responses to these questions during the Award Evaluation phase. Responses to the questions have a 3,000-character limit and may include up to three charts, graphs, or tables.

1. What are your key products, services, and/or programs?

2. Provide your market size over the past five years for your main products and services.

3. What are your mission, vision, and values or guiding principles?

4. What are the defining characteristics of your organizational culture?

5. Describe your workforce profile key workforce segments (e.g., location, types of workers, including students and volunteers as applicable, etc.).

6. Describe your workforce profile key engagement drivers.

7. Describe any planned or occurring changes in your workforce capabilities, capacity, or composition

8. What are your key applicable regulations, as well as accreditations, certifications, or registration requirements?

9. Describe and/or depict your leadership and governance structure.

10. Describe your key community relationships and partnership including type, frequency of engagement, and length of relationship.

11. Describe your key customer segments, including differences among the segments.

12. Describe the key customer requirements and expectations for your products and/or services and customer support services.

ORGANIZATIONAL SITUATION QUESTIONS

Examiners will use the responses to these questions during the Award Evaluation phase. Responses to the questions have a 3,000-character limit and may include up to three charts, graphs, or tables.

1. What are your key strategic challenges, threats, advantages, and opportunities?

2. What are your organization's short- and longer-term key strategic objectives and their most important related goals?

3. What are your key organizational short- and longer-term financial measures?

4. What are your key sources of comparative and competitive data, both from within your industry and outside your industry? Provide what limitations, if any, may affect your ability to obtain or use these data.

5. What other factors, if any, impact your organization's success and sustainability?

6. Is there anything you consider unusual about your environment or business model that would aid in understanding your organization?

RESULTS

Responses to the questions below should be consistent with the information shared in the corresponding Organization Profile questions (for example, share your customer satisfaction results for the key customer segments you provide in Organization Description questions 11-12. You may provide up to two charts, graphs, or tables for each question (maximum 18). **All responses should contain three to five years of data and relevant comparisons. A detailed explanation must be provided if you are unable to provide a minimum of three years of data and relevant comparisons. Because we are seeking to identify eligibility to apply for national role model recognition, relevant comparisons are best-in-class or top decile/top quartile and competitors, where available.**

1) What are your results for external audits related to leadership and governance accountability (including certification, accreditations, and fiscal accountability)?
   Note: Comparisons are not required.
2) What are your results for grievances and complaints for all the following: (1) safety, (2) the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and (3) ethics?
3) What are your results for key measures or indicators of marketplace performance?
   Note: Comparisons are not required.
4) What are your results for financial viability (e.g., liquidity, days cash on hand/reserves, credit or bond rating)?
   Note: Comparisons are not required.
5) What are your results for financial performance (e.g., revenues, operating margin, performance to budget) by organization units, as appropriate?
   Note: Comparisons are not required.
6) What are your results for customer satisfaction by key customer segments?
7) What are your results for workforce satisfaction (e.g., employee survey findings)?
8) What are your results for the performance of your main products, services, or programs?
9) What are your results in efficiency and effectiveness of your key work processes and support processes?

GLOSSARY

BENCHMARKS. Processes and results that represent the best practices and best performance levels for similar activities, inside or outside your organization's industry.

COMPARISON. See RELEVANT COMPARISON.

FAVORABLE TREND. Sustained improvement or sustained high performance.

INTEGRATION. The harmonization of plans, processes, information, resource decisions, workforce capability and capacity, actions, results, measures, and analyses to support key organization-wide goals.

KEY. Major or most important; critical to achieving your intended outcome.

LEVELS. Numerical information that places or positions your organization's results and performance on a meaningful measurement scale.

RELEVANT COMPARISON. Industry benchmarks, competitors, best-in-class or top decile/top quartile, or stated organizational targets.

TRENDS. Numerical information that shows the direction and rate of change of your organization's results or the consistency of its performance over a consecutive time period.