



2026 BALDRIGE CONFERENCE

The Rhythm of Excellence

Hosted by The Alliance for Performance Excellence and
Communities of Resilience and Excellence

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Where Discipline Meets Improvisation

Baldrige & Jazz Organizational Maturity Model

A Jazz-Inspired Path to Performance Excellence

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Baldrige & Jazz Organizational Maturity Model

Prepared For: 2026 Baldrige Conference at the Sheraton New Orleans Hotel

Hosted by [The Alliance for Performance Excellence](#) and

[Communities of Resilience and Excellence](#)

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Framework Alignment: 2023–2024 Baldrige Excellence Framework

(Business/Nonprofit)

Intended Audience: Leaders who are interested in creating learning organizations with the intelligence to drive creativity, innovation, high performance, resilience, high reliability, and long-term sustainability.

Internationally: These organizations are often recognized throughout their industry as national and global leaders.

The Baldrige Excellence Framework is a product of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program. This report is an independent interpretive work aligned to the published 2023–2024 criteria and is not an official NIST or Baldrige Program publication.

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Executive Summary

Excellence in organizational performance does not arrive by accident. It is earned through disciplined practice, deep listening, continuous learning, and the courage to innovate within structure — much like great jazz. *The Rhythm of Excellence: Baldrige Organizational Maturity Model* is a comprehensive diagnostic and developmental framework designed to help organizations at every stage of their performance journey understand where they are, envision where they need to go, and chart a clear, actionable path forward.

This report presents a five-level organizational maturity model rigorously aligned to the 2023–2024 Baldrige Excellence Framework for Business/Nonprofit — the gold standard in integrated leadership and management practice used by thousands of organizations across the United States and the world. The model uses a jazz ensemble as its conceptual metaphor because jazz, like organizational excellence, is the disciplined art of making structure and spontaneity inseparable.

BOTTOM LINE:

- When Baldrige systems, jazz behaviors, Resilience pillars, and HRO principles align, the organization becomes coherent, adaptive, reliable, and innovative — all at the same time.
- High performing leaders create learning organizations with the intelligence to drive creativity, innovation, high performance, resilience, reliability, and long term sustainability.
- These organizations are often recognized throughout their industry as national and global leaders.

Baldrige Works Everywhere

"Baldrige: The Rhythm of Excellence" refers to the concept that the Malcolm Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework is not a one-time project or a static checklist, but rather an ongoing, habitual process that creates a consistent "pulse" or tempo of continuous improvement within an organization.

It represents the integration of core values—such as systems perspective, visionary leadership, and data-driven decision-making—into the everyday operations and management "rhythm" of an organizational sustainable excellence.

The Baldrige Excellence Framework maps to jazz music, and every other disciplined human endeavor. It maps widely because it captures how people with a shared purpose, design and organize systems to create value, learn, and continually improve. Baldrige provides a framework that addresses shared issues, challenges, and opportunities across any human organization including:

- **Music & Dance (Performing Arts):** Can manage a symphony or ballet company's operations, audience satisfaction, and talent retention.
- **Physiology (Medical/Research Labs):** Can optimize clinical workflows, patient safety, and testing accuracy.
- **Philosophy & Sociology (Academic Departments):** Can assess faculty efficiency, student success outcomes, and departmental strategy.
- **Economics (Think Tanks/Institutes):** Can evaluate research output quality, stakeholder value, and financial sustainability.

- **Theater & Visual Arts:** Managing galleries, production logistics, and community engagement.
- **Engineering & Computer Science:** Streamlining lab development, project delivery, and safety protocols.
- **Public Policy & Government:** Guiding civic administration and public service execution via adaptations like [Communities of Resilience and Excellence](#)
- **Law & Jurisprudence:** Managing legal aid societies, court administration efficiency, and client satisfaction.



Baldrige categories define the organizational systems that produce reliable, measurable performance: leadership, governance, strategy, customers /stakeholders, measurement & knowledge, workforce development and engagement, operations, transformation, culture, resilience, continuity, and high reliability.

♪ **Baldrige Works Everywhere**

Baldrige maps are everywhere because it is a portable systems language for designing, measuring, learning, and improving any organized activity. It defines ***what*** matters (leadership, strategy, people, processes, measurement, results) and ***how*** the organization continually learns, improves, becomes more creative, innovative, resilient, highly reliable, and sustainable.

Baldrige measures how work gets done through an Approach, Deployment, Learning and Integration (ADLI) process **and evaluates how well results reflect that work** through measuring performance Levels, Trends, Comparisons, Integration (LwTCI).

Why Baldrige + Jazz?

The Baldrige Framework is built on a **Systems Perspective** — the idea that every part of a high-performing organization is interconnected, that leadership drives strategy, strategy serves customers, and measurement binds the whole system together in learning and improvement. Jazz works the same way. A jazz ensemble is not a collection of solo performers; it is a living system in which every musician listens, adapts, and contributes to something greater than any individual can produce alone.

The jazz metaphor is not merely decorative. It is structurally precise:

- **Melody** represents Visionary Leadership and Innovation — the Vision and the Why.
- **Harmony** represents Strategy and Workforce — the Collaboration and the Who.
- **Rhythm Section** represents Operations and Measurement — the Execution and the How.

Each of the Baldrige Core Values maps directly to a jazz structural element: the Systems Perspective is the Lead Sheet; Visionary Leadership is the Bandleader; Customer-Focused Excellence is Call and Response; Valuing People is the Solo and Comping; Agility and Resilience is Improvisation; Organizational Learning is the Woodshed and Jam Session; Focus on Innovation is Re-Harmonization; Management by Fact is Music Theory; Societal Contributions are Cultural Diplomacy; Ethics and Transparency are Musical Integrity; and Delivering Value and Results is The Pocket.

The Five-Level Model

The maturity model defines five discrete levels of organizational excellence, derived directly from Baldrige scoring bands:

Level	Name	Jazz Metaphor	Baldrige Score
1	Reactive	The Solo Practitioner	0–25%
2	Developing	Finding the Beat	26–50%
3	Systematic	Playing the Standards	51–65%
4	Aligned	The Ensemble	66–85%
5	Excellent	The Masterpiece Performance	86–100%

How to Use This Report

Begin with the Baldrige Framework Overview to ground your team in the criteria and core values. Then move to the Five Maturity Levels and identify your organization's current level in each of the seven Baldrige categories — your profile will rarely be uniform across all categories, and that asymmetry is itself valuable diagnostic data. Use the Implementation Roadmap to design your improvement journey in phases. Apply the KPIs and Evidence Framework to establish measurable progress markers. Convene a leadership team workshop using the Appendix agenda to build shared understanding and commitment.

Methodology

The Baldrige Organizational Maturity Model presented in this report was constructed through a systematic synthesis of the 2023–2024 Baldrige Excellence Framework criteria, scoring guidelines, and core values, organized into five discrete developmental levels and animated through the jazz ensemble metaphor as an integrating conceptual frame.

Framework Foundation

The model is grounded in the seven interconnected categories of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence: **Leadership, Strategy, Customers, Measurement/Analysis/Knowledge Management, Workforce, Operations, and Results**. These categories, taken together, constitute an integrated management system — not a checklist of isolated practices but a systems-level approach to organizational performance.

Scoring Methodology: ADLI and LTCI

Baldrige uses two complementary scoring dimensions:

- **ADLI (Process Scoring):** Approach — the soundness and systematic nature of methods; Deployment — the consistency and breadth of implementation; Learning — the cycles of evaluation and improvement; Integration — the alignment and linkage across the system.
- **LTCI (Results Scoring):** Levels — absolute performance data; Trends — direction and rate of performance change over time; Comparisons — performance relative to competitors and benchmarks; Integration — the relevance and completeness of results across stakeholders.

Maturity Level Construction

The five maturity levels were derived from the Baldrige scoring bands as follows:

Level	Name	Baldrige Score Band	ADLI Characterization
1	Reactive	0–25%	Beginning — anecdotal, reactive, little deployment
2	Developing	26–50%	Early — some systematic approaches, inconsistent deployment
3	Systematic	51–65%	Systematic — sound approaches, consistent deployment, learning cycles beginning
4	Aligned	66–85%	Integrated — well-deployed, learning cycles producing improvement, strong integration
5	Excellent	86–100%	Role model — exemplary, fully integrated, benchmark performance, continuous innovation



Jazz Metaphor Application

The jazz ensemble metaphor was applied as an organizing conceptual frame — not as decoration but as a structural parallel that illuminates the nature of organizational development at each level. The metaphor was chosen because jazz, uniquely among musical forms, requires both rigorous mastery of theory (the equivalent of process discipline) and the capacity for improvisation within structure (the equivalent of innovation and agility). An organization's excellence journey mirrors a jazz musician's journey from practicing alone in a room to performing transcendent ensemble music at Carnegie Hall.

Baldrige Framework Overview

Systems Perspective: The Lead Sheet



The Baldrige Excellence Framework is built on a foundational principle: **Systems Perspective**.

An organization is not a collection of departments; it is an integrated system in which leadership, strategy, customers, workforce, operations, measurement, and results are

interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The Baldrige systems model is often depicted in three interlocking groups:

Triad	Categories	Jazz Parallel
Leadership Triad	1. Leadership, 2. Strategy, 3. Customers	The Front Line: Bandleader, Composer, Audience
Results Triad	5. Workforce, 6. Operations, 7. Results	The Rhythm Section: Players, Instruments, The Music
Foundation	4. Measurement, Analysis & Knowledge Management	Music Theory: the shared language binding everything
Integration Core	Organizational Profile + All Categories	The Lead Sheet: the shared chart every musician plays from

The Seven Criteria Categories

1. Leadership (120 points)

How senior leaders set vision and values, create an environment for performance excellence, and deploy leadership throughout the organization. Covers governance, legal and ethical behavior, and societal contributions.

2. Strategy (85 points)

How the organization develops strategic objectives and action plans, including how it addresses strategic challenges and opportunities, assesses risks, and plans for workforce and key operational needs.

3. Customers (85 points)

How the organization listens to customers, builds relationships, determines customer requirements and expectations, and uses that knowledge to improve products, services, and the customer experience.

4. Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management (90 points)

How the organization selects, collects, analyzes, manages, and improves data, information, and organizational knowledge assets to support decision-making, innovation, and performance improvement.

5. Workforce (85 points)

How the organization builds and manages an effective and engaged workforce — including recruiting, developing, engaging, compensating, and retaining talent, and building a culture of high performance.

6. Operations (85 points)

How the organization designs, manages, and improves its key work processes and supply network to deliver products and services that create customer and stakeholder value.

7. Results (450 points)

What the organization achieves in product/process performance, customer outcomes, workforce outcomes, leadership and governance results, and financial/marketplace performance. Results carry the highest point weight in the Baldrige model.

The 11 Core Values and Concepts — Jazz Mapping

Core Value	Description	Jazz Structural Element
Systems Perspective	Managing all components as a unified whole	The Lead Sheet
Visionary Leadership	Senior leaders set direction, create customer focus, demonstrate values	The Bandleader
Customer-Focused Excellence	Quality and performance judged by customers	Call and Response
Valuing People	Committed to the well-being and development of all workforce members	The Solo & Comping

Core Value	Description	Jazz Structural Element
Agility and Resilience	Capacity for rapid change, operational flexibility	Improvisation
Organizational Learning	Continuous improvement through learning cycles	The Woodshed & Jam Session
Focus on Success and Innovation	Sustained performance through breakthrough innovation	Re-Harmonization
Management by Fact	Data-driven decisions using reliable performance information	Music Theory
Societal Contributions	Leadership in fulfilling public responsibilities	Cultural Diplomacy
Ethics and Transparency	Interactions governed by honesty, integrity, and accountability	Musical Integrity
Delivering Value and Results	Focus on creating value for all stakeholders	The Pocket

The ADLI Scoring Framework

Every process category in Baldrige is evaluated on four dimensions, collectively known as ADLI:

- **Approach:** How sound and systematic is the method? Is it repeatable, prevention-based, and effective?
- **Deployment:** How broadly and consistently is the approach applied across the organization?
- **Learning:** Are evaluation and improvement cycles embedded? Is innovation occurring?
- **Integration:** Are approaches harmonized across departments, processes, and categories — supporting the whole system?

♪ **Jazz Alignment: Jazz as a Living Model of Baldrige**

A jazz ensemble is perhaps the most vivid living metaphor for the Baldrige Systems Perspective. Each musician brings a developed approach (ADLI: Approach) to their instrument. The group deploys that approach together in performance (Deployment). After each gig, the musicians listen to the recording, identify what worked and what didn't, and return to the woodshed to improve (Learning). Over time, their individual voices integrate into a shared sound that transcends any individual contribution (Integration). This is not metaphor — it is the Baldrige process scoring model in sonic form.

The Five Maturity Levels and the Role of Leadership

The following five sections describe each maturity level in comprehensive detail, including behavioral characteristics across all seven Baldrige categories, sample evidence statements, improvement actions, jazz insight, and a full maturity indicators table. Organizations are encouraged to score themselves independently in each of the seven categories — it is common and expected to be at different levels in different areas.

Maturity depends on leadership of the organization, these five maturity levels communicate three essential truths about organizational excellence, alignment, and adaptability:

1. Excellence is a System, Not a Silo

The images show that leadership, strategy, customers, workforce, operations, data, resilience, and culture are interdependent — like instruments in a band. A CEO sees immediately:

CEO TRUTH: "If one system is out of tune, the whole performance suffers."

2. Alignment Is the CEO's Primary Job

The golden arrows, musical notes, and "Systems in Sync" message reinforce that alignment is not accidental. A CEO must ensure:

- Strategy aligns with operations
- Culture aligns with leadership
- Data aligns with decisions
- Workforce aligns with mission

Just like a bandleader ensures the ensemble plays the same song.

3. Adaptability is the New Competitive Advantage

Jazz is improvisational — but not chaotic. It is structured flexibility. That is exactly what modern organizations need:

- Respond to disruption
- Adjust to customer needs
- Innovate continuously
- Maintain reliability under pressure

CEO TAKEAWAY: The images show that resilience + innovation are not opposites — they are partners.

What We Learn About the Baldrige Excellence Framework

Across the five images, Baldrige becomes clear as a coherent performance system:

- A. Baldrige is a Leadership System** - Leadership sets tone, tempo, and expectations — just like the band leader.
- B. Baldrige is a Strategy Execution System** - Strategy is not a document — it is a rhythm that must be felt across the organization.
- C. Baldrige is a Learning System** - Measurement, analysis, and knowledge management are the "sheet music" that guide performance.
- D. Baldrige is a Workforce Engagement System** - People are the musicians — their engagement determines the quality of the performance.
- E. Baldrige is a Culture System** - Culture is the stage everything happens on. If the stage is unstable, the performance collapses.
- F. Baldrige is a Resilience & Reliability System** - The inclusion of Resilience, Emergency Preparedness, HRO, and Continuity of Operations shows that excellence requires consistency under pressure, not just good days.

What We Learn from the Structure of Jazz

Jazz is the perfect metaphor for modern organizational excellence because it teaches:

- A. Mastery + Improvisation = High Performance** Jazz musicians practice relentlessly — then improvise confidently. Organizations must standardize what must be consistent and innovate where flexibility is needed.
- B. Listening Is as Important as Playing** In jazz, musicians constantly listen to each other. In organizations: customer listening, workforce listening, environmental scanning, data listening. Listening is a leadership competency.
- C. Roles Are Distinct, but Interdependent** - Each musician has a unique role — but the music only works when roles integrate. Same with Baldrige systems.
- D. Alignment Creates Flow** - When the rhythm section, melody, and harmony align, the music flows. When leadership, strategy, operations, and culture align, the organization flows.
- E. Culture Shapes Performance** - Jazz clubs have a vibe — an atmosphere that shapes the music. Organizational culture is the same.

What the Baldrige–Jazz Alignment Shows

The Baldrige categories provide the organizational architecture (roles, processes, metrics, continuity) while the jazz structure supplies the human operating practices (inspiration, listening, improvisation, interplay). Aligning both yields reliable creativity: faster learning, safer experimentation, and stronger resilience — value that is measurable for CEOs, senior leaders, and the workforce.

Stakeholder Value: Value to CEO / Senior Leaders / Workforce

Each Baldrige system maps to a jazz behavior that generates measurable value for the CEO, senior leaders, and the workforce simultaneously:

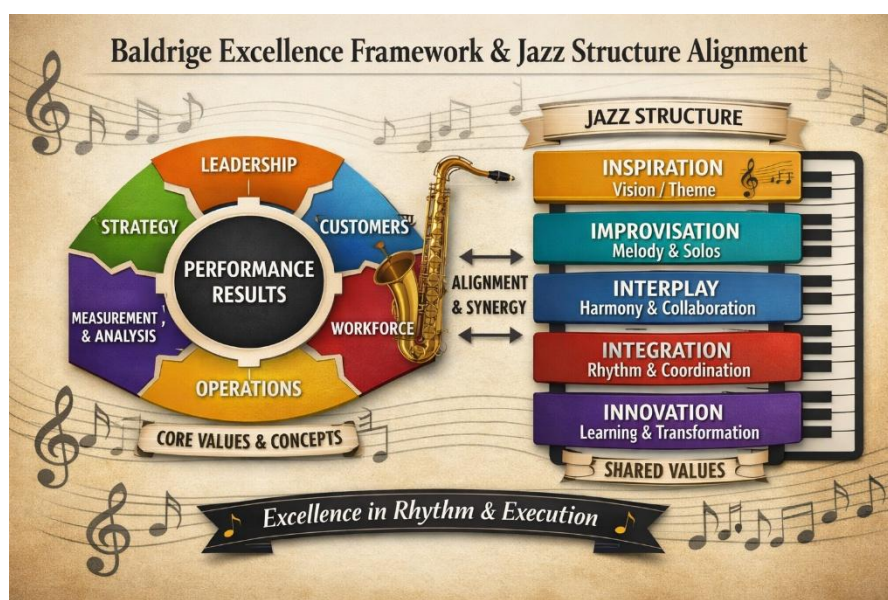
Baldrige Category	Jazz Element	Value to CEO / Senior Leaders / Workforce
Leadership System	Bandleader / Inspire / Vision & Theme	CEO: strategic clarity; Leaders: decision alignment; Workforce: psychological safety.
Governance System	Direction & Form	CEO: risk control; Leaders: clear decision rights; Workforce: predictable boundaries.
Strategy System	Motif & Improvisation Melody & Solos	CEO: adaptive strategy; Leaders: pivot capability; Workforce: empowered discretion.
Measurement & Knowledge	Measure & Refine	CEO: evidence for investment; Leaders: course-correction signals; Workforce: actionable feedback.
Operational Excellence / Continuity	Shared Rhythm / Bassline Interplay	CEO: reliable delivery; Leaders: operational predictability; Workforce: consistent workflows.

Resilience / Emergency Preparedness	Rehearsed Cues / Adaptive Soloing	CEO: reduced downtime; Leaders: faster recovery; Workforce: practiced response skills.
Workforce Development & Culture	Practice & Interplay	CEO: talent retention; Leaders: bench strength; Workforce: mastery and engagement.

CORE INSIGHT: Baldrige systems fail without the human behaviors that jazz models — listening, adapting, coordinating, and innovating.

Level 1: Reactive — "The Solo Practitioner"

Baldrige Score Range: 0–25% | ADLI Characterization: Beginning / Anecdotal



This is a rich visual showing how the Baldrige Excellence Framework aligns with the structure of jazz. It blends organizational systems with musical flow, connecting:

Baldrige Basis: Leadership · Strategy · Customers · Workforce · Operations · Measurement & Analysis · Core Values

Jazz Parallel: Inspiration · Improvisation · Interplay · Integration · Innovation

♪ **Jazz Metaphor: The Practice Room**

A musician playing alone in a practice room — no ensemble coordination, improvising without a shared key or tempo. There is real talent here, but it has not yet been shaped by the discipline of playing with others, listening to feedback, or responding to an audience. Before the ensemble can play together, each musician must first master their instrument. Foundational discipline is the prerequisite to improvisation.

Level 1 Description

On the left, the six Baldrige categories and results (Leadership, Strategy, Customer Relationships, Measurement & Knowledge, Workforce, Operations,

On the right, structuring a jazz ensemble is the ultimate blueprint for creative teamwork. The bandleader provides direction and unity, the bassist anchors the rhythm, the drummer drives collaboration and pulse, the trumpet explores improvisation, and the saxophone harmonizes and bridges the ensemble's collective expression.

At the center, a bold arrow labeled “**Alignment**” and “**Strategy**” connects the two sides, showing how disciplined systems and creative flow harmonize.

Jazz is the perfect metaphor for organizational excellence

Jazz is the perfect metaphor for organizational excellence. A jazz ensemble succeeds because every musician listens, adapts, and contributes to a shared purpose. Baldrige organizations do the same. They balance structure with improvisation, discipline with creativity, and individual mastery with collective

Baldrige and Jazz Mapping

Baldrige Category	Jazz Element	Core function	What aligns
Leadership	Inspiration	Sets direction and tone	Vision → theme → organizational purpose
Strategy	Improvisation	Plans that allow adaptive moves	Strategic chart + rules for local adaptation
Customers	Interplay	External feedback that shapes performance	Audience cues → product/service adjustments
Workforce	Interplay	The performers who execute and collaborate	Skills, trust, rehearsal → team cohesion
Operations	Integration	The rhythm and coordination that enable flow	Processes, cadence, continuity
Measurement & Analysis	Harmony	The chord structure that keeps everyone in tune	Data as real-time cues and corrective signals
Learning & Improvement	Innovation	Repertoire growth through practice and experiments	Small bets → scaled improvements

Baldrige Category	Jazz Element	Core function	What aligns
Resilience / HRO / Continuity	Rhythm Section Stability	Sustains performance under stress	Reliability, redundancy, rehearsed responses
Culture	Venue Vibe	The environment that enables risk and creativity	Norms, incentives, rituals that shape behavior

Detailed mappings and why they matter

- **Leadership → Inspiration:** Leaders set the “song” and the emotional purpose. Clear, compelling vision focuses effort and makes tradeoffs obvious.
- **Strategy → Improvisation:** A strategy is the chart; improvisation is how teams adapt to new information while staying within the form. Good strategy defines boundaries for safe experimentation.
- **Customers → Interplay:** Customers are the audience and co-creators. Their feedback changes phrasing, tempo, and emphasis; listening loops convert signals into tactical changes.
- **Workforce → Interplay:** Musicians listen and respond; employees must do the same. Investment in rehearsal (training) and psychological safety produces better, faster coordination.
- **Operations → Integration:** The rhythm section (ops, continuity, HRO) provides the steady beat that lets solos happen without collapse. Reliability is the precondition for creative risk.
- **Measurement → Harmony:** Data and analytics are the chord progressions that reveal when the ensemble is in tune or off key; metrics should guide real-time adjustments, not only postmortems.

- **Learning → Innovation:** Practice plus structured experimentation produces new riffs that can be adopted across the organization. Learning systems turn one-off successes into repeatable capabilities.
- **Culture → Venue:** The stage's vibe determines whether musicians take risks. Culture shapes incentives, norms, and what behaviors are visible and rewarded.

Characteristics by Baldrige Category

1. Leadership

Senior leaders are reactive and crisis driven. There is no clear mission or vision consistently deployed across the organization. Decision-making is centralized in a small number of individuals. Leadership time is dominated by firefighting rather than direction-setting. Governance structures are minimal or informal. Ethical standards exist informally but are not codified or systematically reinforced.

2. Strategy

Little to no formal strategic planning exists. Organizational direction is set informally and communicated inconsistently. Short-term thinking dominates, with no multi-year planning horizon. Action plans are absent or ad hoc. Risk identification is informal and reactive rather than proactive.

3. Customers

Customer listening is ad hoc and unsystematic. Complaints are handled reactively when they surface. There is no customer segmentation, no formal Voice of the Customer (VOC) process, and no mechanism for translating customer feedback into improvement. The organization defines quality by its own standards rather than customer requirements.

4. Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

Data is collected inconsistently and often in silos. Decision-making is largely anecdotal and experience based. There is no formal performance review process, no data quality framework, and no knowledge management system. Organizational learning does not occur systematically.

5. Workforce

The workforce culture is compliance-based — employees do what is required but are not engaged in improvement or innovation. Turnover is often high. Employee development plans are absent or informal. Workforce engagement is not measured. Hiring is reactive rather than strategic.

6. Operations

Key processes are undocumented, inconsistent, and highly dependent on individual knowledge rather than organizational systems. Frequent rework is accepted as normal. Supply-network management is informal. There is no systematic approach to process improvement, and innovation in operations is rare.

7. Results

Limited performance data exists. Trend analysis is absent. Comparisons to competitors or benchmarks are not conducted. What results are tracked tend to be financial outputs only, with little measurement of process, customer, or workforce outcomes.

Sample Evidence at Level 1

- "We handle problems as they arise."
- No formal performance review cycles exist.
- No standardized decision-making process.
- No two-way communication at all levels of the organization in place.
- Customer satisfaction is tracked only through complaint volume.

- Process documentation exists for compliance purposes only, not improvement.
- Strategic planning is an annual conversation among senior leaders, not a deployed process.

Suggested Actions: From the Practice Room to the Rehearsal Hall

- Establish and communicate a clear organizational mission and vision.
- Create basic process documentation for the three to five most critical operational processes.
- Begin systematic data collection with a simple balanced scorecard (five to ten key measures).
- Implement quarterly leadership reviews with structured agenda and action tracking.
- Launch a basic employee engagement survey and commit to acting on findings.
- Identify two or three key customer segments and initiate a formal listening mechanism.

Level 1 Maturity Indicators Table

Baldrige Category	Level 1 Behavioral Descriptor	Typical ADLI Score
1. Leadership	Reactive, crisis-driven leadership; no consistent mission/vision deployment; governance informal	0–10%
2. Strategy	No formal strategic planning; goals short-term and informal; no action plans deployed	0–10%
3. Customers	Ad hoc listening; complaints only; no segmentation; no VOC process	0–15%
4. Measurement	Data collected sporadically; anecdotal decisions; no knowledge management	0–10%
5. Workforce	Compliance culture; high turnover; no development plans; engagement not measured	0–15%
6. Operations	Undocumented processes; frequent rework; no supplier management; no improvement cycles	0–10%

Baldrige Category	Level 1 Behavioral Descriptor	Typical ADLI Score
7. Results	Little data; no trends; no benchmarks; financial outputs only	0–15%

Level 2: Developing “Finding the Beat”

Baldrige Score Range: 26–50% | ADLI Characterization: Early Systematic / Inconsistent Deployment



Baldrige Basis: Leadership · Strategy · Measurement & Analysis · Operations · Learning & Improvement

Jazz Parallel: Inspiration · Improvisation · Interplay · Innovation · Rhythm & Flexibility

♪ Jazz Metaphor: The First Rehearsal

Musicians beginning to rehearse together — learning the chord changes, finding a shared pulse, occasional syncopation. There are moments of real beauty, but also collisions when players don't listen carefully enough. The band has found the key and tempo. Now it must learn to listen to each other — a "big ears" culture begins here. Progress is real, but consistency is still the challenge.

Core thesis: Structure without practiced human dynamics yields compliance; dynamics without structure yields chaos. Combining Baldrige's systems with jazz-style behaviors produces **repeatable excellence that can still pivot creatively.**

Why it matters: Organizations that codify guardrails (roles, metrics, processes) while deliberately training people to *listen, improvise, and respond* accelerate innovation and improve customer experience.

Baldrige supplies the organizational architecture (leadership, strategy, measurement, workforce, operations); jazz supplies the human dynamics (inspiration, improvisation, interplay) that animate those systems — together they create a disciplined, adaptive engine for sustained innovation and performance.

The **Baldrige Excellence** Framework defines a comprehensive set of organizational systems and criteria—leadership, strategy, customers, measurement/knowledge, workforce, operations, and results—*that guide continuous improvement and resilience*. **Jazz structure** models how people behave inside those systems: leaders set the groove, performers improvise within form, players listen and respond, and audiences (customers) provide immediate feedback. This behavioral layer turns processes into adaptive performance.

Comparison table (key attributes)

Baldrige Category	Jazz Element	What it Enables
Leadership / Governance	Inspire & Lead & Setting the Grove	Clear vision and motivational direction
Strategy / Planning	Strategize & Improvise & Playing the Melody	Long-range plan with adaptive flexibility
Measurement & Knowledge / Tracking Progress	Measure & Refine & Interplay	Rapid feedback loops and learning
Workforce Development	Develop & Perform & Jamming Together	Skill mastery and collaborative virtuosity
Operations / Executing the Plan	Innovation & Shared Rhythm & Flexibility & Creating Something New	Reliable execution and timing

Practical lessons and recommendations

1. **Create “jam sessions” for innovation.** Reserve time/space for cross-functional teams to prototype ideas within defined constraints; treat these as low-risk experiments measured by Baldrige-style metrics. **Bold:** designate experiments as learning investments.
2. **Embed fast feedback loops.** Connect customer signals and operational metrics to team retrospectives so measurement drives immediate refinement. **Bold:** shorten the measure→learn→adapt cycle.
3. **Train in musical skills.** Invest in listening, call-and-response communication, and role clarity—these interpersonal skills are the “technique” that enables safe improvisation.

- **Over-structuring** kills spontaneity; **under-structuring** increases operational risk. Balance by codifying decision rights, success metrics, and escalation paths while protecting creative space. **Measure both outcomes and learning velocity**, not only compliance.

RISK & GUARDRAIL: Risk: Over-structuring kills spontaneity; under-structuring increases operational risk. Balance by codifying decision rights, success metrics, and escalation paths while protecting creative space. Measure both outcomes and learning velocity, not only compliance.

Characteristics by Baldrige Category

1. Leadership

Mission and vision are stated but inconsistently deployed across the organization. Some communication channels have been established, and senior leaders are beginning to articulate values. Leadership still tends to be directive rather than participative. Governance frameworks are forming. Some ethics and compliance awareness exist, but accountability systems are not fully developed.

2. Strategy

A basic strategic planning process exists, typically annually. Short-term goals have some associated metrics. Action plans are developed for major initiatives but are not consistently linked to operational measures or communicated throughout the organization. Risk management is beginning to be addressed.

3. Customers

Some customer listening methods are in place, typically an annual satisfaction survey. Basic customer segmentation is beginning. Complaint data is tracked and used for some corrective

action. Customer requirements are partially understood but not systematically translated into service or product improvements.

4. Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

Performance measures are in place in some functional areas. Limited benchmarking is occurring. Data review happens but is often siloed and not linked to decision-making at all levels. Knowledge management is informal — expertise resides in individuals rather than organizational systems.

5. Workforce

Some training programs exist, primarily compliance and on-boarding. Beginning workforce engagement efforts are underway. Performance management is in place but may not be consistently applied. Compensation and recognition programs exist but may not be well-linked to organizational priorities.

6. Operations

Key processes are identified and partially documented. Some improvement cycles are occurring, typically in response to problems rather than proactively. Supply chain relationships are managed transactionally. Some quality management practices are in place.

7. Results

Performance data exists in silos — financial, operational, and customer data is not integrated into a coherent performance picture. Some trends are tracked over time. Comparisons to industry peers are limited. Results are beginning to show improvement in some areas.

Sample Evidence at Level 2

- An annual strategic planning process is in place with documented goals.
- A customer satisfaction survey is deployed at least annually.
- Key process flowcharts are documented for major operations.
- Quarterly business reviews occur with senior leadership.

- An employee performance appraisal system is in place.

Suggested Actions: From Rehearsal to the First Gig

- Align strategy deployment to all organizational levels through cascading goals.
- Establish a systematic Voice of the Customer process with multiple listening methods.
- Begin benchmarking against industry peers in at least three key performance areas.
- Create cross-functional improvement teams to break down silos.
- Develop a workforce engagement plan with measurable targets and action commitments.
- Build an integrated performance dashboard linking strategy to operations to results.

Level 2 Maturity Indicators Table

Baldrige Category	Level 2 Behavioral Descriptor	Typical ADLI Score
1. Leadership	Mission/vision stated but inconsistently deployed; some communication channels; forming governance	25–35%
2. Strategy	Annual planning process; basic goals with some metrics; limited action plan deployment	25–40%
3. Customers	Annual satisfaction survey; some segmentation; complaint tracking; partial VOC	30–45%
4. Measurement	Measures in place in some areas; limited benchmarking; siloed data; informal knowledge management	25–40%
5. Workforce	Training programs exist; beginning engagement efforts; performance appraisals in place	30–45%
6. Operations	Key processes identified and partially documented; some improvement cycles; transactional supplier management	25–40%
7. Results	Data exists in silos; some trends tracked; limited comparisons; early improvements in some areas	25–40%

Level 3: Systematic “Playing the Standards”

Baldrige Score Range: 51–65% | ADLI Characterization: Systematic / Consistent Deployment / Learning Cycles Emerging



Baldrige Basis: Leadership System · Governance · Communication · Strategy · Customer Relationship · Measurement & Knowledge Management · Workforce Engagement · Operations · Transformation · Innovation · Culture

Jazz Parallel: Inspire & Lead · Communicate & Connect · Strategize & Improve · Engage & Delight · Measure & Refine · Develop & Perform · Transform & Adapt · Learn & Create · Shared Rhythm & Values

♪ Jazz Metaphor: The Jazz Standard

The ensemble competently performing jazz standards — consistent, reliable, audience-pleasing, but still following the written chart. "Autumn Leaves" sounds the way it is supposed to sound. The musicians are technically sound, the timing is right, the harmony is correct. The band plays the standard beautifully. Now comes the harder work — learning to improvise around it, to find the unique voice within the structure. Competence is not yet mastery.

Baldrige categories map to jazz structure as complementary systems: Baldrige supplies the organizational scaffolding (leadership, strategy, operations, measurement, workforce) while jazz supplies the human, improvisational behaviors (inspiration, communication, improvisation, audience engagement). Together they create a disciplined yet adaptive system for sustained innovation and performance.

- **Core insight:** *High performance requires both structure and improvisation.* Baldrige supplies the governance, metrics, and processes that reduce risk and scale success; jazz supplies the human practices—trust, listening, rapid adaptation—that turn processes into creative outcomes.
- **Practical implication:** Embed **feedback loops** (measurement + audience/customer signals) and **safe improvisation zones** (pilot projects, empowered teams) so strategy and operations can adapt without losing control.
- **Organizational payoff:** Combining disciplined systems with practiced improvisation increases **resilience, innovation velocity, and employee engagement**—the same dynamics that let jazz ensembles innovate while staying coherent.

Explanation of the Interrelationship

The **Baldrige Excellence Framework** defines organizational systems—leadership, strategy, customers, measurement, workforce, operations—that create repeatable, measurable performance and continuous improvement. **Jazz structure** (vision/inspiration, call-and-response communication, planned forms with improvisation, shared rhythm and values) models how people enact those systems in real time: leaders inspire, teams communicate, performers improvise within agreed forms, and audiences provide feedback. The mapping is not literal but functional: **Baldrige gives *architecture*; jazz gives the *behavioral dynamics* that animate that architecture.**

Comparison table

Baldrige Category	Jazz Element	What it Enables
Leadership System	Inspire & Lead	Clear vision; motivational direction
Strategy System	Strategize & Improvise Planning & Fungibility	Plan with adaptive flexibility Assets or budget allocations are mutually interchangeable
Communication System	Communicate & Connect Harmony & Expression	Real-time coordination and cues
Customer Relationship System	Engage & Delight Audience Connection	Tie customer and performance data to immediate team learning cycle
Measurement & Knowledge	Measure & Refine Feedback & Insight	Feedback loops and iterative learning
Workforce Development	Develop & Perform Talent & Mastery	Skill growth and mastery
Operations System	Shared Rhythm	Reliable execution and timing

Baldrige Category	Jazz Element	What it Enables
Transformation Management	Transform & Adapt Change & Innovation	Safe space for experimentation

Recommendations and next steps

- **Make improvisation explicit.** Create roles, times, and places where teams can experiment (innovation sprints, “jam sessions”) while using Baldrige-style metrics to evaluate outcomes. **Bold:** designate experiments as low-risk learning investments.
- **Strengthen real-time communication.** Adopt short, structured rituals (standups, huddles) modeled on musical call-and-response to speed coordination.
- **Close the feedback loop.** Tie customer and performance data to immediate team learning cycles so measurement drives refinement, not just reporting.

Risks and trade-offs

- Over-structuring kills spontaneity; under-structuring increases chaos. Balance by **codifying guardrails** (roles, decision rights, metrics) and protecting creative space inside them. **Important:** measuring both outcomes and learning velocity, not only compliance.

Characteristics by Baldrige Category

1. Leadership

Consistent leadership communication channels are established and used regularly. Core values are embedded in organizational culture to a meaningful degree. Senior leaders model the values they espouse. Succession planning is beginning to be addressed. Governance is

formalized and functional. The organization is beginning to demonstrate ethical leadership beyond compliance.

2. Strategy

A systematic strategic planning process with a three- to five-year horizon is in place. Action plans are deployed to key functional areas. Strategic risks are identified and incorporated into planning. Performance metrics are linked to strategic objectives. The organization monitors its competitive environment and adjusts plans accordingly.

3. Customers

Multiple Voice of the Customer methods are employed — surveys, focus groups, social listening, complaint analysis. Customer segmentation is well-defined. A complaint management system is in place with tracking and resolution metrics. Customer journey mapping has been completed for key segments. Customer insights are systematically used in service design and improvement.

4. Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

An integrated measurement system exists with regular performance reviews at multiple organizational levels. Comparative data from benchmarks and competitors is used in decision-making. Knowledge management practices are emerging — best practices are documented and shared. Data quality processes are in place.

5. Workforce

Systematic workforce development programs are aligned to organizational needs. Engagement surveys are conducted, results are shared, and action plans are developed and tracked. Recognition programs are in place and valued. Workforce capability planning addresses anticipated needs. Leadership development programs are emerging.

6. Operations

Well-documented key processes are in place and consistently followed. Process improvement cycles — such as Plan-Do-Check-Act or Lean/Six Sigma — are actively employed. Supplier management is systematic with performance standards and regular reviews. Process performance measures are tracked and used for improvement. Some innovation in operations is occurring.

7. Results

Good performance data exists across most Baldrige categories. Positive trends are evident in key areas. Comparisons to industry averages are routinely used. Results are beginning to demonstrate favorable performance relative to peers in several categories.

Sample Evidence at Level 3

- A balanced scorecard is deployed across all major functional areas.
- An annual Baldrige self-assessment is conducted with leadership team.
- Customer journey mapping has been completed for the top two customer segments.
- Active Six Sigma Green Belt projects are underway in operations.
- A formal supplier scorecard is in use with quarterly reviews.
- Leadership development programs are in place for manager-level and above.

Suggested Actions: From the Standard to the Improvisation

- Strengthen organizational learning cycles — after-action reviews, improvement sprints, and best-practice harvesting.
- Increase benchmarking to world-class and best-in-class organizations, not just industry averages.
- Integrate improvement efforts across organizational silos through cross-functional leadership.
- Expand and formalize the innovation pipeline with dedicated resources and governance.

- Develop leadership capability at all organizational levels — not just senior leaders.
- Apply for a state Baldrige Alliance assessment to gain external perspective.

Level 3 Maturity Indicators Table

Baldrige Category	Level 3 Behavioral Descriptor	Typical ADLI Score
1. Leadership	Consistent communication; values embedded in culture; succession planning emerging; formalized governance	50–60%
2. Strategy	3–5 year planning horizon; action plans deployed; strategic risks assessed; metrics linked to strategy	50–65%
3. Customers	Multiple VOC methods; customer segmentation; complaint management; customer journey mapping	55–65%
4. Measurement	Integrated measurement system; regular reviews; comparative data used; knowledge management emerging	50–60%
5. Workforce	Systematic development; engagement surveys with action plans; recognition programs; capability planning	50–65%
6. Operations	Documented processes; improvement cycles active; systematic supplier management; process measures tracked	50–60%
7. Results	Data across most categories; positive trends in key areas; comparison to industry averages; favorable peer comparisons beginning	50–60%

Recommendations and next steps

- **Make improvisation explicit.** Create roles, times, and places where teams can experiment (innovation sprints, “jam sessions”) while using Baldrige-style metrics to evaluate outcomes. **Bold:** designate experiments as low-risk learning investments.
- **Strengthen real-time communication.** Adopt short, structured rituals (standups, huddles) modeled on musical call-and-response to speed coordination.

- **Close the feedback loop.** Tie customer and performance data to immediate team learning cycles so measurement drives refinement, not just reporting.

Risks and trade-offs

- Over-structuring kills spontaneity; under-structuring increases chaos. Balance by **codifying guardrails** (roles, decision rights, metrics) and protecting creative space inside them. **Important:** measure both outcomes and learning velocity, not only compliance.
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Level 4: Aligned "The Ensemble"

Baldrige Score Range: 66–85% | ADLI Characterization: Integrated / Deep Learning / Organizational Alignment



Baldrige Basis: Leadership · Strategy · Customers · Measurement & Knowledge · Workforce · Operations · Results + Resilience · High Reliability Organization (HRO) · Emergency Preparedness · Data Integrity · Continuity of Operations

Jazz Parallel: Bandleader · Rhythm & Groove · Collaboration · Sensitivity to Operations · Commitment to Resilience

♪ **Jazz Metaphor: Trading Fours**

A tight jazz ensemble — each player listening to the others, trading solos, supporting each colleague; the music is more than the sum of its parts. "Comping" — the art of supporting others to shine — defines this level. The pianist comps behind the saxophone solo; the bassist walks beneath the piano improvisation; the drummer responds to every musical gesture. The organization has learned that sustainable excellence comes from making every player better. The whole is not merely greater than the sum of its parts; the whole has become something qualitatively different from any individual contribution.

Combining **all Baldrige systems** with **jazz-style practices** yields an operating model that is both **robust** and **adaptive**. Baldrige supplies the governance, metrics, and continuity that protect value; jazz supplies the human practices—listening, improvisation, interplay—that convert those systems into continuous innovation. Organizations that intentionally align systems and behaviors gain faster learning cycles, higher engagement, and greater resilience while maintaining operational reliability.

Jazz Metaphor: The band can handle disruptions, broken strings, missing musicians, unexpected changes—without losing the groove. They adapt instantly and maintain performance quality.

Interrelationship Overview

Baldrige systems supply the organizational architecture: roles, processes, metrics, and guardrails that make performance repeatable and auditable. **Jazz structure** supplies the human dynamics: inspiration, listening, improvisation, and interplay that let people adapt and create in real time. The two are complementary: Baldrige defines **where** the organization must perform and how success is measured; jazz models **how** people coordinate, adapt, and innovate inside those boundaries. Together they produce **reliable creativity** —the ability to deliver consistent results while rapidly responding to novel conditions.

Functional mapping: every Baldrige system → jazz behavior → practical effect

Baldrige System	Jazz Element	What it Enables
Leadership System	Bandleader / Inspire	Clear purpose and psychological safety
Governance System	Direction & Form	Decision rights and safe boundaries
Communication System	Call-and-response	Fast, low-friction coordination
Strategy System	Motif + Structure	Shared plan with room for solos
Customer Relationship System	Audience Connection	Real-time external feedback shaping choices
Measurement, Analysis & Knowledge Management	Measure & Refine	Data-driven iteration and learning
Employee Development & Engagement	Practice & Mastery	Skill depth that supports confident improvisation
Operational Excellence System	Shared Rhythm	Reliable execution that supports variation

Baldrige System	Jazz Element	What it Enables
Health & Safety System	Steady Groove	Risk controls that protect experimentation
Environmental Management	Context Awareness	Sensitivity to external constraints and cues
Community Support System	Call-and-Response with Audience	Social license and reciprocal feedback
Emergency Preparedness System	Rehearsed Cues	Rapid, practiced responses under stress
Data Integrity & Security System	Trusted Scorekeeping	Accurate signals for decisions and improvisation
Resilience System	Adaptive Soloing	Recovering and pivoting under disruption
High Reliability Organization	Tight Ensemble	Error-resistant coordination under pressure
Transformation System	Theme Development	Scaling successful riffs into new forms
Continuity of Operations	Bassline / Foundation	Sustains core functions during change
Performance Improvement	Iterative Jamming	Continuous small experiments and refinements
Culture	Shared Groove & Values	Norms that enable listening, trust, and risk-taking

What we learn — key insights

- **Structure creates safe space for creativity.** Clear guardrails reduce the downside of experimentation and let teams improvise without systemic risk.

- **Practice converts freedom into quality.** Deliberate skill development and rehearsals make improvisation productive rather than chaotic.
 - **Feedback loops are essential.** Short, visible measurement cycles turn improvisation into validated learning.
 - **Coordination beats command in complexity.** Distributed, real-time coordination modeled on musical interplay outperforms rigid top-down control when conditions change quickly.
 - **Design for dual modes.** Explicitly switch between “reliable execution” and “creative exploration” rather than treating them as separate programs.
-

Key Insights

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- **Design for dual modes.** Explicitly switch between "reliable execution" and "creative exploration" rather than treating them as separate programs.

Recommended Next Steps

1. Run structured jam sessions — Time-boxed experiments with a hypothesis, success metrics, and rollback plan.
2. Embed rapid feedback loops — Route customer and operational signals into daily team rituals and decision gates.
3. Codify guardrails — Define decision rights, risk thresholds, and escalation paths so teams know safe boundaries.
4. Train for ensemble skills — Cross-functional rehearsals, scenario drills, and listening exercises to build coordination.
5. Measure learning velocity — Track experiments run, validated learnings, time to pivot, and employee confidence alongside outcome KPIs.

Baldrige Evidence: Baldrige identifies agility and resilience as core values of high-performing organizations.

Characteristics by Baldrige Category

1. Leadership

A highly integrated leadership system is fully operational. Leaders at all levels demonstrate consistent commitment to organizational values, and the culture of excellence is deeply embedded. Senior leaders invest significant time in developing next-generation leaders. Innovation is actively cultivated and resourced. The organization's ethical standards are a source of competitive differentiation. Governance is sophisticated, transparent, and forward-looking.

2. Strategy

Strategy is fully aligned to mission and is systematically deployed from senior leadership to the front line. Scenario planning is conducted regularly to build agility into the planning process. The organization has the ability to modify strategies rapidly in response to environmental shifts.

Strategic risks and opportunities are managed with discipline and embedded in operational decision-making.

3. Customers

Deep, long-term customer relationships are actively managed as strategic assets. The customer experience is proactively designed and continuously improved based on rich, multi-method listening data. Customer insight drives product and service innovation. Net Promoter Score and customer lifetime value are managed as strategic KPIs. Customer co-design of services is beginning to emerge.

4. Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

Predictive analytics are employed to anticipate performance challenges before they materialize. A comprehensive knowledge management system captures, shares, and deploys organizational expertise. Performance reviews are integrated across all levels and linked to strategic objectives. Real-time data dashboards support rapid operational decision-making.

5. Workforce

High workforce engagement is a sustained organizational achievement, consistently in top-quartile compared to industry benchmarks. The workforce is treated as a primary competitive advantage. Distributed leadership is operational — employees at all levels lead improvement initiatives. Psychological safety is embedded in the culture. Workforce capability planning anticipates future organizational needs with precision.

6. Operations

Processes are agile, innovative, and continuously improved. High-Reliability Organization (HRO) principles are beginning to be embedded in operational management. Supply-network relationships are strategic partnerships with shared performance goals. Innovation in processes regularly produces competitive advantage. Operational excellence and customer experience are treated as inseparable.

7. Results

Strong results are evident across all seven Baldrige categories. Improvement trends are consistent over multiple years. Favorable comparisons to industry leaders — not just averages — are demonstrated. The organization is recognized by external stakeholders as a high-performing enterprise.

Sample Evidence at Level 4

- World-class Net Promoter Scores consistently in the top quartile of the industry.
- Workforce engagement index in the top quartile of peer organizations.
- An innovation pipeline producing 20–30% of revenue from new services within five years.
- ISO-certified quality management system integrated with Baldrige self-assessment.
- Predictive analytics dashboard deployed for operations and workforce planning.
- Organization has achieved state Baldrige Alliance recognition.

Suggested Actions: From the Ensemble to the Concert Hall

- Pursue formal external Baldrige assessment through the national program.
- Benchmark against best-in-class organizations globally, across industry boundaries.
- Accelerate innovation through dedicated innovation labs, design thinking programs, and strategic partnerships.
- Build long-term sustainability into the strategic plan — environmental, social, and governance commitments.
- Develop next-generation leaders through stretch assignments and succession readiness programs.
- Deepen customer co-creation partnerships as a competitive differentiator.

Level 4 Maturity Indicators Table

Baldrige Category	Level 4 Behavioral Descriptor	Typical ADLI Score
1. Leadership	Integrated leadership system; culture of excellence deeply embedded; innovation cultivated; sophisticated governance	70–80%
2. Strategy	Strategy aligned to mission; scenario planning; agile adaptation; strategic risks embedded in operations	70–80%
3. Customers	Deep customer relationships; proactive experience management; innovation driven by customer insight; top-quartile NPS	70–85%
4. Measurement	Predictive analytics; comprehensive KM system; integrated performance reviews; real-time dashboards	70–80%
5. Workforce	Top-quartile engagement; distributed leadership; psychological safety embedded; strategic workforce planning	70–80%
6. Operations	Agile innovative processes; HRO principles beginning; strategic supplier partnerships; sustained operational excellence	70–80%
7. Results	Strong results across all 7 categories; consistent improvement trends; favorable comparisons to industry leaders	70–85%

Level 5: Excellent "The Masterpiece Performance"

Baldrige Score Range: 86–100% | ADLI Characterization: Role Model / Exemplary / Industry-Defining



Baldrige Basis: All Baldrige systems fully integrated — Leadership · Governance · Communication · Strategy · Customer · Measurement · Workforce · Operations · Transformation · Innovation · Culture · Performance Improvement

Jazz Parallel: A world-class ensemble capable of innovation, mastery, transformation, and creative excellence.

♪ Jazz Metaphor: Miles at Carnegie Hall

Miles Davis at Carnegie Hall — transcendent mastery where structure and spontaneity merge into innovation that redefines the art form itself. Miles Davis never played the same thing twice — not from chaos, but from mastery so deep that every moment became an original creation. This is Level 5: the organization that defines excellence for others to follow. The Baldrige Award is not a destination but a reflection of who the organization has become — an entity that has made reinvention part of its identity, and generosity toward the field part of its mission.

Combining all Baldrige systems with jazz-style practices produces an operating model that is both robust and adaptive. Baldrige supplies governance, continuity, and measurement that protect value; jazz supplies the human skills—listening, improvisation, interplay—that convert those systems into continuous innovation and rapid recovery. Organizations that intentionally align systems and behaviors gain faster learning cycles, higher engagement, and greater resilience while maintaining operational reliability.

Characteristics of Level 5 Maturity

- Organization achieves **sustained excellence** across all Baldrige categories.
- Systems perspective is fully realized—every system reinforces every other.
- Innovation is continuous and embedded in culture.
- Results show industry-leading performance, benchmark superiority, and long-term sustainability.
- Organization contributes to society, develops future leaders, and shapes industry standards.

Jazz Metaphor: The band is legendary. They innovate new genres, inspire others, and deliver consistently extraordinary performances. Their mastery allows creativity without chaos.

Baldrige Evidence: Baldrige defines this level as delivering **value and results**, with fully integrated systems and sustained high performance.

Interrelationship

The **Baldrige systems** are the organization's architecture: formal roles, processes, metrics, guardrails, and continuity plans that make performance predictable and auditable. The **jazz structure** is the human operating system: inspiration, listening, improvisation, interplay, and shared rhythm that enable rapid adaptation and creative problem solving.

Together: Baldrige defines *where* the organization must perform and *how* success is measured; jazz models *how* people coordinate, adapt, and innovate inside those boundaries. The result is **reliable creativity**—the ability to deliver consistent outcomes while responding to novel conditions in real time.

Functional Mapping: Full System Integration and Continual Transformation

Baldrige System	Jazz Element	Practical Effect
Leadership System	Bandleader / Inspire	Sets purpose, tone, psychological safety
Governance System	Direction & Form	Clarifies decision rights and safe boundaries
Communication System	Call-and-response	Fast, low-friction coordination and cues
Strategy System	Motif + Structure	Shared plan with room for solos and pivots

Baldrige System	Jazz Element	Practical Effect
Customer Relationship System	Audience Connection	Real-time external feedback shaping priorities
Measurement, Analysis & Knowledge	Measure & Refine	Data-driven iteration and validated learning
Employee Development & Engagement	Practice & Mastery	Skill depth that enables confident improvisation
Operational Excellence System	Shared Rhythm	Reliable timing that supports creative variance
Health & Safety System	Steady Groove	Risk controls that protect people and experiments
Environmental Management	Context Awareness	Sensitivity to external constraints and cues
Community Support System	Social Call-and-Response	Reputation and reciprocal feedback loops
Emergency Preparedness System	Rehearsed Cues	Rapid, practiced responses under stress
Data Integrity & Security	Trusted Scorekeeping	Accurate signals for decisions and improvisation
Resilience System	Adaptive Soloing	Recovering and pivoting under disruption
High Reliability Organization	Tight Ensemble	Error-resistant coordination under pressure
Transformation System	Theme Development	Scaling successful riffs into new forms
Continuity of Operations	Bassline Foundation	Sustains core functions during change
Performance Improvement	Iterative Jamming	Continuous small experiments and refinements
Culture	Shared Groove & Values	Norms that enable listening, trust, and risk-taking

Resilience and Reliability addressed together

- **Reliability is the baseline.** Systems like Operational Excellence, High Reliability Organization, Continuity of Operations, Health & Safety, and Data Integrity create the stable foundation (the bassline and drummer) that prevents catastrophic failure.
- **Resilience is adaptive capacity.** Resilience, Transformation, Emergency Preparedness, and Performance Improvement are the **adaptive solos**—practices that detect disruption, reconfigure resources, and restore or improve capability.
- **How they interact:** Reliability reduces the noise and risk so improvisation can be effective; resilience uses improvisation within guardrails to recover and evolve. Reliable systems make improvisation safer; resilient practices make reliability sustainable under stress.
- **Operational implication:** Design redundancy and clear rollback plans (reliability) while funding rapid experiments and cross-training (resilience). Measure both uptime/error rates and recovery time/learning velocity.

What we learn

- **Dual design principle:** Build *both* strong foundations (process, controls, continuity) and practiced adaptive behaviors (listening, improvisation, rapid learning).
- **Practice converts freedom into quality:** Regular rehearsals, scenario drills, and cross-functional “jam sessions” turn improvisation into dependable adaptive action.

- **Feedback is the engine:** Short, visible measurement loops (customer signals, operational telemetry, after-action reviews) convert improvisation into validated improvements.
- **Culture is the multiplier:** Trust, psychological safety, and shared language amplify the effectiveness of both systems and behaviors.

Recommended next steps and metrics

1. **Codify guardrails** — define decision rights, risk thresholds, and rollback rules so teams know safe boundaries for improvisation.
2. **Create structured jam sessions** — time-boxed experiments with hypotheses, metrics, owners, and rollback plans.
3. **Run ensemble training** — cross-functional rehearsals, scenario drills, and listening exercises to build coordination under stress.
4. **Embed rapid feedback loops** — route customer and operational signals into daily rituals and decision gates.
5. **Measure learning velocity** — track experiments run, validated learnings, time to pivot, and employee confidence alongside outcome KPIs.

Suggested Metrics

Category	Key Metrics
Reliability	Uptime; mean time between failures; operational error rate
Resilience	Mean time to recover; number of successful recoveries; time from incident to validated improvement

Innovation Velocity	Experiments per quarter; validated learnings per month; time from insight to deployment
People	Training hours in ensemble skills; cross-functional rehearsal frequency; employee psychological safety score

Priority Actions

1. Codify guardrails — define decision rights, risk thresholds, and rollback rules so teams know safe boundaries for improvisation.
2. Create structured jam sessions — time-boxed experiments with hypotheses, metrics, owners, and rollback plans.
3. Run ensemble training — cross-functional rehearsals, scenario drills, and listening exercises to build coordination under stress.
4. Embed rapid feedback loops — route customer and operational signals into daily rituals and decision gates.
5. Measure learning velocity — track experiments run, validated learnings, time to pivot, and employee confidence alongside outcome KPIs.

Baldrige Evidence: Baldrige defines this level as delivering value and results, with fully integrated systems and sustained high performance.

Characteristics by Baldrige Category

1. Leadership

Exemplary leadership is widely recognized within and beyond the organization's sector. The culture of excellence is self-sustaining — it no longer depends on any individual leader to maintain it. Next-generation leaders are fully developed and leading at all levels. The organization's governance model is a benchmark for others. Ethics and transparency are defining organizational characteristics, recognized externally as well as internally.

2. Strategy

Strategy is a living system — continuously informed by real-time intelligence and adjusted with discipline and agility. The organization not only responds to its environment; it shapes it.

Strategic planning integrates sustainability, equity, and long-term societal contribution alongside financial performance. The organization is consistently ahead of sector trends rather than responding to them.

3. Customers

The organization co-creates with customers — customers are partners in service and product design, not recipients of predetermined offerings. Anticipatory service design means that customer needs are addressed before customers articulate them. The customer experience provided by this organization defines industry expectations. Customer loyalty and advocacy metrics are at world-class levels sustained over multiple years.

4. Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

World-class knowledge management captures, transfers, and applies organizational intelligence with extraordinary efficiency. Real-time organizational intelligence supports both operational decision-making and strategic adaptation. Measurement is systemic — not just tracking performance but generating insight that drives innovation. The organization is a learning machine in the fullest sense.

5. Workforce

"T-shaped" teams — employees with deep expertise in their domain and broad capacity to collaborate across disciplines — are the organizational norm. The workforce is the primary innovation engine of the organization. Psychological safety is maximized — radical candor, trust, and creative risk-taking are embedded in daily culture. Workforce well-being and excellence are treated as inseparable organizational imperatives.

6. Operations

The organization operates as a Highly Reliable Organization (HRO) — with preoccupation with failure, deference to expertise, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and reluctance to simplify complexity. Zero-defect aspirations govern operational culture without creating a blame environment. The supply network is deeply integrated, resilient, and mutually developmental. Innovation in operations regularly creates new industry capabilities.

7. Results

World-class results are sustained across all seven Baldrige categories over five or more years. The organization does not merely benchmark against others — it is the benchmark. Consistent excellence across multiple performance cycles, stakeholder groups, and environmental conditions demonstrates that its excellence is systemic, not situational.

Sample Evidence at Level 5

- Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award recipient or Finalist designation.
- Recognized as the industry benchmark organization by independent analysts and peers.
- Sustained five-plus year excellence trajectory across all Baldrige categories.
- Culture of continuous reinvention evidenced by consistent revenue from innovation.
- Organization actively mentors other organizations and contributes to the field of performance excellence.
- Workforce engagement and customer loyalty scores are the highest in sector, sustained across economic cycles.

Suggested Actions: The Woodshed Never Closes

- Share knowledge and methods with the broader field through publications, speaking, and mentoring.
- Actively mentor peer organizations seeking to improve — this is the cultural diplomacy of performance excellence.

- Continue the discipline of reinvention — actively challenge current success to avoid complacency.
- Guard against the "success trap" — the organizational tendency to replicate what worked rather than innovate.
- Sustain the woodshed mindset: even at Level 5, the musicians return to practice, because mastery is a practice, not a destination.

Level 5 Maturity Indicators Table

Baldrige Category	Level 5 Behavioral Descriptor	Typical ADLI Score
1. Leadership	Exemplary leadership; self-sustaining culture of excellence; next-gen leaders fully developed; governance benchmark for others	85–100%
2. Strategy	Strategy is a living system; real-time adaptation; organization shapes its industry; long-term sustainability integrated	85–100%
3. Customers	Co-creation with customers; anticipatory service design; industry-defining customer experience; world-class loyalty metrics sustained	85–100%
4. Measurement	World-class knowledge management; real-time organizational intelligence; measurement drives innovation; systemic learning	85–100%
5. Workforce	T-shaped teams; workforce as primary innovation engine; psychological safety maximized; well-being and excellence unified	85–100%
6. Operations	Full HRO implementation; zero-defect aspirations; resilient integrated supply network; operations drive industry innovation	85–100%
7. Results	World-class results across all 7 categories; sustained excellence 5+ years; organization is the industry benchmark	85–100%

Leadership Implementation Roadmap

The journey from Level 1 to Level 5 is not measured in months — it is measured in years of disciplined practice, honest self-assessment, courageous improvement, and unwavering commitment to excellence. The following five-phase roadmap provides a practical guide for organizations beginning or accelerating their Baldrige excellence journey.

Phase 1: Foundation (Months 1–6) — "Learning Your Instrument"

Objective: Establish the baseline understanding, commitment, and structural prerequisites for systematic improvement.

- Conduct a Baldrige self-assessment using the Organizational Profile and all seven criteria categories.
- Align senior leadership team on mission, vision, and strategic direction.
- Document the five to ten most critical operational processes.
- Establish a baseline performance measurement system — ten to fifteen key measures across leadership, customer, workforce, and operations.
- Launch a first employee engagement survey.
- Initiate a formal customer satisfaction listening process.

Phase 2: Development (Months 7–18) — "Finding the Band"

Objective: Build systematic approaches in all seven Baldrige categories and begin meaningful deployment.

- Establish a systematic Voice of the Customer process with multiple listening methods and formal analysis.
- Deploy a formal strategic planning process with three-to-five year horizon, action plans, and cascaded goals.
- Launch structured workforce development programs aligned to strategic needs.
- Integrate measurement systems — link process, customer, workforce, and financial data in a common review structure.
- Begin benchmarking against industry peers in key performance areas.
- Form cross-functional improvement teams using the Jazz Ensemble Model (rotating leads, collaborative problem-solving).

Phase 3: Systematization (Months 19–36) — "Playing the Standards"

Objective: Achieve consistency, integration, and learning cycles across all seven categories.

- Achieve cross-functional alignment — strategy, customer, workforce, and operations goals are integrated and mutually reinforcing.
- Expand benchmarking to world-class and best-in-class organizations beyond the immediate sector.
- Establish a formal innovation pipeline with resources, governance, and success metrics.
- Develop supplier management into strategic partnership frameworks with shared improvement goals.
- Apply for state Baldrige Alliance assessment to receive external examiner feedback.

- Deploy leadership development programs at all organizational levels.

Phase 4: Integration (Months 37–60) — "The Ensemble Moment"

Objective: Achieve deep integration, predictive intelligence, and distributed leadership.

- Deploy predictive analytics for performance management and workforce planning.
- Build a comprehensive knowledge management system that captures, shares, and applies organizational expertise.
- Embed HRO (High-Reliability Organization) practices in operational governance.
- Achieve distributed leadership — improvement initiatives led at all organizational levels without senior leadership mandate.
- Pursue national Baldrige Award application or equivalent external recognition.
- Integrate long-term sustainability and societal contribution into the strategic plan.

Phase 5: Excellence (Ongoing) — "The Masterpiece, Performed Again"

Objective: Sustain exemplary performance, lead the field, and continuously reinvent.

- Continuous reinvention — systematically challenges current successes to avoid complacency.
- Establish thought leadership presence through publications, conference presentations, and peer mentoring.
- Co-create with customers as full innovation partners.
- Sustain world-class results across all seven Baldrige categories over multiple years.

- Return regularly to the woodshed — reassess, relearn, and recommit to the discipline of excellence.

Implementation Milestone Table

Phase	Timeline	Key Activities	Accountable Role	Success Metrics
1. Foundation	Months 1–6	Self-assessment; leadership alignment; process documentation; baseline metrics; first engagement survey	CEO/Executive Team; Quality Director	Self-assessment completed; 10 baseline measures established; 5 processes documented
2. Development	Months 7–18	VOC system; strategic planning process; workforce development; integrated measurement; benchmarking	Quality Director; HR Director; Strategy Lead	VOC process deployed; strategic plan with cascaded goals; benchmarking in 3+ areas
3. Systematization	Months 19–36	Cross-functional integration; world-class benchmarking; innovation pipeline; supplier management; state Alliance assessment	Cross-Functional Improvement Teams; Innovation Lead	State Alliance assessment completed; innovation pipeline active; supplier

Phase	Timeline	Key Activities	Accountable Role	Success Metrics
				scorecards deployed
4. Integration	Months 37–60	Predictive analytics; knowledge management; HRO practices; distributed leadership; national award application	C-Suite; Data & Analytics Lead; Operations Director	Predictive dashboards live; KM system deployed; Baldrige application submitted
5. Excellence	Ongoing	Continuous reinvention; thought leadership; customer co-creation; sustained world-class results	All Leaders; Board of Directors	World-class results sustained 5+ years; recognized industry benchmark; active peer mentoring

KPIs and Evidence Framework

Performance excellence requires performance evidence. The following table presents a comprehensive framework of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) organized by Baldrige category, designed to provide an integrated view of organizational health and maturity level progress. These indicators should be selected, customized, and baselined as part of Phase 1 of the implementation roadmap.

Leadership Results KPIs

KPI	Description	Target Direction	Measurement Frequency
Ethics Compliance Rate	Percentage of workforce completing ethics training and attestation	100%	Annual
Leadership Effectiveness Score	360-degree leadership assessment score (workforce survey)	Upward trend; top-quartile benchmark	Annual
Governance Audit Findings	Number and severity of governance audit findings	Downward trend; zero critical findings	Annual
Strategic Communication Reach	Percentage of workforce aware of organizational mission, vision, and current strategic priorities	90%+	Semi-annual

Strategy Results KPIs

KPI	Description	Target Direction	Measurement Frequency
Strategic Objective Achievement Rate	Percentage of annual strategic objectives fully achieved	80%+ achievement	Annual
Action Plan Completion Rate	Percentage of strategic action plans completed on schedule	85%+ on-time completion	Quarterly
Revenue from Strategic Initiatives	Percentage of revenue attributable to new strategic initiatives (past 3 years)	Upward trend; 20%+ at Level 4	Annual
Strategic Risk Response Time	Average time from risk identification to mitigation plan activation	Downward trend	Quarterly

Customer Results KPIs

KPI	Description	Target Direction	Measurement Frequency
Net Promoter Score (NPS)	Customer willingness to recommend; industry-relative benchmark	Top-quartile industry benchmark	Quarterly
Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT)	Overall customer satisfaction rating across all segments	Upward trend; 90%+ satisfied	Quarterly
Customer Retention Rate	Percentage of customers retained year-over-year by segment	Upward trend; 90%+ at Level 4	Annual
Complaint Resolution Time	Average hours from complaint receipt to resolution and customer confirmation	Downward trend; same-business-day at Level 4	Monthly

Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management Results KPIs

KPI	Description	Target Direction	Measurement Frequency
Data Quality Index	Composite score of data completeness, accuracy, and timeliness across key measures	Upward trend; 95%+ at Level 4	Quarterly
Decision Cycle Time	Average time from data availability to decision and action at leadership level	Downward trend	Quarterly
Knowledge Reuse Rate	Percentage of improvement initiatives that leverage documented organizational knowledge	Upward trend	Semi-annual

Workforce Results KPIs

KPI	Description	Target Direction	Measurement Frequency
Workforce Engagement Index	Composite engagement score from annual workforce survey; industry-benchmarked	Top-quartile industry benchmark	Annual
Voluntary Turnover Rate	Percentage of workforce voluntarily separating per year	Downward trend; below industry average	Monthly / Annual
Training Hours per Employee	Average formal learning hours per workforce member per year	Upward trend; 40+ hours at Level 4	Annual
Internal Promotion Rate	Percentage of leadership openings filled by internal candidates	Upward trend; 60%+ at Level 4	Annual

Operations Results KPIs

KPI	Description	Target Direction	Measurement Frequency
Process Capability Index (Cpk)	Statistical measure of process performance relative to specification limits	1.33+ at Level 3; 1.67+ at Level 4	Quarterly
On-Time Delivery Rate	Percentage of products/services delivered on or before promised date	95%+ at Level 3; 99%+ at Level 5	Monthly
Defect / Error Rate	Defects per million opportunities (DPMO) or equivalent quality metric	Downward trend; Six Sigma aspiration at Level 5	Monthly
Supply-Network	Composite supplier performance and risk assessment index	Upward trend; diversified and audited supply base	Quarterly

KPI	Description	Target Direction	Measurement Frequency
Resilience Score			

Financial and Business Results KPIs

KPI	Description	Target Direction	Measurement Frequency
Revenue Growth Rate	Year-over-year revenue or budget growth, adjusted for market conditions	Above industry average	Quarterly / Annual
Operating Margin	Operating income as a percentage of revenue/budget	Top-quartile industry benchmark	Quarterly
Market Share	Percentage of total addressable market served by the organization	Stable or upward trend	Annual
ROI on Improvement Initiatives	Financial return on investment in improvement and innovation programs	Positive ROI; documented value creation	Annual

Governance and Roles

Baldrige Maturity Steering Committee

The Baldrige journey requires executive-level ownership and cross-functional leadership. The Steering Committee provides strategic direction, removes organizational barriers, allocates resources, and models the cultural values that excellence requires.

Role	Responsibilities	Meeting Cadence
Executive Sponsor (CEO/President)	Ultimate accountability; cultural tone-setting; resource authorization; external representation	Quarterly full committee; as needed
Quality/Excellence Director	Day-to-day program leadership; self-assessment coordination; improvement project oversight; reporting to committee	Weekly with project teams; monthly committee reporting
Functional Leaders (HR, Operations, Finance, Customer Experience)	Category-specific accountability; team engagement; barrier removal within function	Quarterly committee; monthly working sessions
Board Representative (if applicable)	Governance oversight; long-term accountability; external stakeholder perspective	Annual summary briefing; as needed

Self-Assessment Team Structure

A cross-functional Self-Assessment Team conducts the annual Baldrige self-assessment, producing the organizational maturity profile that drives improvement priorities. The team structure mirrors the Jazz Ensemble Model — diverse instruments, shared chart, rotating solos.

- **Team Size:** Six to twelve members representing all seven Baldrige categories.
- **Composition:** A mix of experienced and newer organizational members; diverse functional representation; at least one external advisor where possible.
- **Process:** Individual scoring, team consensus, gap analysis, priority-setting, action planning.
- **Output:** Annual Organizational Maturity Profile with category-level scores, strengths, and opportunities for improvement (OFIs).

Improvement Project Teams: The Jazz Ensemble Model

Cross-functional improvement project teams are structured using the jazz ensemble principle: every member contributes their unique instrument, leadership rotates based on the demands of the challenge at hand, and the group's collective intelligence exceeds any individual's capacity. Teams are time-bounded, goal-specific, and chartered by the Steering Committee.

External Examiner Partnerships

State Alliance for Performance Excellence programs provide trained external examiners who conduct site visits and provide written feedback reports. These external partnerships are the organizational equivalent of a master class — an expert ear that hears what the ensemble cannot hear about itself. Organizations are strongly encouraged to pursue state Alliance assessments at Level 3 and national Baldrige assessment at Level 4.

High-Reliability Organization (HRO) Principles in Governance

At Levels 4 and 5, governance structures incorporate HRO principles: leaders are preoccupied with what could go wrong, reluctant to oversimplify complex situations, sensitive to operational reality, committed to building resilient systems, and defer to expertise rather than hierarchy when the situation demands. This governance philosophy transforms leadership from command-and-control to listen-and-learn — precisely the Bandleader model of jazz excellence.

Risk, Resilience, and HRO Practices

High-Reliability Organization Principles

High-Reliability Organizations (HROs) are organizations that operate in high-stakes, complex environments and consistently achieve safety and performance outcomes that far exceed their peers. The five HRO principles, developed by Weick and Sutcliffe, map directly to Baldrige excellence at Levels 4 and 5:

- **Preoccupation with Failure:** Excellence organizations seek out what could go wrong before it does — treating near-misses as treasures, not embarrassments.
- **Reluctance to Simplify:** Complex organizations resist the human tendency to oversimplify; they honor complexity and design for it.
- **Sensitivity to Operations:** Leaders at all levels maintain situational awareness of what is actually happening in frontline operations, not just what is reported.
- **Commitment to Resilience:** Excellent organizations build the capacity to recover from, adapt to, and grow stronger through disruption.
- **Deference to Expertise:** Authority flows to competence in the moment, not to positional hierarchy — the person who knows, leads.

♪ Jazz Insight: The Clam as Organizational Learning

In jazz, a "clam" is a wrong note — an improvisation that doesn't land. In a lesser ensemble, a clam creates panic and hesitation. In a great ensemble, a clam is instantly absorbed, responded to, and woven into the next phrase. Miles Davis was famous for making mistakes into the starting points for new ideas. HRO organizations cultivate this

same resilience — not the absence of error, but the organizational capacity to convert error into learning faster than competitors can react to it.

Risk Management and Baldrige Integration

The Baldrige Framework explicitly addresses risk management in Category 2 (Strategy), specifically in item 2.1a(2), which requires organizations to identify strategic challenges and opportunities and assess associated risks. At Level 3 and above, risk management moves from a compliance function to a strategic capability — integrated with planning cycles, monitored through measurement systems, and reviewed by governance at the highest levels.

Supply-Network Resilience

COVID-era experience demonstrated with devastating clarity that supply-network fragility is one of the most significant operational risks facing any organization. Baldrige-excellent organizations build supply-network resilience through supplier diversification, strategic partnership development, shared risk assessment, dual-sourcing for critical inputs, and supply-chain visibility investments. At Level 4 and 5, supply networks are managed as ecosystems, not transactions.

Business Continuity and Crisis Response

Excellence organizations maintain living business continuity plans — not binder-shelf documents but tested, exercised, and regularly updated operational responses to foreseeable disruption scenarios. Crisis response capability is practiced through tabletop exercises, after-action reviews, and regular plan updates. At Level 5, the organization's crisis response becomes

a field-wide resource — they publish their learning, mentor peers, and raise the resilience floor of their entire sector.

Psychological Safety as Foundation

Research by Amy Edmondson at Harvard Business School has established that psychological safety — the shared belief that team members can speak up, take risks, and admit mistakes without fear of retribution — is the single strongest predictor of team learning and performance. Psychological safety is both an HRO principle and a jazz principle: the great ensemble is the one where every player trusts that the band will catch their bold idea and run with it. Building and sustaining psychological safety at all organizational levels is prerequisite to both HRO practices and Baldrige excellence at Levels 4 and 5.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Half-Day Baldrige Maturity Self-Assessment Workshop

"From the Woodshed to the Stage: A Half-Day Performance Excellence Self-Assessment"

Workshop Overview

Element	Details
Duration	4.5 hours (half-day)
Ideal Group Size	8–20 participants
Recommended Participants	Senior leadership team, quality leaders, functional directors, improvement champions
Materials Required	This report (printed); Baldrige self-assessment worksheets (individual scoring form); flip charts; markers; sticky notes (3 colors); voting dots; timer
Room Setup	Round or U-shaped tables (ensemble seating); avoid theater-style; ensure wall space for flip charts; natural light preferred
Facilitator	Quality Director, external Baldrige examiner, or trained facilitator — not the CEO (who should participate, not lead)

Workshop Agenda

Module 1: Introduction — Setting the Stage (45 minutes)

- Welcome and context-setting by Executive Sponsor (5 minutes).

- Facilitator introduction of Baldrige Framework and Jazz Metaphor — the "lead sheet" orientation (20 minutes).
- Overview of the five maturity levels and what each looks like in practice (10 minutes).
- Q&A and clarification (10 minutes).

Facilitator Note: Use the jazz metaphor to create psychological safety. Remind participants that every organization is at a specific place in its excellence journey — the goal today is honest self-awareness, not defensiveness. A musician who doesn't know what they don't know cannot practice their way to mastery.

Break — 15 minutes

Module 2: Category-by-Category Self-Assessment (60 minutes)

- Distribute individual self-assessment scoring worksheets (one per participant).
- Participants independently score their organization on each of the seven Baldrige categories using the maturity indicators tables from this report (30 minutes).
- In small groups of three to four, participants share their individual scores and discuss key evidence for their ratings (20 minutes).
- Each small group prepares to report their highest and lowest scored category and the evidence behind both ratings (10 minutes).

Facilitator Note: Instruct participants to score based on what is systematic and consistent — not on the best case. "We did that once" is not deployment. "We do that every time" is deployment.

Module 3: Team Scoring Consensus and Maturity Level Determination (45 minutes)

- Each small group reports scores for each of the seven categories (15 minutes).
- Facilitator records all scores on flip chart; team discusses range and divergences (20 minutes).
- Consensus scoring for each category using voting dots (Level 1–5 scale) (10 minutes).

- Plot the organization's Maturity Profile — identifying which categories are at which levels, and where the greatest gaps and greatest strengths lie.

Facilitator Note: Divergence in scores is valuable data. When one person scores a category at Level 4 and another scores it at Level 2, that gap in perception reveals a deployment or communication gap that is itself an improvement opportunity. Celebrate the divergence.

Break — 15 minutes

Module 4: Action Planning — "From the Woodshed to the Stage" (60 minutes)

- Identify the top three Opportunities for Improvement (OFIs) from the maturity profile (15 minutes).
- For each OFI, assign a team to draft a 90-day action plan using the implementation roadmap phases (25 minutes).
- Teams present draft action plans; full group provides feedback and refinement (15 minutes).
- Executive Sponsor closes with commitment statement and next-steps (5 minutes).

Wrap-Up (30 minutes)

- Facilitator summarizes maturity profile and action commitments.
- Schedule the next self-assessment (recommend 12 months).
- Celebrate the courage it took to be honest — jazz musicians who can hear their own mistakes are the ones who improve fastest.
- Distribute this report and Baldrige Excellence Builder as ongoing resources.

APPENDIX B

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
ADLI	Baldrige process scoring dimensions: Approach (soundness and systematic nature), Deployment (breadth and consistency of implementation), Learning (cycles of evaluation and improvement), Integration (alignment across the organization).
Action Plans	Specific steps, timeframes, resources, and accountabilities established to achieve strategic objectives. Action plans translate strategy into operational reality.
Agility	Capacity for rapid change and operational flexibility. In Baldrige, agility addresses both the speed of organizational response and the structural capacity to execute change without loss of performance quality.
Benchmarking	The process of comparing organizational performance against world-class standards, best-in-class competitors, or recognized industry leaders to identify performance gaps and improvement opportunities.
Customers	The actual and potential users of your organization's products and services, including both current customers and those of competitors. In Baldrige, customers are the ultimate judges of quality.
Deployment	The extent to which an approach is applied across the organization — consistently, reliably, and at all relevant levels and locations. Broad, consistent deployment is a key ADLI scoring factor.
Governance	The system of management and oversight of the organization, including the board of directors, executive leadership, audit, and accountability mechanisms. Governance ensures accountability to stakeholders and alignment to mission.
HRO	High-Reliability Organization — an organization that consistently minimizes failures and maximizes performance in high-stakes, complex environments through five principles: preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise.

Term	Definition
Integration	In ADLI scoring, integration refers to the degree to which approaches are aligned and complementary across all organizational processes and categories — the whole system working as one. In jazz: the ensemble sound.
Key Processes	The most important internal work processes for creating and delivering products and services that create customer value, generate revenue or mission outcomes, and drive organizational performance.
Knowledge Management	The systematic processes by which organizational knowledge — including data, information, expertise, and best practices — is captured, organized, shared, and applied to support decision-making and innovation.
Learning	In ADLI scoring, learning refers to cycles of evaluation, experimentation, and refinement that lead to new knowledge and improved approaches. In jazz: the woodshed, the post-gig listening session, the next rehearsal.
Organizational Profile	The Baldrige preface to the Criteria that describes the organization's key characteristics, strategic situation, and performance environment. The Organizational Profile is the starting point for self-assessment and provides context for all seven categories.
Process	Linked activities with the purpose of producing a product, service, or outcome for a customer or stakeholder. All organizational work is accomplished through processes, whether or not those processes are formally defined and documented.
Resilience	The ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions to survive, and prosper. Resilience is both a Baldrige core value and a defining HRO characteristic.
Results	The outcomes of an organization's activities, products, and services — measured across product and process performance, customer outcomes, workforce outcomes, leadership and governance outcomes, and financial/marketplace performance. Results are the ultimate proof of excellence.
Stakeholders	All groups that are or might be affected by an organization's actions and success — including customers, workforce members, partners, suppliers, the community, and regulatory bodies. Stakeholder value creation is a Baldrige excellence imperative.
Strategic Challenges	The pressures that exert a decisive influence on an organization's likelihood of future success — typically externally driven and related to the organization's position in a competitive or resource environment.

Term	Definition
Strategic Objectives	The broadly stated articulations of what the organization intends to accomplish over a three-to-five year period — translating mission and vision into specific, measurable outcomes that drive action planning.
Supply Network	The collection of suppliers, partners, and distributors that contribute to the organization's ability to deliver products and services. Supply-network management is addressed in Baldrige Category 6 (Operations).
Sustainability	An organization's ability to address current needs while having the agility and strategic management necessary to prepare successfully for its future — including environmental, social, governance, and financial dimensions.
Systems Perspective	The Baldrige core value of managing the whole organization — all its components — as an integrated system. No category operates in isolation; all are interconnected in a system oriented to achieving organizational purpose. In jazz: the ensemble sound that no single musician can produce alone.
Voice of the Customer (VOC)	The systematic processes by which an organization listens to, captures, and translates the needs, requirements, expectations, and preferences of customers into actionable improvement intelligence. Multiple VOC methods are expected at Levels 3 and above.
Workforce Engagement	The extent to which workforce members are committed to the organization, motivated to contribute to its success, and find meaning and fulfillment in their work. High engagement is both a Baldrige values imperative and a leading indicator of superior organizational results.

APPENDIX C

Baldrige Category and Item Point Values Reference Table

The following table presents the official point values for each of the seven Baldrige Criteria categories from the 2023–2024 Baldrige Excellence Framework for Business/Nonprofit.

Organizations should note that Category 7 (Results) carries the single largest point weight (450

of 1,000 points), reflecting the Baldrige philosophy that processes are means, and outcomes — for all stakeholders — are the ultimate measure of organizational excellence.

Category	Category Name	Points	Percentage of Total
1	Leadership	120	12%
2	Strategy	85	8.5%
3	Customers	85	8.5%
4	Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management	90	9%
5	Workforce	85	8.5%
6	Operations	85	8.5%
7	Results	450	45%
TOTAL	1,000	100%	

Key Scoring Insight

The Results category commands 45% of the total Baldrige score, reinforcing a fundamental principle: excellent processes are necessary but not sufficient. Organizations must demonstrate that their processes produce measurably superior outcomes for customers, workforce members, the community, and financial stakeholders. Results are evaluated on four dimensions (LTCI): Levels, Trends, Comparisons, and Integration — all four dimensions must be strong for top-tier results scoring.

APPENDIX D

Recommended Resources

Resource	Description and Application
2023–2024 Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST)	The primary source document for all seven Criteria categories, core values, scoring guidelines, and glossary. Available free at nist.gov/baldrige . The foundational text for any organization beginning the Baldrige journey.
Baldrige Excellence Builder	A condensed, accessible version of the Baldrige Criteria designed for organizations beginning their self-assessment journey. Freely available from NIST/Baldrige Program. Ideal for Phase 1 workshop preparation.
<i>Yes to the Mess</i> by Frank Barrett	A Harvard Business School professor and jazz pianist makes the definitive academic case for jazz improvisation as an organizational leadership model. Directly supports the theoretical foundation of this maturity model. Essential reading for leadership teams.
<i>Good to Great</i> by Jim Collins	Jim Collins' landmark research on what distinguishes good companies from great ones aligns strongly with Baldrige principles — particularly Level 5 Leadership (a direct Collins concept), disciplined people, disciplined thought, and disciplined action. Read alongside the Baldrige framework for reinforcing context.
Baldrige Alliance for Performance Excellence (State Programs)	A network of state and regional performance excellence programs aligned to Baldrige criteria, offering assessments, feedback, and recognition awards. Strongly recommended for organizations at Levels 2–4. Find your state program at baldrigealliance.org .
Quest for Excellence Conference (NIST/Baldrige)	The annual conference at which Baldrige Award recipients share their practices and lessons learned. Attending is the organizational equivalent of a master class — direct learning from the best. Highly recommended for teams at Levels 3 and above.
<i>Managing the Unexpected</i> by Weick & Sutcliffe	The definitive academic text on High-Reliability Organization principles. Essential for organizations pursuing Levels 4 and 5, particularly in integrating HRO governance practices with Baldrige leadership and operations categories.

Resource	Description and Application
<i>The Fearless Organization</i> by Amy Edmondson	Harvard Business School research on psychological safety as the foundation of team learning and performance. Directly applicable to Baldrige workforce engagement, innovation culture, and HRO practices at Levels 4 and 5.
Baldrige Criteria Commentary (NIST)	An in-depth explanation of each Criteria item, providing context and guidance beyond the questions themselves. Available free at nist.gov/baldrige . Invaluable for self-assessment teams seeking to deeply understand what Baldrige is looking for.

♪ ♪ ♪ **A Final Note from the Bandstand** ♪ ♪ ♪

"It takes a long time to play like yourself."

— Miles Davis

Every great organization, like every great musician, spends years learning the rules before learning to transcend them.

The maturity model in this report is not a destination — it is a map.

The music is yours to play. The woodshed is always open.

Begin.

The Rhythm of Excellence: Baldrige Organizational Maturity Model | July 4, 2026

Aligned to the 2023–2024 Baldrige Excellence Framework for Business/Nonprofit (NIST). This document is an independent interpretive work and is not an official publication of the National Institute of Standards and Technology or the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program. The Baldrige Excellence Framework® and Criteria for Performance Excellence® are registered

trademarks of NIST. Prepared for organizations and leaders pursuing performance excellence. |
All maturity descriptors are illustrative and should be calibrated to organizational context.

♪ ♪ ♪ **A Final Note from the Bandstand** ♪ ♪ ♪

“I see the Baldrige process as a powerful set of mechanisms for disciplined people engaged in disciplined thought and taking disciplined action to create great organizations that produce exceptional results.”

&

“Resiliency, not perfection, is the signature of greatness.”

— James C. Collins