Best Practices from Baldrige Award Recipients: Tips from Award Winners in Every Sector

Baldrige Performance Excellence Program
National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD
The following tips have been compiled from a series of posts on Blogrige, the official blog of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (BPEP) based on BPEP staff interviews with presenters at the 26th Annual Quest for Excellence® Conference.

Tips are organized by the sectors of business, health care, and education and grouped by topics presented at the Quest conference by the Baldrige Award-winning organizations (arranged alphabetically by organization name).

Web site links and URLs for the original Blogrige posts follow each organization’s tips so that readers can benefit from accessing the full context and additional information.

This information is from the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, Gaithersburg, MD: U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2014.
Business/Nonprofit Sector

Getting Started with Baldrige:

- Communicate: Make sure you have the support of senior leadership and employees. Instigating organizational change is not a one-person challenge, and the only way to truly sustain change and excellence is if everyone is on the same page.
- Share/steal: The Baldrige community is so generous and open; take advantage of conferences and best-practice sessions. If you’re struggling in a certain area, it’s likely that other organizations have been down the same path and come out on the other side. There’s no sense in reinventing the wheel when so many great leaders and organizations are eager to share their stories with you.
- Keep going: It’s a journey, and one that will take you longer than you might expect. The Baldrige framework is not about an award or a temporary fix. It’s about lasting, continuous improvement and a systematic framework for excellence. You will never “master” the Criteria. Instead, you can use it every year, every month, every day, to ensure that your organization is striving for excellence in every aspect.

MESA (2006 and 2012 Baldrige Award winner, small business); for full story, see http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/03/19/growing-by-leaps-and-baldrige/.

Building a Customer-Focused Strategy:

- Don’t treat continuous improvement, Lean, or another improvement strategy as an add-on to your current operations or a “bolt-on accessory.” Integrate improvement with your culture and how you do business.
- Build ownership for your strategy among the workforce. This means that you have to get people’s buy-in, but understand that some things are non-negotiable, such as safety, health, morals, and ethics.
- Work on a “demand-pull” approach of people wanting your products, rather than a “supply-push” approach.
- Don’t focus on efficient measures (these are noble, but you can wind up with lousy measures); instead, try for effective measures that are focused, do what they are supposed to do and are not overburdened with too many different purposes.
Managing Organizational Change:

- Shrink the change to effect change.
- Build on your “bright spots” (people, processes) to effect change.
- Understand that information is not necessarily the key to change; the key is not only to inform but also to demonstrate the change and ensure understanding through accountability checks.
- Innovate to sustain the change. To achieve different results, you have to do things a different way. Thinking of new ways to conduct value-added processes is key to growth.

Aligning an Organization and Managing Performance for Improvement/Change:

- Consider these three key accelerants to the organizational alignment needed for an improvement journey: (1) Highest-ranking officers who are personally committed to steering the journey, (2) senior executives who hold leaders accountable for metric-based performance outcomes through a performance management and evaluation system, and (3) senior teams who provide their leaders with the skills needed to maximize their own potential by providing mandatory, quarterly leadership training.
- Address chronically low-performing members of the team to prevent negative impact on the culture of the organization and reward successes of high-performing individuals so that you don’t miss out on the opportunity to maximize the potential of the lifeblood of the organization: the solid performers who need mentoring and coaching. A key work process for high-performing organizations includes a consistently practiced, fair, documented, and
objective series of discussions with high, solid, and low performers to sustain
the momentum for the arduous journey of cultural transformation.

Studer Group (2010 Baldrige Award winner, small business); for full story, see
http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/03/27/changing-culture-insights-from-a-
2010-baldrige-award-winner/. 
Health Care Sector

Using Lean Methodology to Address the Baldrige Criteria:

- Use Kanban (Lean scheduling system) or 2-bin system (Lean inventory control system) as a systematic approach to controlling the costs of supplies in response to Criteria item 6.2, which asks how organizations control the costs of operations).
- Use visual management to ensure that the day-to-day operation of work processes meet requirements and lead to the in-process measures used to control and improve those processes (Criteria item, 6.1b).
- Standard work, a foundational concept of Lean, is a simple, written description of the safest, highest-quality, most-efficient way known to perform a task or achieve an outcome. Use standard work in both clinical and nonclinical areas for deploying key processes, in order to reduce variability from caregiver to caregiver.

Advocate Good Samaritan (2010 Baldrige Award winner, health care); for full story, see http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/04/03/Got-MUDA-無駄/.

Fostering Physician Leadership:

- Appoint a physician champion who is a trusted peer to recruit physicians within the organization to invest in leadership training.
- Emphasize a mission of improving patient care and the increased personal effectiveness of the leadership-trained individual to make a positive difference.
- Have physicians see that previously trained physicians behave differently and have demonstrated success and recognition as a result of their training.

North Mississippi Health Services (2012 Baldrige Award winner, health care); for full story, see http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/03/04/a-physician-hothouse-for-innovation/.
Improving Processes Using Both the Baldrige Criteria and Magnet:

- Focus on the concept that both the Baldrige Criteria and Magnet are based on evidence-based practice; they learn from each other.
- Emphasize that both the Baldrige Criteria and Magnet are grounded in what is best for the patient, which creates purpose and pride in the workforce.
- When developing committee structure, capitalize on your existing committees. Keep in mind that both the Baldrige Criteria and Magnet are based on a foundation of having structure, process, and outcomes; those three premises work together for both the Baldrige Criteria and Magnet.
- Use one process improvement methodology when making improvements identified by the Baldrige Criteria and by Magnet; then involve nursing and non-nursing staff members in both to get the benefit of differing perspectives.
- Crosswalk your responses in applications for both Magnet and the Baldrige Award. Crosswalks are cost-effective and are an additional way to identify best practices.

Poudre Valley Health System (2008 Baldrige Award winner, health care); for full story, see [http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/02/20/whats-more-disposable-magnet-or-baldrige/](http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/02/20/whats-more-disposable-magnet-or-baldrige/).

Partnering with a Competitor to Achieve Clinical Integration:

- Build a foundation of trust and open communication.
- Start with a common goal and shared vision and work from there.
- Bring in a nonbiased third party to help with facilitation and building the infrastructure.

Schneck Medical Center, 2011 Baldrige Award winner, health care); for full story, see [http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/04/01/for-the-good-of-the-community/](http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/04/01/for-the-good-of-the-community/).

Benefitting from the Voice of the Customer:

- Foster a shared relationship between the customer and organization.
- Provide customers with feedback opportunities before and after their health care visits and even after hours.
- Create more than one way to listen to customers, for example, utilizing technology to improve how to listen.

Southcentral Foundation (2011 Baldrige Award winner, health care); for full story, see http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/03/20/listening-and-customer-satisfaction/.

Preparing for the Affordable Care Act

Use the Baldrige Health Care Criteria for Performance Excellence to do the following:

- Develop more efficient and effective processes, improving them in order to prepare to serve more people signing up for health care products.
- Work on the conditions of care to make it more affordable and to become more efficient in delivering care to the community.
- Create strong strategic plans that reveal the organization’s key challenges and advantages, core competencies, risks to sustainability, blind spots, and ability to execute the plan.
- Develop innovative approaches and achieve action plans related to engaging the workforce, including physicians and other staff members focused on patients.

Sutter Davis Hospital (2013 Baldrige Award winner, health care); for full story, see http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/04/24/the-efficient-and-effective-road-to-the-affordable-care-act/
Education Sector

Adopting Baldrige to Improve a School System:

- Talk with the staff involved: Help the staff to identify their priority areas for improvement, looking at the data you have to support that, and get them involved in identifying what the "big rocks" are. Sometimes it’s an easy win to get them involved in being part of the solution as well as identifying the problem. It’s not always what the leadership might see as a priority area; if workers see it as a major issue, then they tend to be more engaged in the improvement process and have more buy-in along the way.
- Use the Baldrige Criteria and the Baldrige processes without using all the Baldrige terminology. Using language that is familiar to the workers is less overwhelming.
- “Go slow to go fast”: Keep a pulse on your staff to see where they are in the transition process through both formal check-in meetings and informal conversations. You need to have a combination of that hard and soft data to monitor. You need some folks to tell you what the reality is on how things are going.

Iredell-Statesville Public Schools (2008 Baldrige Award winner, education); for full story, see http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/04/02/tight-education-funding-growing-student-needs-where-baldrige-is-essential/.

Conducting an Organizational Self-Assessment:

- Use the “Are We Making Progress?” surveys as a starting point for using the Baldrige framework. These surveys—one for the senior leadership team and another for other employees (available for free download from the Baldrige Web site at http://www.nist.gov/baldrige/publications/progress.cfm—are based on the Organizational Profile questions in the Baldrige Criteria.
- Once the survey results are in, pull together a cross-functional team to analyze the results and discuss potential answers to the questions from the Organizational Profile.
- Conduct a gap analysis based on this work; it will likely provide several “jumping off points” for continuous improvement efforts in the organization.
Implementing a New Curriculum:

Use a collaborative planning process to ensure that you are implementing the curriculum across your system systematically. Following are questions addressed by the school system at each step of the process:

1. **Plan**: What is the indicator or standard asking our students to do? What are the difficult points for teachers? Students? What are the connections to prior/future learning? How will the thinking and academic skills be addressed?

2. **Do**: What is acceptable evidence of proficiency with the indicator? What is the sequence of learning? How will we identify ways instruction can be adjusted to meet the needs of all learners?

3. **Study**: How will we know students are learning it? Review data points around multiple pathways.

4. **Act**: What do we do if they already know it? What do we do if they do not learn it?

Creating a Strategic Plan:

- Determine your values and goals (from mission)
- Conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis and an environmental scan.
- Determine strategy areas and create action plans.
- Publish and share the strategic plan with all.
- Monitor and create accountability systems.
Pewaukee School District (2013 Baldrige Award winner, education); for full story, see http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/04/22/from-blind-squirrels-looking-for-nuts-to-strategic-planners/.

Measuring Performance:

- Design a system for your performance measurement and improvement that is repeatable and sustainable (Approach).
- Involve all key groups in development of your performance measurement and improvement system and share the results widely (Deploy).
- Make calm, clear-headed decisions based on the data analysis and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the performance measurement process itself (Learn).
- Align your performance measurement system with your organization’s mission, vision, values, and key work processes (Integrate).

Richland Community College (2005 Baldrige Award winner, education); for full story, see http://nistbaldrige.blogs.govdelivery.com/2014/03/06/measuring-performance-best-practices-of-a-2005-baldrige-award-winner/.