

NEWS RELEASE

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IMPROVEMENTS MADE TO CONSULTANT REFERRAL NETWORK

The Minnesota Council for Quality – in cooperation with the Kansas Center for Performance Excellence, the Michigan Quality Council, the Ohio Partnership for Excellence, the Washington State Quality Award, and the Wisconsin Forward Award – is pleased to announce significant refinements to their Consultant Referral Network©.

Located at www.consultantreferralnetwork.org, the Consultant Referral Network is a dynamic, web-enabled search tool that connects organizational improvement experts to client organizations seeking them. This service allows clients to outline their needs in terms of subject matter expertise sought, type of assistance desired (consulting, training, coaching, speaking, or facilitating), sector/industry expertise required, size of consulting firm desired, desired location of consulting firm, and years of experience preferred. The client can also weight the relative importance of each variable. The tool will then identify up to five consultants or firms that best match the client's needs.

Refinements recently made to the tool now allow clients to also conduct directory searches. These searches will allow clients to see all consultants with a specific subject matter expertise, all consultants with particular sector experience, and all consultants domiciled in a specific state, for example. There is no charge for client searches.

“Use of the Consultant Referral Network continues to grow,” says Brian Lassiter, president of the Minnesota Council for Quality. “With about 100 consultants listed in the service, the tool's value to clients continues to increase. And with the additional functionality of the tool, clients have the choice of how they search for consultants.”

The Consultant Referral Network was officially launched March 1, 2005, by the state quality award programs in Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Since then, Kansas and Washington have joined in the partnership of programs offering the service. The Network now averages about 1200 independent visits a month and has about 20-30 client searches a month.

“Our goal is to increase the awareness and use of this tool,” continues Lassiter. “These enhancements will make the tool more robust for clients who seek assistance in improving aspects of their organization. And as the number of clients using the tool increases, the tool becomes more valuable for consultants.”

About the Washington State Quality Award

WSQA is a not-for-profit organization committed to encouraging and recognizing performance excellence in business, education, government, non-profit and healthcare. The organization champions the concepts and tools of Performance Excellence as based on the *Baldrige Criteria*. These *Criteria* help organizations increase their capabilities, expand their knowledge and skills and improve their performance. WSQA encourages excellence and contributes to making Washington a better place to live, learn and work by helping organizations achieve superior results through the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. For more information, visit www.wsqa.net.

About the Minnesota Council for Quality

Founded in 1987, the Minnesota Council for Quality is a non-profit that helps organizations improve performance and competitiveness. The Council's primary service is a comprehensive organizational assessment that identifies

strengths and improvement opportunities and serves as the foundation for the Minnesota Quality Award. In addition, the Council brokers improvement-related resources, information, knowledge, and best practices within and between Minnesota organizations. For more information, please visit www.councilforquality.org.

About the Kansas Center for Performance Excellence

The Kansas Center for Performance Excellence is the education, training and consulting arm of the Kansas Award for Excellence Foundation (KAE), a 501c(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to promote and recognize performance excellence in Kansas. KAE is the state affiliate of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. For more information about the Kansas Center for Performance Excellence, visit <http://www.kae.bluestep.net/> or call 800-743-6767

About the Michigan Quality Council

The mission of the Michigan Quality Council is to assist organizations in improving their performance through the use of proven quality concepts and techniques that ensure desirable results for products, services and customer satisfaction. The MQC does this by providing professional development; advising/consulting in partnership with others; assessing and providing feedback on strengths and improvement areas; recognizing exemplary performance; and identifying and disseminating best practices. For more information, please visit www.michiganquality.org.

About the Ohio Partnership for Excellence

The Ohio Partnership for Excellence™ (OPE) is a non-profit organization that works with organizations to simply become better at what they do. By using the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence as a framework, OPE helps organizations see improved results. Many organizations see lowered costs, improved productivity, increased profitability, and rises in both employee and customer satisfaction. For more information, please visit www.partnershipohio.org.

About the Wisconsin Forward Award

The mission of Wisconsin Forward Award, Inc. is to promote and recognize the adoption of high performance management principles and practices by Wisconsin organizations in order to achieve world-class status for Wisconsin products and services; help meet international competition; and enhance continuous learning, quality improvement and performance excellence. For more information, please visit www.forwardaward.org.

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