

## Baldrige Express Case Study: Aegis Sciences Corporation

---

Aegis Sciences Corporation is a rapidly growing, Nashville-based drug testing laboratory. Like many companies, it is dedicated to continuous improvement, but seeks regular, effective and fast insight into its processes. What gaps need filling? Are employees engaged? Are the Criteria concepts Aegis has embraced becoming part of the company's culture?

Last year, through a partnership between TNCPE and the National Council for Performance Excellence, Aegis discovered Baldrige Express – a diagnostic tool that would help the company answer these questions and more. It's a survey-based, internal assessment designed to measure performance on a wide range of key indicators.

Baldrige Express helped Aegis gauge its improvement efforts and evaluate its key processes, systems and results. The company was able to quickly translate the feedback into practical, measurable efforts that address the opportunities for improvement identified by the survey.

Darcie Duckworth, Aegis' assistant director of training, facilitates Baldrige Express for her company. She reports that last year, the first time the company used the tool, Aegis was able to glean a lot of value from the hefty Baldrige Express Feedback Report.

### Results

"A lot of good things came from the first year," said Darcie. "We needed better training, development, and HR."

An issue that was brought up by several team members was a dearth of information about job opportunities within the company. As a result, Aegis developed a better process for notifying team members of job openings, and it began to implement more cross-training.

To address feedback about communication, Aegis began publishing a monthly internal newsletter.

But one of the most interesting by-products of Aegis' Baldrige Express use is what the company calls "BEA Teams" or "Baldrige Express Action Teams," composed of Aegis employees.

"We're taking those team members and teaching them how to be mini TNCPE examiners," said Darcie. Each BEA Team is assigned one Category of the Baldrige Criteria and uses the Baldrige Express feedback to identify gaps. "We developed a process for them to try to find OFIs for the feedback in their categories, and then present them to executive management," said Darcie. Much like a TNCPE evaluation, the BEA Team process includes independent review and consensus stages.

### Reinforcing the TNCPE Application

In addition to pushing the company ahead, initiatives driven by Aegis' Baldrige Express Feedback will help improve the company's 2009 TNCPE Award application. Baldrige Express results are designed to serve as a stand-alone self-assessment or as a lead-in to a TNCPE application or other Baldrige-based assessment. Some organizations have used Baldrige Express to sustain improvement momentum between award cycles.

### Benchmarking Data

When Darcie received feedback from Aegis' second Baldrige Express survey, she was pleased to discover an improvement from the previous year: Baldrige Express provides benchmarking data with its feedback report. "You really get to see where you stand with others in the same industry code," said Darcie. Identifying this kind of comparative data comes into play in the Criteria, particularly within Items 2, 3 and 4.

### Cultivating a Criteria Culture

Something that is particularly important to Aegis is imbuing Criteria concepts across its workforce. Darcie says Baldrige Express has been helpful in not only gauging that workforce buy-in, but familiarizing employees with the structure of the Baldrige Criteria.

"We really wanted to get our team members engaged in the Criteria, and this seemed to be a really good tool to do that," said Darcie.

Prior understanding of the Baldrige Criteria is not needed to complete the survey, but taking it will introduce and reinforce the concepts of the Baldrige framework – from senior leaders down. At the same time, the results provide insight into how well members of an organization understand and use the Criteria.

### **Customizable**

While Aegis chose to survey its entire workforce (and even a long-time consultant), Baldrige Express is customizable. The fee structure is based on the number of users, so it can be scaled up or down, depending on how many employees an organization wants to assess and budget constraints.

Survey results are customizable, too. Data can be disaggregate according to multiple subgroups that an organization defines. This helps identify differences in perception or deployment between departments, employee types, grade level, work sites, seniority, or any other factors selected by the company.

The survey can be administered online, on paper, or a combination of both. Even the survey language and questions can be modified to best fit an organization's needs.

Ultimately, Aegis appreciates Baldrige Express as an improvement driver that gives a voice to its workforce. It synthesizes points of view from all parts of the organization, maturing its processes and integrating approaches.

“(Baldrige Express) gives team members an outlet to make suggestions for improvement,” says Archie. “We have four different business units, so, for example, it gives an opportunity for someone in business development to give a process improvement for our laboratory. It’s a really good cross-functional tool for us.”