

# Principles of the Baldrige Education Criteria

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*From: 2009-2010 Education Criteria for Performance Excellence, Baldrige National Quality Program; National Institute of Standards and Technology. Gaithersburg, MD.*

## **1. The Criteria focus on results.**

The Criteria focus on the six key areas of organizational performance.

- (1) student learning outcomes
- (2) customer-focused outcomes
- (3) budgetary, financial, and market outcomes
- (4) workforce-focused outcomes
- (5) process effectiveness outcomes, including key operational performance results
- (6) leadership outcomes, including governance and societal responsibility results

The use of this composite of measures is intended to ensure that strategies are balanced—that they do not inappropriately trade off among important stakeholders, objectives, or short- and longer-term goals.

## **2. The Criteria are nonprescriptive and adaptable.**

The Criteria are made up of results-oriented requirements. However, the Criteria do not prescribe how your organization should be structured; that your organization should or should not have departments for planning, ethics, quality, or other functions; or that different units in your organization should be managed in the same way. These factors differ among organizations, and they are likely to change as needs and strategies evolve.

The Criteria are nonprescriptive for the following reasons:

- (1) The focus is on results, not on procedures, tools, or organizational structure. Organizations are encouraged to develop and demonstrate creative, adaptive, and flexible approaches for meeting requirements. Nonprescriptive requirements are intended to foster incremental and major (“breakthrough”) improvements, as well as meaningful change through innovation.
- (2) The selection of tools, techniques, systems, and organizational structure usually depends on factors such as the organization type and size, organizational relationships, your organization’s stage of development, and the capabilities and responsibilities of your workforce.
- (3) A focus on common requirements, rather than on common procedures, fosters understanding, communication, sharing, alignment, and integration, while supporting innovation and diversity in approaches.

## **3. The Criteria integrate key education themes.**

The Education Criteria consider several important education concepts and the specific needs of education organizations. These include the following:

- The Education Criteria place a primary focus on teaching and learning because these are the principal goals of education organizations.
- While the Education Criteria stress a focus on student learning for all education organizations, individual organizational missions, roles, and programs will vary for different types of organizations (e.g., primary and secondary schools, trade schools, engineering schools, or teaching and research organizations).

- Students are the key customers of education organizations, but there may be multiple stakeholders (e.g., parents, employers, other schools, and communities).

The concept of excellence includes three components:

- (1) a well-conceived and well-executed assessment strategy;
- (2) year-to-year improvement in key measures and indicators of performance, especially student learning; and
- (3) demonstrated leadership in performance and performance improvement relative to comparable organizations and to appropriate benchmarks.

#### **4. The Criteria support a systems perspective to maintaining organization-wide goal alignment.**

The systems perspective to goal alignment is embedded in the integrated structure of the Core Values and Concepts; the Organizational Profile; the Criteria; the Scoring Guidelines; and the results-oriented, cause-effect, cross-process linkages among the Criteria Items.

Alignment in the Criteria is built around connecting and reinforcing measures derived from your organization's processes and strategy. These measures tie directly to student and stakeholder value and to overall performance. The use of measures thus channels different activities in consistent directions with less need for detailed procedures, centralized decision making, or overly complex process management. Measures thereby serve as both a communications tool and as a basis for deploying consistent overall performance requirements.

Such alignment ensures consistency of purpose while also supporting agility, innovation, and decentralized decision making. A systems perspective to goal alignment, particularly when strategy and goals change over time, requires dynamic linkages among Criteria Items. In the Criteria, action-oriented cycles of improvement take place via feedback between processes and results. The improvement cycles have four, clearly defined stages:

- (1) planning, including design of processes, selection of measures, and deployment of requirements (approach)
- (2) executing plans (deployment)
- (3) assessing progress and capturing new knowledge, including seeking opportunities for innovation (learning)
- (4) revising plans based on assessment findings, harmonizing processes and work unit operations, and selecting better measures (integration)

#### **5. The Criteria support goal-based diagnosis.**

The Criteria and the Scoring Guidelines make up a two part diagnostic (assessment) system. The Criteria are a set of 18 performance-oriented requirements. The Scoring Guidelines spell out the assessment dimensions—Process and Results—and the key factors used to assess each dimension. An assessment thus provides a profile of strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to the 18 performance-oriented requirements and relative to process and performance maturity as determined by the Scoring Guidelines.

In this way, assessment leads to actions that contribute to performance improvement in all areas, as described in the shaded box on the previous page. This diagnostic assessment is a useful management tool that goes beyond most performance reviews and is applicable to a wide range of strategies, management systems, and types of organizations.