Unique Applicant Considerations

The Baldrige Excellence Framework^{TM} can be used to evaluate and improve performance of any organization. What makes this tool so powerful is the personalization of the *Criteria for Performance Excellence* questions to each organization by considering its key factors. Many of TNCPE's applicants have unique operating environments or governance structures that are particularly important to consider as you begin your examination. Examples of these unique circumstances include:

- Small businesses
- Multi-site organizations, including applicants with field offices out of state
- Government agencies
- Applicants owned by another corporation, including divisions or sites of larger entities
- Mature applicants applying at Level 2
- New applicants applying at Levels 3 or 4

Guidelines are provided below to help examiners identify and apply key factors for these types of organizations.

Identifying Key Factors

Key factors are primarily identified in the Organizational Profile, although they can also be found in the applicant's Intent to Apply or throughout the application. Listed below are key sections of the Organizational Profile that may highlight an applicant's unique situation. Capturing and using key factors such as these will be crucial to creating a value-added feedback report.

P.1a(3) **Workforce Profile**	The size of the organization is a critical key factor. Smaller organizations have access to fewer resources and often can be effective with less formal processes than larger organizations. The size of the organization also will affect your site visit planning.
P.1a(4) **Locations (Assets)**	Understanding the applicant's locations is essential for site visit planning. This information also is important for checking deployment of key processes throughout the workforce. Pay particular attention to whether sites operate independently (with their own strategic planning and financial processes) or as one integrated business.
P.1a(5) **Regulatory Environment**	An organization's regulatory environment significantly impacts the way it operates. For example, state agencies may require legislation in order to change key operating processes; certain government contractors are prohibited from many types of customer contact; and healthcare applicants must safeguard patient health information through their knowledge management practices. Consider whether regulations exist that would dictate the applicant's ability to innovate its processes.

P.1b(1) Organizational Structure and Governance System	Many of TNCPE's applicants are owned or directed by another organization. In these instances, it is critical to understand how much control the applicant has over the strategic planning process, its HR functions, and its system of measurement. In some instances, it may be more valuable to evaluate how the applicant adapts a corporate strategic plan to its own business or location. Keep in mind that the applicant must still answer *Criteria* questions; but be flexible in how these questions apply.
P.1b(3) Suppliers and Partners	If the applicant identifies key suppliers or partners, take time to consider how this might change its interpretation or process for certain *Criteria* items. Not only will supply-network management be key to its success; the organization may be dependent on these other organizations to deliver support processes or strategic inputs included in the *Criteria* questions. Be sure to understand the applicant's ability to choose and manage suppliers, as some could be required by regulation or a corporate owner.

Using Key Factors to Guide Your Examination

As you complete your examination, you will use key factors such as those highlighted above to customize your assessment of the applicant. Most importantly, you will use these key factors to select which 6-10 strengths and OFIs will provide the most value to the applicant and help it move forward. Here are some suggestions to help you prioritize comments for these unique applicants:

Small Business Applicants	1. Small businesses may rely more on verbal communication and less on formal documentation. Remember that approaches must be systematic, but not necessarily documented.
	2. Information systems may be less mature or in some cases involve manual processes. Again, look for and evaluate systematic approaches, not sophistication.
	3. Benchmarking and comparative data may be approached through trade literature or comparisons to other local providers of similar services.
	4. Segmentation may not be meaningful or appropriate for certain results (for example, segmenting workforce results for only five employees).
Multi-site Applicants **Applicants with field offices out of state**	1. Deployment is a key consideration for applicants with multiple sites. Look for evidence of communication to and from field sites in the application. If possible, try to visit at least two sites other than the applicant's headquarters or speak with 20-25% of the workforce.
	2. Segmentation is an important consideration for applicants with multiple sites.
	3. Look for evidence of innovation at each site. How are best practices shared across the larger organization?
	4. Consider whether information technology and the knowledge management process support continuous improvement for the entity as a whole.

Government Agencies	1. Government agencies are often supported by a government-wide strategic plan and budget, and may also use a centralized human resources or supply chain department external to the agency. Look for this information in the Organizational Profile, and ask questions during team leader calls, as well as on site.
	2. Be prepared to assess how the agency customizes or deploys these services, and how communication flows to and from the agency.
	3. In many government agencies, policies must be supported by legislation. While innovation is still possible, it may not happen at the same rate or have the same appearance as innovation in privately-owned organizations. Look for evidence of innovation to internal work processes, and consider how ideas for innovation are communicated from the agency to the legislature.
	4. Where possible, focus your OFIs on things the applicant can change – for example, how your applicant provides feedback for the management of key suppliers rather than more typical supplier oversight functions.
Applicants owned by another entity **Divisions or sites of larger entities**	1. Some organizations find value in having each independent site apply separately to the TNCPE process or by having one division pilot the application process. For these applicants, it is important to determine early in the examination process what the applicant does and does not control. Look for this information in the Organizational Profile, and ask questions during team leader calls as well as on site. Determine who controls areas such as: strategic planning, human resources, systems of measurement, and financial processes.
	2. Be prepared to consider how corporate processes (such as human resources) are deployed, enhanced, or modified at your applicant's location to meet its specific needs.
	3. Be prepared to evaluate results of the larger entity as they apply to your specific applicant (for example, locate your applicant's performance in a segmented performance chart for the larger entity).
	4. Where possible, focus your OFIs on things the applicant can change – for example, the organization may not own the strategic planning process, but it may be able to make changes to how the division implements the strategic plan or conducts its own SWOT analysis to roll up into the corporation's plan.

Other Good Questions to Ask

Who is your applicant's customer? In some instances, it may be the parent corporation, another division, or agency.

What version of the Framework did your applicant use? The process engineering function at a healthcare organization may have used the Business Criteria or the Health Care Criteria. Be sure you know which one, and why.

Who is the audience for the feedback report? This may help you understand at what level to focus your evaluation of processes such as strategic planning.

Applicant Maturity

While TNCPE offers four application levels, organizations do not always begin at Level 1 and progress to Level 4. In some instances, an applicant new to the TNCPE process may jump right in at Level 3 or 4 in order to extend the length of the site visit and obtain additional feedback. Just because an organization applies at Level 4, do not assume that feedback at the multiple item questions will be appropriate. If a Level 4 applicant lacks approaches to the basic item questions, focus your feedback here. Use the same thought process you would for a Level 2 applicant to tailor your feedback and structure your comments for a less mature applicant.

Conversely, some larger or more mature organizations may choose to start at the beginning of the TNCPE process and apply at Level 1 or Level 2. For a large, multi-site applicant, it can be overwhelming to be limited to a one-day site visit. In this instance, it is critical that the team leader determine early on in conversations with the applicant what the organization is hoping to gain from the site visit in order to prioritize time effectively. You may not be able to visit multiple locations given this timeframe. However, you may write comments at the overall or multiple item questions if you learn enough onsite to determine that the applicant has fully responded to the basic item questions. Tailor your comments to the applicant's actual maturity level as well as what it expressed as priorities in the Organizational Profile.

In Conclusion

Always write the comment that adds the most value. For example, it is much more beneficial to advise the applicant of an OFI it can change rather than one it can do nothing about. In addition, all feedback should be value-added. For each OFI you write, ask yourself:

1. What can the applicant do to address the OFI?
2. Will addressing the OFI help the applicant move to the next higher scoring range?
3. Will addressing the OFI help the applicant run its business better?