

PRESS RELEASE

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Baldrige Foundation Releases New 2026 Baldrige Excellence Framework® to Strengthen American Competitiveness

New maturity pathways offer organizations a clearer, more accessible Framework for improving performance and resilience, while also supporting those that choose to pursue the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award®; the nation's only presidential award for performance excellence.

WASHINGTON, D.C., [RELEASE DATE]. The Foundation for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, known as the Baldrige Foundation, today released the 2026 Baldrige Excellence Framework® for Business, Nonprofit, and Government organizations.

The new edition, developed in close partnership with and under the oversight of the Baldrige Program at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), gives organizations three places to begin based on their current maturity and a structured path for moving to the next level by strengthening leadership, improving processes, integrating systems, and achieving sustainable results.

Congress established the Baldrige Program in 1987 to strengthen U.S. competitiveness and quality of life, an effort initiated by Malcolm Baldrige, Secretary of Commerce, in association with President Ronald Reagan. The redesigned Framework advances that national purpose by making proven performance excellence principles more accessible to organizations of every size and at every stage of development. Since its inception, 144 Baldrige Awards have been presented to 129 unique recipients who serve as national role models. Among those national role models is Mid-America Transplant, a two-time Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award recipient, having received the award in 2015 and 2019. Kevin Lee, its president and CEO, states, "Mid-America Transplant's mission is to save lives through excellence in organ and tissue donation, and since adopting the Baldrige Framework more than 20 years ago, we've been able to make significant improvements which has led to more lives saved in our community and across our country."

A Clear Path to Excellence

The 2026 Baldrige Excellence Framework introduces three progressive Maturity Pathways that build on one another, beginning with Establishing, advancing to Developing, and culminating in Maturing:

- **Establishing:** *Operational Awareness* clarifies how work is performed, what stakeholders need, which processes matter most, and what results should be measured.
- **Developing:** *Process Discipline* builds consistency, accountability, and regular use of data to guide decisions and improvement.
- **Maturing:** *System Integration* connects leadership, strategy, customers, organizational intelligence, workforce, operations, and results into a system that learns and improves.

“American competitiveness is built organization by organization,” said Josh Racette, President and CEO of the Baldrige Foundation. “The Presidential Award represents the pinnacle of performance excellence, and the Baldrige Excellence Framework® gives every organization a place to begin, a path to advance, and an opportunity to help build a stronger, more resilient, and more prosperous nation.”

Protecting the Rigor and National Standard

The Framework retains the systems perspective, core values and concepts, and evaluation guidance that distinguish Baldrige. It also addresses rapid technological change, organizational resilience, workforce capability, responsible use of artificial intelligence, and the governance, security, and use of organizational data.

Results are integrated throughout six categories: Leadership, Strategy, Customers, Organizational Intelligence, Workforce, and Operations. This connects how an organization leads and manages its work and related processes with the outcomes it seeks to achieve.

The revision was guided by the Baldrige Framework National Technical Committee, which includes recognized experts, Baldrige Award recipients, Examiners, and sector leaders.

“It has been an extraordinary honor to chair the Committee behind this new framework,” said Denise Shields, Chair of the Committee. “The 2026 Baldrige Excellence Framework® gives organizations across the nation a practical, powerful resource for strengthening leadership, improving performance, and building the resilience needed to compete and thrive. I am especially proud that this work preserves the rigor of Baldrige while making the path to excellence clearer and more accessible for every organization ready to move forward.”

From Improvement to Presidential Recognition

The Baldrige Excellence Framework supports organizational learning, self-assessment, planning, and improvement. It also provides a common foundation for tiered evaluation and recognition offered by Baldrige-based state, regional, and sector programs that are members of the nationwide Alliance for Performance Excellence. To learn more, visit the [Alliance for Performance Excellence](#) website.

Receiving a Top Tier Award from an Alliance member program is one standard eligibility pathway for applying to the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA), the nation’s only presidential award for performance excellence and the highest level of national recognition a U.S. organization can receive. The national [Award Criteria](#) are derived from and trace directly to the Baldrige Excellence Framework. The Alliance manages Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award operations on behalf of the National Institute of Standards and Technology. NIST and the U.S. Department of Commerce retain ultimate responsibility and oversight, and the Secretary of Commerce makes the final selection of Award recipients.

Currently, 13 organizations are receiving site visits, conducted by the volunteer MBNQA Examiners with their recommendations advanced to an esteemed panel of Judges that make recommendations based on the Award Criteria to the Secretary of Commerce for the final selection of Award recipients.

“For nearly four decades, the Baldrige Program has helped organizations of all kinds improve their performance and become more successful through application of the Baldrige Excellence Framework and participation in the Baldrige Award process,” said Bob Fangmeyer, Director of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program at NIST. “The 2026 version of the Framework is intended to make it much easier for organizations to benefit from its use, whether they are focused on getting started, getting better, or becoming great. The work being done by the Alliance and the Foundation on behalf of NIST ensures the continuation of the Baldrige Program’s mission, increasing its reach, and therefore enhancing its impact and value for the nation.”

Availability and Upcoming Webinar

The 2026 Business, Nonprofit, and Government edition will be available beginning **[RELEASE DATE]** at <https://baldrigefoundation.org/what-we-do/baldrige-excellence-framework/>. Education and Health Care editions are planned for early fall 2026.

The Baldrige Foundation will be hosting a Zoom webinar on September 2nd at 1pm EST to walk through the major changes and provide an overview of the maturity pathways. [To register, please click here.](#)

About the Baldrige Foundation

The Foundation for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award exists to strengthen the competitiveness of organizations and improve community well-being through performance excellence. Guided by core values of visionary leadership, customer-focused excellence, valuing people, innovation, integrity, and partnership, the Foundation, through its Institute for Performance Excellence, equips leaders and organizations worldwide with knowledge, tools, recognition programs, and systems that drive improvement and results. Its long-term vision is a world where excellence is the expectation, and the Baldrige Framework® stands as the global standard for organizational performance excellence and leadership.

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