

BALDRIGE EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK



America's Leading Framework for Performance Excellence

Understanding the Maturity Pathways

1

ESTABLISHING

We are gaining insights into how we operate, establishing foundational processes, and defining what we want to accomplish and the key results the organization needs to measure.

2

DEVELOPING

We are standardizing and strengthening processes so they are consistent and reliable, and we are beginning to measure our results systematically to inform decisions, evaluate performance, and drive improvement.

3

MATURING

We are aligned and integrated, learning and improving as a system, and our results often perform at high levels compared to other organizations.

Maturity Pathway Descriptions

Detailed characteristics, focus areas, and success criteria for each pathway.

Establishing Pathway

OPERATIONAL AWARENESS

In the Establishing Pathway, the organization may not yet have a clear or shared understanding of how it operates, what its customers expect, and how engaged its employees are. Work may be carried out through informal practices, individual effort, or historical habits rather than defined processes. Through intentional reflection and discussion, the organization begins to identify key processes, clarify responsibilities, and define what matters most, sometimes leading to the translation of these insights into emerging goals. Leaders start answering foundational questions about how work gets done and what results should be measured. Results may be informal, inconsistent, or not yet clearly defined. Data collection may be limited or uneven.

The focus on this pathway is:

- Developing a shared understanding of current processes
- Making sure the right people have access to the right information
- Beginning to understand customer and employee needs
- Understanding what results are critical to track and analyze performance
- Developing a clearer understanding of how work is currently done and where important processes or information may be missing or unclear

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: The organization is developing a shared understanding of what it is trying to accomplish and has created the visibility needed to begin disciplined improvement.

Developing Pathway

PROCESS DISCIPLINE

In the Developing Pathway, the organization is working to make its processes more consistent and reliable. Key processes are becoming more clearly defined, more repeatable, and less dependent on individual knowledge or effort. Leaders begin to document expectations of customers, employees, and key stakeholders, communicate priorities more regularly, and use information to guide decisions. Results are increasingly used to track and analyze organizational performance and support learning.

The focus on this pathway is:

- Consistency and reliability across the organization
- Clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations
- Growing confidence that processes will produce intended outcomes
- Results include Levels of current performance, Trends over time, and some Comparisons with other organizations in areas of importance
- Learning through analysis of fact-based data and feedback from customers and users to improve processes

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: The organization has reliable, well-run processes and uses data to improve them. Its results are getting better and more consistent, creating a solid foundation for aligning and integrating work across the entire system. It has satisfied customers and employees.

Maturing Pathway

SYSTEMS THINKING

In the Maturing Pathway, the organization's processes and results are integrated, well-aligned, and routinely evaluated for improvement. Key processes are standardized, integrated, and intentionally designed to support mission-driven strategic objectives. Leaders regularly review results to assess performance against customer, employee, and stakeholder expectations as well as the organization's strategic objectives. They examine Levels of current performance, Trends over time, and relevant Comparisons to other organizations to guide improvement, share learning, and inform fact-based decision-making aligned with the organization's mission and strategic priorities.

The focus on this pathway is:

- Alignment and integration across leadership, strategy, people, and operations
- Systematic cycles of improvement become commonplace, leading to continuous learning and improvement, sharing of best practices, and seeking opportunities for innovation
- Proactive identification of risks and opportunities
- Product, process, customer, employee, and outcome results that include Levels, Trends, and Comparisons which encourage higher performance are regularly reviewed, analyzed, and used to drive improvement and decision-making

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: The organization sustains strong performance, adapts intentionally to change, has (highly) engaged customers and employees, innovates, and continuously improves as an integrated system. Results are improving or sustaining high performance and are strategically relevant to the mission and long-term objectives. These organizations are often referred to as role models and highlighted for their best practices.