

FEATURE  
**BALDRIGE AWARD**

# Stately Manner



**State programs based on Baldrige criteria help organizations innovate and continuously improve their performance excellence and quality** | by Cindy Veenstra and Julie Furst-Bowe

## Just the Facts

*In addition to the Baldrige award, there are about 30 state and regional programs that recognize organizations for performance excellence, most offering several levels of awards, networking and support.*

*These programs work collaboratively as the Alliance for Performance Excellence.*

*More organizations are being encouraged to take advantage of these programs in their quest for excellence and quality.*

**The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award was created by the U.S. Congress in 1987 to recognize quality and performance excellence in businesses during a time of increasing global competitiveness.**<sup>1</sup> It is managed by the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) agency. Over the past 30 years, the award criteria have evolved, and the types of organizations that can apply for this prestigious recognition have expanded.

Each year, organizations in the manufacturing, service, small business, healthcare, education and nonprofit/government sectors apply for the award. More than 1,600 organizations have applied for the Baldrige award since its inception. In total, 113 awards have been presented to 106 organizations (including seven repeat recipients).<sup>2</sup>

The Baldrige Performance Excellence Program administers the Baldrige award, the only presidential recognition for performance excellence. In its effort to promote organizational performance excellence and quality, its focus includes:

- + Helping organizations achieve best-in-class levels of performance.
- + Identifying and recognizing role-model organizations.
- + Identifying and sharing best management practices, principles and strategies.<sup>3</sup>

In announcing the 2009 Baldrige award recipients, then President Barack Obama touted the importance of their commitment to quality: "The road to greatness in America has been, and always will be, traveled by those who embrace change and work hard every day to be the best; the organizations we honor today with the Baldrige National Quality Award exemplify that spirit," Obama said. "This year's recipients have shown how quality, innovation, and an unending quest for excellence help strengthen our nation and brighten the future of all Americans."<sup>4</sup>

This past year's Baldrige award recipients show diversity by business sector and geography: Don Chalmers Ford in Rio Rancho, NM; Momentum Group in Irvine, CA; Kindred Nursing and Rehabilitation Center—Mountain Valley in Kellogg, ID; and Memorial Hermann Sugar Land Hospital in Sugar Land, TX.<sup>5</sup>

### State programs drive success

In addition to the national program, about 30 independent state and regional Baldrige-based award programs support organizations in nearly all of the 50 states.<sup>6</sup> Often overlooked are the state and regional programs that help organizations in their journeys in quality improvement and performance excellence. It is worth noting that all 2015 and 2016 national Baldrige award recipients were recipients of a state or regional Baldrige program award in previous years.<sup>7</sup>

This article will provide information on the state and regional Baldrige programs, as well as the processes they use to assist organizations achieve performance excellence. With the collaborative and innovative nature of the state and regional programs, we believe that more organizations could benefit from their services. We also will discuss the role of the Alliance for Performance Excellence, which is the national network that collaborates with state and regional Baldrige programs and the national program.

Based on Baldrige state impact statements, Figure 1 shows the 10 states with the highest number of applicants for the national Baldrige award from 2005 to 2016.<sup>8</sup> The figure shows states from most regions of the United States—from Texas to California to Wisconsin. Often, these states have very active state or regional Baldrige programs that encourage Baldrige

journeys, first with the state or regional award program, and then to apply for the national Baldrige award.

As an example of the success of the state programs, the Iowa Quality Center (IQC) website includes a testimonial from Bob Loyd, a plant manager at Clipper Windpower LLC in Cedar Rapids, IA:

“The great people at the Iowa Quality Center have consistently helped me and our staff make connections with others in the state in regard to quality initiatives. And those connections have been invaluable. Through our interactions with the IQC, our team members and I really understand what ‘excellence’ means and how to create a culture of quality that supports that excellence.”<sup>9</sup>

State and regional Baldrige programs were established with a goal of advancing organizational excellence and competitiveness in their states and regions through their recognition award and training programs. These programs help many local organizations begin and continue their performance excellence journeys. They are committed to offering organizations a wide range of quality educational programs and services: Baldrige criteria training, applicant training and examiner training, as well as other training in many quality-related topics geared toward specific sectors.

Many Baldrige National Quality Award recipients began their performance excellence journeys with their state quality award programs. In fact, being recognized at the top excellence level by a state or regional award program is now an eligibility condition for organizations that desire to apply for the Baldrige award.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, state and regional programs offer their stakeholders much more than an annual awards program. These state and regional programs have joined collaboratively to form the Alliance for Performance Excellence, a nonprofit network that includes national, state and local Baldrige-based award programs. Through the alliance, the growth of Baldrige programs is encouraged by the collaborative efforts of the alliance’s member organizations. Its members also serve as a feeder system for the national program, providing a significant number of examiners and award applicants. Also, the alliance maintains a library of relevant Baldrige material.

The alliance is the best source for current information on the status of regional and state programs and training programs that are provided. On the alliance website ([www.baldrigepe.org/alliance](http://www.baldrigepe.org/alliance)), click on your state on the map or the “State & Local Programs” tab for

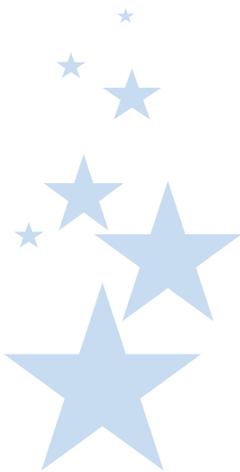
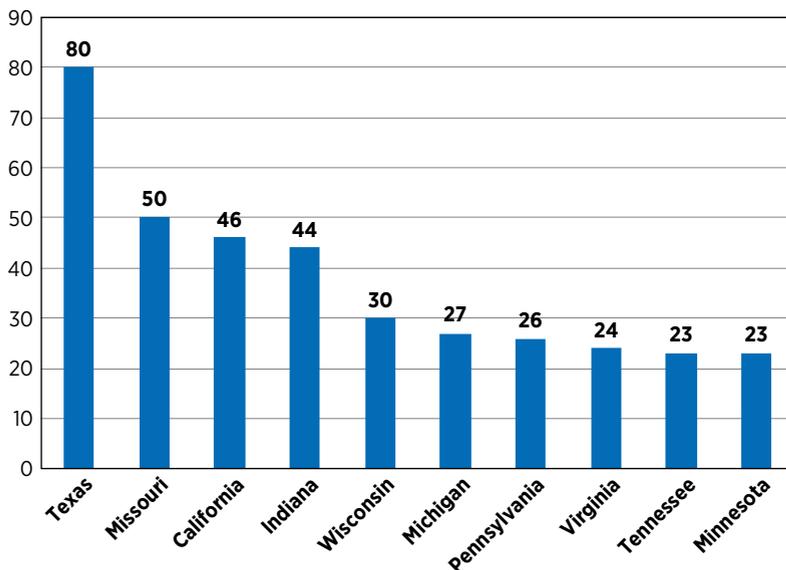


FIGURE 1

## Top 10 states with most Baldrige award applicants: 2005-2016



contact information for the state or regional Baldrige program associated with your state.<sup>11</sup>

### Application process

To apply for the Baldrige award, applicants complete a 50-page application based on an established set of detailed criteria for improving performance excellence. Applications are reviewed and scored by teams of trained examiners who provide each applicant with a detailed feedback report of the applicant's strengths and opportunities for improvement. After the examiners' reviews, the judges' panel decides the applicants who will receive a site visit. After completing those visits, the judges' panel makes recommendations to NIST for Baldrige award recipients.<sup>12</sup>

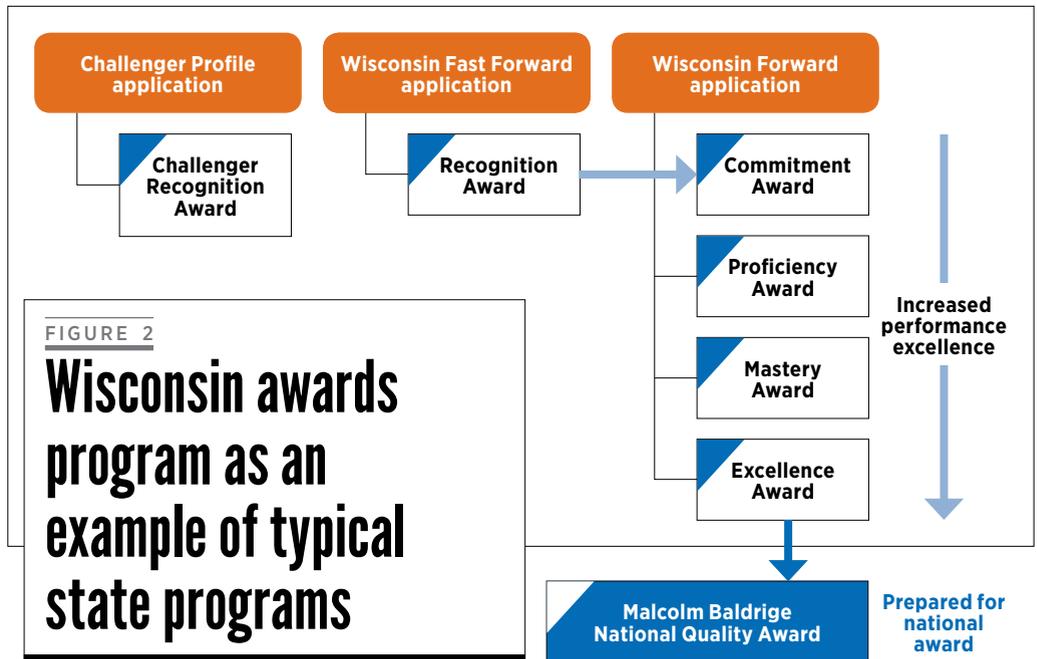
For many years, state and regional award programs followed the same process. However, this process is often considered daunting for many organizations, particularly small ones or those new to performance excellence. In recent years, state and regional programs have innovated in efforts to reach and involve a greater number of organizations, and have developed an alternate tiered recognition system, with the top-level recognition close in criteria and process to the Baldrige award.

### Wisconsin Center for Performance Excellence

A typical state and regional program is the Wisconsin Forward Award, administered by Wisconsin Center for Performance Excellence (WCPE). The award is similar to the national application process and based on the *Baldrige Excellence Framework* and Baldrige criteria.

In the applications, organizations must describe seven areas of continuous improvement and performance excellence:

1. Leadership.
2. Strategy planning.
3. Customer focus.
4. Measurement, analysis and knowledge management.
5. Workforce focus.
6. Operations focus.
7. Results.<sup>13</sup>



Typical of most state and regional programs, the Wisconsin Forward Award is composed of four levels of recognition: commitment, proficiency, mastery and excellence (see Figure 2). Besides a review by a team of examiners, site visits are conducted for organizations being considered for the mastery or excellence level of the Wisconsin Forward Award. The Wisconsin Forward Award for Excellence is awarded to organizations with superior achievement of performance excellence processes and results. For most recipients at the top level, the next step is to apply for the Baldrige award at the national level.<sup>14</sup>

**Fast Forward:** In addition, WCPE supports a beginner to intermediate application known as the Wisconsin Fast Forward. Described as a stepping stone for organizations interested in the Wisconsin Forward awards and aspiring to improve their performance excellence, applicants can demonstrate their current efforts in a shortened application. All seven categories of the Baldrige criteria are addressed in the application.

The Fast Forward application is appropriate for organizations that are new to internal organizational self-assessments and the Baldrige criteria. The application's process helps to familiarize employees with the organization's management practices and related

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results. Most Fast Forward applicants have some of their key processes documented in some format, have some favorable measurements and results, and include trend and comparative data in their processes. Organizations can submit Fast Forward applications at any time of the year, and successful Fast Forward applicants are recognized at the annual awards program as recipients of the Wisconsin Forward Award at the commitment level.<sup>15</sup>

**Challenger Profile:** Typical of other state programs, WCPE helps its clients complete the Baldrige application with various supporting documents. One of these is the Wisconsin Challenger Profile, which helps organizations get started by responding to basic questions about their organizational context and key results that will help lay the groundwork for future improvement efforts and future Wisconsin Forward Award applications. Challenger Profile applications are accepted throughout the year, too. Organizations completing this simplified Wisconsin Challenger Profile are recognized at the annual awards program.<sup>16</sup>

Typical of state and regional programs, WCPE offers various training workshops to educate members on Baldrige improvement and performance excellence concepts and practices. State and regional programs frequently host annual award programs to showcase award recipients and share best practices among applicants and other interested organizations. In 2016, WCPE hosted an annual award ceremony, its Wisconsin Forward Awards Gala, at which four organizations were recognized for a Wisconsin Forward Award, and four organizations were recipients of the Wisconsin Challenger Profile recognition.<sup>17</sup>

### Success stories

WCPE has been the starting point for three national Baldrige award recipients from Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie, Mercy Health System in Janesville and, most recently, the Pewaukee School District. Some of the district's successes are highlighted in the sidebar on this page.

In an interview, JoAnn Sterneke, the district's superintendent, discussed the continuous improvement process and the importance of feedback from the state Baldrige program.

"It's always been about the learning and the feedback, not about the award process," Sterneke said. "Very soon after we got our first feedback report from the Wisconsin Center for Performance Excellence, we began work on improvement. The feedback was so helpful that it became the kick-start of what we kept doing."<sup>18</sup>



★ ★ SUCCESS STORY ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## Pewaukee School District

The Pewaukee School District (Wisconsin) has an enrollment of 2,760 students. The district has four schools (two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school) operated on an 85-acre campus that serves students from the city and village of Pewaukee. The district is staffed by 296 employees and operates under a budget of \$28.6 million.

Here are some results from the district's Baldrige journey:

**76%** advanced placement pass rate in 2011-2012, higher than the county (73.9%) and the state (68%).

**45.5%** proficiency achieved by economically disadvantaged students, compared with scores below 33% for similar students in the county, the state and nearby high-performing schools on the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concept Examinations reading proficiency tests.

**93.8%** parent satisfaction with educational quality in 2012-2013.

**91.5%-94.8%** parent satisfaction with communication in 2012-2013, compared with a national average of 74%.

**0.09%** dropout rate, better than rates in the county, the state and nearby high-performing districts by a factor of five to 15.

Named one of Wisconsin's Top 100 Workplaces in 2011, 2012 and 2013.

Sources: <http://tinyurl.com/qp-baldrige-impacts> and [www.nist.gov/baldrige/pewaukee-school-district](http://www.nist.gov/baldrige/pewaukee-school-district)

In addition, ASQ is actually among recent recipients of the Wisconsin Forward Award for Excellence (top level).<sup>19</sup>

### Resources supporting state programs

The Baldrige program makes several Baldrige program resources, including the *Baldrige Excellence Framework, Your Guide to Performance Excellence*, training material and award process documents available to state and regional programs.<sup>20</sup>

The Baldrige program also offers free, informative Baldrige improvement tools for self-assessment, including the “Are We Making Progress?” and the “Are We Making Progress as Leaders?” surveys, and the “easyInsight: Take a First Step Toward a Baldrige Self-Assessment” for organizations at all stages of their quality journeys.<sup>21</sup>

Because the Baldrige award requires recipients to communicate how they achieve their improvement, knowledge and expertise has spread to other organizations. Time and again, this pattern of success has emerged for all sectors, including healthcare and education. [QP](#)

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank Liz Menzer, former executive director of the Wisconsin Center for Performance Excellence, for her assistance.

## Taking the first steps

Many recipients of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award have communicated how valuable the feedback from the application for the Baldrige award has been. As a result, these recipients said they were more successful in their organization’s journey to continuous improvement, performance excellence and sustainability. Using the Baldrige model often leads to a stronger systems-thinking perspective.<sup>22</sup>

**If your organization is interested in joining in the Baldrige experience and networking with other organizations on successful strategies for improved quality and performance excellence, look up your state’s Baldrige program website at the Alliance for Performance Excellence website ([www.baldrigepe.org/alliance](http://www.baldrigepe.org/alliance)) and contact its office. Consider attending the next conference it sponsors. In addition, contact the alliance or email [baldrige@nist.gov](mailto:baldrige@nist.gov).**

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