



*Empowering Organizations to Improve Results*

2019

Process Level —  
Application Guidance  
Manual for the  
Performance  
Excellence Program



## Letter from the Director

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What does the Southwest Alliance for Excellence do?

As the Southwest Alliance for Excellence (SWAE) embarks on its 30<sup>th</sup> year serving organizations we will continue to help organizations become more efficient and improve their results!

SWAE helps organizations of all sizes, sectors, and industries improve their results using the *Baldrige Excellence Framework – a systems approach to improving your organization’s performance*. The *Criteria for Performance Excellence* helps to simplify an organization’s efforts. It is designed to help identify what really matters to your organization, and focus efforts where they will count. Using the Criteria gives you a holistic assessment of where your organization is and where it needs to be. Use it to empower your organization to reach your goals, improve results, and become more competitive by aligning your strategy, processes, decisions, people, actions and results.

At first glance, the Criteria may seem a bit dense and daunting, but SWAE offers many resources to help you learn: The SWAE Performance Excellence Program, our workshops, examiner training, and our Annual Sharing of Best Practices & Awards Luncheon are all first-rate avenues toward excellence.

I also would like to talk about *why* we do it: SWAE’s mission is to empower organizations in Arizona, Nevada and Utah to pursue performance excellence, improve outcomes and contribute to the economic strength of their community and state. We are dedicated to making our states better places to live and work.

Our ultimate stakeholders are the citizens of Arizona, Nevada and Utah – you and me. When our businesses, schools, hospitals, factories and government bodies focus on results, when they function at high performing levels, we all benefit.

SWAE believes, by integrating the principles of the *Criteria for Performance Excellence*, our organizations, communities and citizens will thrive. I am delighted that you are here to take advantage of this opportunity.

Sincerely,

*Karen L. Shepard*

Karen L. Shepard  
Executive Director



3961 E. Chandler Blvd. Suite 111-334  
Phoenix, AZ 85048  
(480)874-5815  
[www.swae.org](http://www.swae.org)



# About the Southwest Alliance for Excellence

## Our Vision

*Be a recognized leader in advancing organizational excellence.*

The Southwest Alliance for Excellence was established in 1990. Our goal is to improve the economic vitality of the region by promoting the understanding and use of the *Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence*.

Since 1990, hundreds of organizations have applied to and benefited from the SWAE Performance Excellence Program.

We are an independent, nonprofit corporation governed by a Board of Directors drawn from manufacturing, service, healthcare, education and government sectors. We function as a non-profit that provides cost-effective support to regional businesses and organizations. Our funding comes solely from membership, sponsorship and program revenue.

## SWAE Workforce

Two staff, and more than 75 volunteers provide services to SWAE members and applicants, implementing all SWAE activities.

## Board of Directors

The SWAE Board of Directors consists of distinguished leaders from all sectors of AZ, NV & UT economies, providing policy guidance and direction. The board is responsible for SWAE's governance and finance.

## Members and Sponsors

The support of corporate and individual members and sponsors enables SWAE to deliver programs and services to companies in every industry sector. All companies, organizations and individuals involved with or interested in SWAE are welcome to apply for membership. Membership benefits include:

- Knowledge sharing on performance improvement topics through the SWAE newsletter
- Opportunities for education and learning through discounted training
- Discounted SWAE Performance Excellence Program application fees
- Demonstration of a commitment to excellence
- Acknowledgement in SWAE materials
- Networking and connecting with like-minded organizations and individuals

To become a SWAE member or sponsor, please visit the Members / Sponsors section of our website (<http://www.swae.org/mission/>) or call the SWAE office: (480)874-5815.

## Our Mission

*To empower organizations to pursue performance excellence, improve outcomes and contribute to the economic strength of their community and state.*

## Southwest Alliance for Excellence Performance Excellence Program

Modeled after the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, SWAE fulfills its mission by providing in-depth, low-cost assessments of regional organizations using the *Criteria for Performance Excellence*. This process is the basis of the SWAE Performance Excellence Program.

Organizations that go through an assessment receive detailed feedback that may be used to improve processes and results. It's an effective way to energize employees, sharpen focus, look at your organization from a systems perspective and earn recognition for your business or organization.

The SWAE Performance Excellence Program is multi-tiered, offering five levels of review. An organization that is new to the Criteria can get its feet wet by starting with a Level 1 (Interest) application or a Process Level application. As the organization grows and develops, it may apply for a Level 2 (Commitment), Level 3 (Achievement) and Level 4 (Excellence) Award. Among other eligibility requirements, organizations that apply for a Baldrige National Quality Award must first receive a SWAE Pinnacle Award for Excellence.

To participate in the SWAE Performance Excellence Program, organizations submit a self-assessment to the SWAE office based on questions posed in the *Criteria for Performance Excellence*. The length and breadth of this self-assessment depends on the award level sought. Please see page 14 for more details on requirements for each level.

A team of SWAE examiners then evaluates the self-assessment and conducts a site visit to gain a thorough understanding of the organization. Based on its findings, the team prepares a detailed Feedback Report that identifies the applicant's strengths and opportunities for improvement.



## About the Southwest Alliance for Excellence

The Panel of Judges reviews the examiner team's work for integrity and completeness and determines the applicant's award level.

### Code of Ethical Standards

Integrity is one of SWAE's core values. A strict Code of Ethical Conduct and Conflict of Interest Statement binds each examiner and judge. Neither examiners nor judges may participate in any evaluation, scoring or recognition decisions where there may be, or could appear to be, any personal, potential or perceived conflict of interest.

### Applicant Eligibility

Any public or private organization located in the states of AZ, NV or UT may participate in the SWAE Performance Excellence Program.

### Organizational Units

Business/organizational units or subsidiaries are eligible to submit an application. For purposes of the evaluation process, a subsidiary means an actual subsidiary, business unit, division, or district office. Eligible organizations must be recognizable as discrete entities, and must be easily distinguishable from a parent and other sub-units. They must function as business or operational entities, not as activities assembled to write an application.

Organizations must be self-sufficient enough to be examined in all seven Criteria categories. For example, an organizational unit with its own administrative, human resources and other support functions is eligible; but a unit that is entirely dependent upon the parent organization for the majority of these functions is ineligible.

The following organizational units are expressly allowed:

- Business units or larger
- Whole manufacturing plant
- Hospitals within systems; whole health care systems
- State government office/division/department
- Stand-alone sub-units of larger organizations
- School districts
- Individual schools
- Colleges within Universities; whole universities

**Note:** Meeting eligibility requirements for SWAE Level 4 awards does not necessarily convey eligibility as a national Baldrige Applicant.

### Future Eligibility

If an organization receives the prestigious Pinnacle Award for Excellence (Level 4), the organization is ineligible to apply for another SWAE organization level Award for a period of three years. For example, a 2014 Pinnacle Award recipient would be eligible to reapply in 2018. There is no such restriction for Interest Recognition (Level 1), Commitment Awards (Level 2) or Achievement Awards (Level 3).

### Eligibility Determination

In order to ensure fairness and consistency to all award applicants, an Intent to Apply/Eligibility Form is required for Organization Levels 2, 3 and 4 applicants and Process Level applicants. This form takes into account an organizational unit's structure, functions and performance. Potential applicants are encouraged to submit the Intent to Apply/Eligibility Form as early as possible. For more information on eligibility determination, see the Intent-to-Apply and Eligibility Form on pages 18-24.

### Award Allocation

Awards are granted on the basis of fulfilling the Criteria requirements described for each level (see page 12 for a complete description of these requirements). There is no limit to the number of awards presented annually. However, if no candidate demonstrates the levels of performance excellence outlined on pages 11 ("SWAE Award Program Recognition Levels") and established by the Criteria, no award will be conveyed. In other words, there may be years when no recipients are named, particularly at the higher award levels.

### Responsibilities of Award Recipients

Applicants receiving recognition and awards are encouraged to support the development of performance improvement for others participating in the SWAE Performance Excellence Program. Excellence Award recipients are expected to share nonproprietary information from their application material and participate in the Southwest Alliance for Excellence annual Awards Banquet, so others may learn from their success. A minimum of one "Best Practice" workshop or "Benchmark Tour" is generally held at the recipient's site.



# Additional SWAE Programming

## Education

Throughout the year, SWAE provides training opportunities to organizations that want to improve processes and results. All of these programs are available at low cost and open to the public.

For more information about any of SWAE's educational opportunities, visit the Workshops & Events page of the SWAE website: [www.swae.org](http://www.swae.org) or call the SWAE office at (480)874-5815.

### Application Workshop

Application workshops provide tips and tools for beginning an organizational self-assessment and writing a SWAE application to the Criteria. In addition, attendees learn how award levels are determined and gain insight into site visits. These workshops are a great first step for organizations that are new to using the Criteria; they also provide advanced strategies for companies more familiar with the SWAE application process and the Criteria.

### Baldrige 101 Workshop

The *Criteria for Performance Excellence* provides a seven-category framework for defining what is most important to an organization's success. This course is an introduction to the Criteria's framework, using that information, organizations can then identify and implement meaningful improvements.

### Benchmarking Tours/Workshops

When an organization receives an Excellence Award, it opens its doors to the public for a series of best practice tours and workshops. These tours highlight the systems and methods that helped the organization achieve the award.

Throughout the year, we offer opportunities to get a sneak peek inside industry-leading companies and organizations that share their best practices with participants. Attendees tour the host organization while learning valuable information they can take back to their own workplaces.

### Workshops

SWAE offers workshops to help organizations better understand methods of improvement through the use of the Baldrige Criteria, other quality methodologies and the Performance Excellence Program. We also host writing

Workshops to help applicants prepare to apply for the Process Level in addition to Baldrige 101 Workshops.

### Custom Training

SWAE designs and delivers custom training sessions and presentations to interested organizations. Call the SWAE office at (480) 874-5815 or email [kshepard@swae.org](mailto:kshepard@swae.org) for details.

## Examiner Training

Every year, SWAE trains a contingent of volunteer examiners in the *Criteria for Performance Excellence* to evaluate the businesses and organizations that apply to the SWAE Award Program. These examiners typically represent the best and brightest- professionals who want to challenge themselves while contributing to the region's economic development.

Serving on the SWAE Board of Examiners is a powerful personal and professional development experience. Starting with training and continuing through the applicant evaluation process, networking opportunities abound. In addition, examiners are exposed to the best practices of role model companies.

"I found the SWAE Examiner experience extremely valuable to my understanding and growth in Quality. The training and site visit offered me the opportunity to understand quality programs outside of my own industry." – Susie Duffy; HonorHealth

Employers have found that examiner training empowers employees to apply the Criteria at their own jobs, improving processes and results. In addition, applicants have discovered that having an examiner or two on the "inside" improves their own SWAE applications.

Every summer SWAE schedules examiner training sessions. For information about becoming an Examiner or signing up employees to serve as examiners, please visit the Examiner section on the Award Program page on SWAE's website or call the office: [www.swae.org/performance-excellence-program/](http://www.swae.org/performance-excellence-program/) (480) 874-5815.

This is a powerful learning experience and valuable professional development step for anyone. The Board of Examiners evaluates award applications, conducts site visits and prepares feedback reports.



# Additional SWAE Programming

Benefits of participation include:

- Strong understanding of a global set of guidelines for running an effective organization
- Insider look at innovative approaches utilized by leading organizations
- Improved assessment, analytical, interviewing and writing skills
- Networking with colleagues and other professionals throughout the region
- Opportunity to attend Performance Excellence Award Banquet compliments of SWAE

## SWAE Performance Excellence Program Sharing of Best Practices & Awards Luncheon

The SWAE Performance Excellence Program Sharing of Best Practices & Awards Luncheon is the platform SWAE uses to recognize organizations that complete the evaluation and feedback process. During the luncheon, each SWAE applicant that has fulfilled the criteria requirements receives an award based on its level of achievement. For employees of organizations that participate in the application process, the luncheon is a great celebration, confirming the organization's commitment to improving performance results.

## SWAE Leadership Award

The Southwest Alliance for Excellence (SWAE) Leadership Award is an annual award recognizing an individual who exemplifies outstanding leadership in the pursuit of performance excellence and has furthered performance improvement beyond the boundaries of their organization. Recipients can represent any industry and any type or size organization in Arizona, Nevada, or Utah. They are dedicated to and demonstrate leadership behaviors and results consistent with the SWAE Core Values, community involvement, corporate citizenship and economic development. They must be willing to share their leadership practices as they relate to the SWAE Core Values and Leadership Behaviors.

Nominations for the SWAE Leadership Award are solicited from the public. Self-nominations are not permitted. The award recipient is selected by an outside, diverse committee.

## Baldrige Express Self-evaluation Survey

When you take steps to better your organization, you need to know if your efforts are working. The Southwest Alliance for Excellence, in conjunction with the Alliance for Performance Excellence, offers a high-level diagnostic tool that can help. Called Baldrige Express, this online organizational survey is designed to help you gauge deployment of your improvement initiatives. A valuable set of feedback is provided to the organization upon completion.

## Best Practice Sharing

SWAE provides a venue where businesses and organizations can learn from the performance improvement strategies of their role model peers:

- Benchmarking tours and workshops are presented by SWAE Award recipients to share the strategies and processes that brought them to this level of accomplishment.
- During the annual SWAE Performance Excellence Program Sharing of Best Practices & Awards Luncheon, recipients of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and the SWAE Excellence Award share the lessons they have learned on their journeys to performance excellence.

## SWAE Learning Events

Refer to the Events and Workshops schedule at <http://www.swae.org/events-workshops/>, or turn to the previous page to see descriptions of other learning opportunities like:

- Baldrige 101 Workshop
- Application Writing Workshop
- Benchmarking Tours/Workshops
- Lean Six Sigma
- Using Baldrige Express
- Networking opportunities and events

Or, call SWAE to schedule a customized learning event at your site: (480) 874-5815. For more information about any of SWAE's programs, please visit our website or call the SWAE office: [www.swae.org](http://www.swae.org), (480) 874-5815.