Virginia SPQA
Examiner Guide 2024

Our Mission

To promote continual improvement strategies and provide training, mentoring, and recognition to organizations in pursuit of performance excellence.

United States Senate Productivity and Quality Award
for Virginia and the District of Columbia

spqa-va.org

October 2023

Dear Colleagues in Performance Excellence,

The U.S. Senate Productivity and Quality Award for Virginia and Washington D.C. (SPQA) is celebrating over 30 years of service to organizations in our region. From its beginnings, SPQA has been a national leader in spreading excellence in organizational performance. Every organization in Virginia and the District of Columbia that participates is a winner!

SPQA utilizes and incorporates the *Baldrige Excellence Framework,* used by hundreds of organizations to support organizational improvement, meet their customer's needs and stay abreast of competition.

Whether large or small, in manufacturing, business service, education, health care or government, organizations can benefit from the application of the *Baldrige Excellence Framework.*

Your interest in serving as an Examiner is highly valued. We hope you will take this challenge and become part of an elite group of volunteers in service to the Commonwealth and the District of Columbia.

Sincerely,

James Spengler
Chairman, SPQA Board of Directors

About Virginia and the District of Columbia SPQA & its Examiners

The United States Senate Productivity and Quality Award (SPQA) for Virginia and the District of Columbia recognizes and provides performance improvement feedback to organizations in Virginia, the District of Columbia, and sometimes other states using the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence (CPE) contained in the *Baldrige Excellence Framework*. This feedback is based on an evaluation by dedicated volunteer examiners. Virginia SPQA offers two programs where examiners are critical to success – the Award and Discovery Programs. Details of each follows:

Award Program. Organizations "apply" for the United States Senate Productivity & Quality Award Medallion. The Award Program is similar to the national Malcolm Baldrige Award Program. Award applicants submit written applications based on the Baldrige Criteria. Each application is assigned to a Team, and each Examiner on the Team conducts an independent evaluation of the assigned application. Each Examiner reviews, writes an analysis, and scores the application. After this independent review, the Team comes together for Consensus on their individual findings and scoring of the application and produces a Consensus Report. A panel of Judges reviews the Consensus Report and nearly all applicants are selected to receive an onsite visit where the Team seeks to clarify and verify findings in the Consensus Report. Examiners then prepare a Final Feedback Report for the applicant after site visit interviews. Site visits may require travel, and travel expenses for the site visit will be reimbursed by Virginia SPQA. The panel of Judges reviews each Examiner Team's Final Feedback Report, as well as findings from each of the site visits, and makes Award determinations.

In addition to providing a service for the applicant, Examiners assigned to an award application receive an **extraordinary learning experience** – especially when a site visit is conducted. Examiner service for the Award Program, Virginia SPQA's premier program, an important aspect of Virginia SPQA's mission. To ensure the best assessment of applications, Examiner Teams are diverse; comprised of new and experienced Examiners and Examiners from different business sectors and backgrounds. Examiners are exposed to a myriad of knowledge and experiences. Examiner team size varies for this Program, but normally ranges from five to eight individuals.

Discovery Program. Organizations that are relatively new to the *Baldrige Excellence Framework* "submit" a self-assessment based on a template provided by Virginia SPQA. The self-assessment concept is based on Criteria fundamentals, but at a basic level. Participation is recognized. There are no awards at this Discovery level. A Site Visit may be requested at the discretion of the applicant. Discovery Site visits are generally one day examiner experiences. The Discovery Program has smaller Examiner teams comprised of 2-4 individuals are normally adequate. The Discovery Program relies on Examiners who have participated in the Award Program for at least one cycle. For the Discovery Program, the Examiner Team develops written "observations" based on the face value of the self-assessment submitted by the organization.

To the extent practical, and ensuring no conflict of interest, efforts are made in both Programs to assign Examiners to evaluate and/or review organization applications and submissions in sectors (e.g. government, healthcare, education, business, etc.) where they have experience. Experienced individuals, supplemented by others of differing backgrounds, work to produce a well-balanced and comprehensive perspective for the organization.

Pathways to Excellence is SPQA's systematic approach to supporting organizations through their journey to excellence. Organizations are assigned a mentor and begin by writing an Organizational Profile. They then perform a self-assessment using the Baldrige Excellence Builder. The final two stages are Discovery and Award. Throughout the process the organization receives training, mentoring, and support.

The information provided as **Key Dates for the SPQA Examiners, 2024 Examination Cycle** are the key dates and activities of the Virginia SPQA Discovery and Award Programs, and the Examiner community. Examiner application cycle for the Full Award program is typically from January to June. Discovery applications come in throughout the year and is based on the Applicant's timeline for submission. Discovery Examiners review the applicant for a period of 6 to 8 weeks. Additionally, if the Discovery applicant requests a Site Visit Option, Examiners will be participating in a one-day Site Visit.

Key Dates for SPQA Examiners
2024 Award Examination Cycle

Dates	Activity
October 14, 2023	**Examiner Recruitment Opens**
December 1, 2023	**Examiner Recruitment Closes**
December 5, 2023	**Final Notification of Examiners' Selection, requirements, and Training Dates**
January 4 & 5, 2024	**Baldrige for Beginners** - *For examiners who have not taken this course* *Online 8 AM – 12 Noon*
January 8-12, 2024	**Baldrige Framework Deep Dives –** *All New and Returning Examiners* *Deep dives into each of the 6 process categories – 2 hours each - Online*
January 18 & 19, 2024	**On Site Training** - *All New and Returning Examiners* *Location TBA*
January 19, 2024	**Examination Cycle Begins**
April – May, 2024	**Site Visits** *2 days on site*
June 2024	**Delivery of Feedback Reports**
July/August 2024	**Applicant Feedback Meetings**

Program Cycles

The Award Program works on an annual schedule with defined dates for Examiner training, review, site visits, and feedback development. Examiner's time is primarily focused during the first six months of the calendar year, with specific timeframes for each phase of the examiner review process.

The Discovery Program operates year around. While there are no Discovery site visits, there are defined steps and timeframes within the actual submission and feedback period that the Examiner Team must follow.

Benefits of Being a Virginia SPQA Examiner

Virginia SPQA Examiners are experts in business, health care, government, non-profit, and education sectors selected from industry, service businesses, professional and trade organizations, government agencies, other not-for-profit groups, and the ranks of the retired.

Examiners receive training in the *Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework* and the Criteria for Performance Excellence, as well as training in how to use the Criteria as the basis for evaluating applications in the Award Program and self-assessments in the Discovery Program. Examiners can take this learning experience and become performance excellence champions within their own organizations. Many organizations have found it very valuable to have staff trained as examiners to assist their journey to performance excellence.

In addition to a desire to have returning Examiners, new Examiner applicants are welcomed and encouraged. Mentoring is provided for new Examiners to help orient them and facilitate their growth and development. The skills and experiences gained as a result of being an Examiner are also valuable professional development opportunities, especially in the areas of analytical thinking, synthesis, and evaluation. The letter of appreciation, signed by the Virginia U.S. Senators can be an important addition to one's professional file, and the designation as a Virginia SPQA Examiner can be a great addition to one's resume'. Continued personal learning and career development, as well as continuing education for recertification, are additional benefits of serving as an Examiner. Further, many Virginia SPQA Examiners have become Examiners for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program.

Virginia SPQA Examiners can take advantage of opportunities to network with other professionals in a variety of career fields such as Quality, Organizational Development, Human Resources, and Leadership, to name a few, as well as being a part of the Virginia SPQA community. Examiners are also called upon to evaluate their experience and make recommendations to the Virginia SPQA Board of Directors for program improvements.

At a practical level, for Examiners who complete the examination cycle Examiner Orientation and Training is provided at no cost, and Examiners may receive discounts on other SPQA training courses and events.

Examiner Eligibility, Application & Ethics

Individuals apply to become Examiners and/or renew their status for acceptance in the coming Program cycle. Examiners must be citizens or permanent residents of the United States and reside in the United States or its territories. Although most examiners reside in Virginia or the District of Columbia, our primary service areas, we encourage examiners from anywhere in the U.S. No one is denied consideration or appointment as an Examiner on the grounds of race, creed, national origin, age, gender or disability. Virginia SPQA's reputation and credibility ultimately relies on its Examiners. As such, those serving in this role must also achieve and maintain certain education and training, as well as performance requirements.

Virginia SPQA Examiner applications for both new and returning candidates are accepted, generally, from October to December. In addition to basic contact information, the application asks questions intended to help assess an applicant's level of experience with the *Baldrige Excellence Framework* and Criteria, which helps in assigning individuals to Examiner Teams. Returning examiners complete a simpler application to update information, including fulfillment of the Criteria Educational Requirements. Examiners may select whether they are interested in the Award or Discovery Programs, or both.

Criteria Training Requirements
All individuals who apply to become an Examiner for the first time, and/or renew their Examiner status, are expected to have Criteria Training within two years of the application and renewal period. This requirement can be met either by attending Virginia SPQA's classes, offered at a modest cost and conducted regionally throughout the year, or through a comparable training program. Since the Baldrige Excellence Framework is updated every two years, this requirement works to ensure Examiners maintain their foundational knowledge associated with the assessment methodology.

Examiner Training Requirements

In addition to the Criteria training Requirements, Virginia SPQA also requires training that focuses on the fundamentals of evaluating an application, including scoring practices, and writing actionable comments for the Award applicant's feedback report.

Comprehensive Examiner training is offered at no cost but is done so with the expectation that individuals who attend training will serve as a member of the Board of Examiners for Virginia SPQA and meet the resulting commitments. If you wish to attend the training but not participate as an SPQA examiner, SPQA will charge a fee for the training.

Usually only returning Examiners, who have completed at least one Award Cycle are selected to become Discovery Examiners.

Examiner Application and Renewal Period

Individuals who aspire to become an Examiner or wish to renew the experience part of the Award and/or Discovery Programs will be able to apply, typically starting in October and running through December. Please note that returning Examiners submit a simplified application. In addition to ensuring we have a capable Examiner Community; this process helps us understand our capacity to respond to Award and Discovery Programs demands.

Board of Examiners Designation

Examiner applicants approved for participation will be notified of *provisional* acceptance to become a member of the Board of Examiners for Virginia SPQA. Status as a member of the Board of Examiners is achieved by fully completing the educational requirements (both Criteria for Performance Excellence Training and Examiner Training), as well as the expectations for being a contributing member and completing requirements through the Independent Review Phase of an Award and/or a Full Discovery Cycle. Examiners are welcome to participate in both Programs each year.

Code of Ethical Conduct

Examiners are expected to carry out their duties and responsibilities in accordance with the SPQA Code of Ethical Conduct and must commit to such as part of the application and renewal period. All materials related to an Examination and Applicant are confidential. Examiners are expected to strictly adhere to the confidentiality procedures that are reviewed at Examiner Training. SPQA takes ethical conduct and confidentiality requirements **very seriously**. Failure to adhere to these requirements damages the integrity of SPQA and its programs, therefore, Examiners who violate these requirements may be removed from the Board of Examiners.

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest

Examiners must provide information regarding conflicts of interest with respect to program participants and applicants. Disclosure includes employers, significant ownership, and client relationships. Such information is used only for purposes of Examiner assignments and will otherwise be kept confidential. The Conflict of Interest Statement is explained during Examiner Training, and signed by Examiners after Team assignments are made. This requirement helps ensure that Examiners provide an objective and unbiased review of their assigned Award applicant or Discovery participant.

Adherence to the Process & Methods
Examiners are expected to conduct examinations fairly and competently within the prescribed approaches and methods associated with each Program.

Assignment and Compensation

Supply and Demand Note
The need for Examiners in each year depends on how many organizations participate in the Award and Discovery Programs. Normally it works well, but there may be times when the Examiner supply for the year is greater than the need. In these cases, Virginia SPQA works to make accommodations.

Examiner Assignment

Virginia SPQA seeks to provide the fairest, most competent evaluation for its Programs. Accordingly, Examiners are assigned to Teams on the basis of their knowledge and experience, consistent with the requirements to avoid conflicts of interest, to apportion the application load equitably, and to adhere to Program schedules. To the extent possible, attempts are made to balance each Team with members who: are new Examiners, are returning Examiners, and those with sector experience, i.e., government, education, manufacturing, business, service and technology, healthcare, etc.

Examiner Compensation

The SPQA Program is a 501(c)3 not for profit organization. The fees for organizations to submit an application self-assessment are kept to a minimum to encourage broad participation. Therefore, Virginia SPQA operates with maximum voluntary support. Examiner expenses for Award Program site visits and feedback meetings are reimbursed in accordance with Virginia SPQA reimbursement policies. Virginia SPQA encourages examiners to seek financial support from their employers for expenses incurred during an examination cycle. Reimbursement is not provided for expenses incurred for training or consensus meetings. Discovery Team meetings are conducted by teleconference and do not require travel.

Examiner Development and Recognition

Examiner Development

Virginia SPQA has created an Examiner evaluation process to facilitate examiner development and ensure that Examiners, who wish to, can progress through the many available roles - Team Leader, Assistant Team Leader, Editor, Mentor, Trainer, Judge, et cetera. Examiners can progress based on their maturity, longevity, experience, and performance as Examiners with Virginia SPQA. A 360° Evaluation, conducted after consensus and site visits, is part of the development path.

Recognizing Examiner Service

Virginia SPQA recognizes the critical importance of Examiners to the success of its Programs. Recognition for Examiners who have fulfilled their obligations includes the following:

- Certificate of completion for relevant Training courses
- Recognition Ceremony
- A Certificate of Appreciation, signed by the Virginia US Senators and DC Member of US Congress
- A Letter of Appreciation sent to your employer
- Name listed on the SPQA website
- Eligibility for Special Examiner Awards based on performance and achievement (Rookie Award, Above & Beyond, and Examiner of the Year)

Time Commitments

In addition to meeting the training requirements, the amount of time devoted to being an Examiner varies depending on whether participation is in the Award or Discovery Program. Even here, there can be variances. For example, in the Award Program, the time is reduced if a site visit is not conducted. Other factors include how well the organization has prepared their application (or self-assessment in the Discovery Program). Likewise, Team Leaders, assistant team leaders, mentors, and editors can expect to spend additional time simply because of their expanded role.

Teams Can Customize Schedules within a Framework

Whether working independently or together as a Team, Examiners have flexibility to schedule their time provided key deliverables are met. Provisional (New) and Returning Examiners must be willing to honor the time commitments, including potential travel, and be able to accommodate time-critical review periods – primarily the consensus meeting and site visit.

Award Program Time Estimates for Examiners

The majority of Examiner activity in the Award Program occurs between mid-January and mid-April. Virginia SPQA recognizes that unplanned situations occur, which could impact participation in a site visit or applicant feedback meeting. The table below provides an estimated time expenditure for each Phase of the Award Program for the typical Examiner. These estimates are based on historical averages.

Phase	Event	Time	Dates
Training	*Baldrige for Beginners* *(For all new and returning Examiners who have not received this or comparable training in the last 2 years.)*	8 hours (only required every two years)	Workshops typically offered quarterly For additional information and to register, go to www.spqa-va.org or email programs.services@spqa-va.org
	Baldrige Framework Deep Dives *(All New and Returning Examiners)*	12 hours	January *Online*
	Examiner Training	16 hours	January *In-person*
	Examination Cycle Just-in-time training	8 hours	Spread throughout the examination cycle
Evaluation	Independent Review	40 hours	January - February
	Team Consensus	10 hours	March
Site Visit *(If Selected)*	Site Visit Training	2 hours	April/May
	Site Visit Preparation	8-20 hours	April through May
	Site Visit	24-30 hours	May
Report	Feedback Report	8-12 hours *(leadership only)*	May/June
Feedback	Applicant Meeting	4 hours *(leadership only)*	July/August
Total Estimated Hours per year		**128 - 146 hours**	January - August

Discovery Program Time Estimates

Examiner activity associated with the Discovery Program occurs year around. While less labor intensive than the Award Program, Examiners in the Discovery Program must still perform within the established timeframes. Organizations submit their Intent to Participate form, which triggers the creation of a 2-4 person Examination Team. For Discovery, other than training and Team formation, the effort starts in earnest for a six-week regimen after the Team receives the Organization's submission. The table below shows estimates of time required for each phase of the Discovery Program for the typical Examiner. The phases and related events are recommendations, Team alterations to this approach are acceptable provided the Feedback Report is available for editing in Week 6 or sooner.

Phase	Event	Time	Dates
Training	*Baldrige for Beginners* *(For all new and returning Examiners who have not received this or comparable training in the last 2 years.)*	8 hours (only required every two years)	Workshops typically offered quarterly For additional information and to register, go to www.spqa-va.org or email programs.services@spqa-va.org
	Baldrige Framework Deep Dives *(All New and Returning Examiners)*	12 hours	January *Online*
	Examiner Training*	16 hours	January *Online*
	JIT Discovery Examiner Tutorial	1-2 hours	Phone call or by webcast as scheduled just prior to receiving the organization's Self-Assessment submission
Team Formation & Preparation	Intent to Participate Received, Team Formed and Trained	N/A	Within the 60 days of receipt of Intent to Participate and prior to Submission receipt.
Initial Evaluation & Independent Review	Team Members Review Submission, develop Key Factors & conduct Independent Review	28-38 hours	**Weeks 1 & 2**
Team Consensus Feedback Development	Category Leads consolidate & refine team members' comments; Team Consensus phone call is held	25 – 30 hours	**Week 3**
Team Consensus & Feedback Refinement	Post-consensus refinement by Category Leads & overall Observation Summary development	15-20 hours	**Weeks 4-6**
Feedback Telecon	Available on request from the organization	2-3 hours	TBD – within 60 days
Total Estimated Hours per cycle		**95-145 hours**	Year around Discovery cycles

Virginia SPQA Code of Ethical Conduct for Examiners

As a U.S. Senate Productivity and Quality Award for Virginia and Washington, DC (Virginia SPQA) Recognition, Ones to Watch and Discovery Examiner. I pledge to uphold my professional principles in the fulfillment of my responsibilities as defined in the bylaws that established Virginia SPQA. In promoting high standards of public service and ethical conduct, as an Examiner, I will:

- *Conduct myself professionally, with truth, accuracy, fairness, respect, and responsibility to the public.*
- *Avoid representing conflicting or competing interests, or placing myself in such a position where my interest may be in conflict, or appear to be in conflict, with the purposes and administration of the SPQA Recognition, Discovery or Ones to Watch Programs.*
- *Safeguard the confidences of all parties involved in the examination of present or former participant businesses or organizations.*
- *Protect confidential information and avoid disclosures that may in any way influence the Programs' integrity or processes, currently or in the future.*
- *Not serve any private or special interest in my fulfillment of the duties as an Examiner; therefore, excluding, by definition, the examination of any organization (or subordinate component or parent organization of an organization) that employs me or has a consulting arrangement in effect or anticipated with me for a period of five (5) years before and after the examination cycle.*
- *Not serve as an Examiner for a primary competitor, customer, or supplier of any organization (or subordinate component or parent organization of an organization) that employs me, that I have a financial interest in, or with which I anticipate a consulting arrangement, or have otherwise been involved, for a period of five (5) years before and after the examination cycle.*
- *Not intentionally communicate false or misleading information that may compromise the integrity of the Recognition, Ones to Watch or Discovery processes or decisions therein.*
- *Make it clear, when establishing links from my own Web sites to the Virginia SPQA Web sites that users will be taken to the official Virginia SPQA Web site.*
- *Never approach an organization I have examined for my personal gain, including the establishment of an employment or consulting relationship, and, if approached by an organization I have examined, do not accept employment from that organization for a period of five (5) years after the completion of the examination cycle.*
- *Treat as confidential all information gained about the applicant or participant and its operations gained during the Recognition, Discovery or Ones to Watch examination cycles, specifically through the Application or Self-Assessment evaluation processes.*
- *Physically safeguard all information concerning the applicant or participant and its operation by taking the following precautions:*
- *Report any violations of the SPQA Code of Ethical Conduct, confidentiality, or Conflict of Interest (COIs) to the SPQA Recognition, Ones to Watch or Discovery Program Director or to the SPQA Board.*
- *Upon completion of the Examiner Preparation Course and the full evaluation cycle of review, I may use the following designation: Recognition, Discovery and/or Ones to Watch Examiner, Mentor, Editor, or Judge, U.S. Senate Productivity and Quality Awards (SPQA) Program for Virginia and year(s) served. However, the Virginia SPQA logo may not be used in advertising or promotion, or on my business cards.*
- *Furthermore, I pledge that as a Recognition, Discovery or Ones to Watch Examiner in good standing, I will strive to enhance and advance the Recognition, Discovery, and Ones to Watch programs, which serve to stimulate organizations in Virginia and the District of Columbia to improve quality, productivity, and overall performance.*