2026 Seal of *Excelencia*: Intentionally Thriving Institutions
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The FAQs for the 2026 Seal of *Excelencia* Intentionally Thriving Institution certification process cover the following topics:

- Information and Assistance to Help Complete Applications
  - General
  - Data Questions
  - Strategy & Program and Practice Questions
  - Post-Completion
- Submission of Applications
- Review of Applications
- Announcement of Recertified Institutions
- Sustaining Your Seal Certification

A summary timeline of the 2026 Seal of *Excelencia* Intentionally Thriving Institution certification process is included below. For a more comprehensive timeline, and if you have any other questions that have not been included in this document, we invite you to email the Seal team at Seal@EdExcelencia.org.



INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE TO HELP COMPLETE APPLICATIONS

General

Q: Our institution already earned recertification. Why do we need to apply for recertification again?

A: The Seal is more than just a one-time recognition. Your recertification in 2023 recognized your intuition's responsibility and accountability for the institutional role in student success and transformation to ensure access and excellence. Your recertification as an Intentionally Thriving Institution demonstrates a continued commitment to use data, practice, and leadership to ensure you are providing your Latino, and all, students with the opportunity of a quality education. Through a thorough assessment and commitment to taking responsibility for student success, Intentionally Thriving Institutions know who they are serving, and are serving their students well, so that they can thrive post-completion.

Q: How does this certification differ from recertification three years ago?

A: In addition to the data, practice, and leadership components of the Seal framework, certification as an Intentionally Thriving Institution compels institutions to share their priority strategies, measures of impact for efforts, and two practices/programs that:

- **Prepare** Latino, and all, students for the workforce and
- **Link** Latino, and all, students to the workforce post-completion.

Our ITI certification overview offers more information about the differences between the recertification and ITI certification applications.

Q: Is our institution required to participate in *Excelencia*'s capacity building institutes to be eligible to apply for recertification?

A: Institutions are required to be part of *Excelencia*'s E-Action network to apply for ITI certification. Institutions are not required to attend any institutes.

Q: Does the application contain character or word limits?

A: There is a word limit for every open-ended question. This word limit helps institutions be more succinct in sharing their narrative with an audience that may not know their campus.

Q: Is it acceptable to use hyperlinks as part of a response?

A: Due to the potential volume, hyperlink content will not be reviewed. *Excelencia* encourages institutions to tell their story in a clear and succinct way within the word limit for every open-ended question.

Q: The online application seems difficult to navigate and edit our responses. What can we do to make it easier?

A: Please email our team at Seal@EdExcelencia.org to request a PDF version of the application.

Q: If we exit the browser mid-way through completing our application, will my work be saved?

A: Yes, the online application does allow users to save their progress and continue later.

Data Questions

Q: How do we complete the data tables in each section?

A: In each data section, you will click the link to view and download your institution's tables, which are pre-populated with data that your institution submitted in 2023. After downloading

the tables, you will fill in all cells using the instructions provided. You can also review and update your previously submitted data. You will need to save the files on your computer and then upload each table to the appropriate section when completing the application.

Q: What if we do not have the data requested (e.g., financial aid data by race/ethnicity)?
A: Please submit the data you do have and leave blank the cell for any data you do not have or if the data is zero. Do not worry about the embedded formula for % change; the *Excelencia* team will review all data tables and modify the formula as needed.

Q: How is "% change" calculated?
A: The formula is: (latest year data minus first year data) / first year data. The formulas have already been embedded into the tables.

Q: What data source is *Excelencia* expecting institutions to use when reporting data requested?
A: *Excelencia* generally expects institutions to use IPEDS data, since it is based on institutionally reported data and can be verified. However, we will also accept data from other institutional sources.

Q: How is *Excelencia* defining the data elements (e.g., retention/persistence, completion, etc.)?
A: *Excelencia* generally follows the IPEDS definitions for the data elements. Each table also offers definitions for the data elements being requested. For more information, please review the IPEDS glossary.

Strategy and Program/Practice Questions

Q: What is *Excelencia* looking for in the responses to the Current Strategies and Practices questions?
A: *Excelencia* is interested in learning about the institution's intentional alignment of data, practice, and leadership. Specifically, we want to learn about the overall strategy that guides institutional efforts in **two of the six practice areas** (enrollment, persistence/retention, support financially, transfer, representation, and completion), and then we ask you to highlight your top 3 programs/practices within that area with evidence of effectiveness to demonstrate intentionality and impact for each.

Q: What does *Excelencia* mean by "alignment?"
A: *Excelencia* thinks of "alignment" as a verb. Alignment is the process of triangulating strategies, practices, and disaggregated data to better understand and connect your institution's efforts focused on Latino, and all, student success. To be in alignment means that an institution is:

- Focused on taking action that results in greater success for Latino, and all, students;
- Routinely engaged in decisive and timely decision-making;
- Intentional and strategic in defining the key actions taken as an institution committed to serving Latino students while serving all students; and
- Consistently focused on Latino student success, as a goal of institutional transformation that requires longer-term efforts to create environments where Latino, and all, students thrive.

Q: How does *Excelencia* distinguish between strategies and practices?
A: Strategy can be thought of as the "big picture," "why," or "philosophy" that guides leadership, faculty, and staff. Practices are data-based interventions; these can also be

programs, processes, and services that your institution provides for students. Some practices may align with multiple strategies.

Q: What does *Excelencia* mean by "evidence of effectiveness?"
A: Evidence of effectiveness for a program/practice is the documented proof, in the form of disaggregated data of your intent to serve Latino students and the measurable impact of your efforts on Latino, and all, student success.

Q: Enrollment: Should we provide duplicated enrollment counts (a student enrolled in fall and spring all counted) within one academic year or unduplicated counts?
A: Please provide an unduplicated headcount for the fall term of an academic year.

Q: Enrollment: The 2025-26 data is not available for our institution; what do we do?
A: If you do not have the data available, you can leave the cells blank. The *Excelencia* team will adjust the embedded % change formula as needed.

Q: Retention: Do institutions have to complete both the Retention and Persistence Data tables?
A: Institutions should only complete one table, depending on the best data available.

Q: Persistence: Should we only count "first-time freshmen" who enroll in the fall and return for the spring, or all students enrolled for that academic year?
A: We want institutions to include all students enrolled in an academic year, not just first-time freshmen.

Q: Transfer: Should institutions use fall (IPEDS) or annualized (estimated) data?
A: *Excelencia* generally expects IPEDS data as it is institutional data that can be verified. Your institution can submit annualized data if IPEDS data is not available.

Q: Financial Support: Does *Excelencia* evaluate institutional awarding policies?
A: *Excelencia* focuses on the strategy for using financial and institutional aid and its impact on Latino, and all, students, **not** on awarding policies.

Q: Representation: What do you mean by "staff" and "part-time faculty?"
A: The definitions of "staff" and "part-time faculty" are determined by each institution. The table provides space to share your institution's definition.

Q: Representation: Clarify what is intended for the "administration/administrator" category as it relates to faculty with dual roles.
A: We are not looking for mutually exclusive data. For this purpose, faculty with dual roles may be included as administrators and as faculty.

Q: Degree Completion: Should we report 3-year or 6-year completion rates?
A: For institutions that primarily grant associate degrees, we prefer to see your institution's 3-year completion rate for a cohort. For institutions that primarily grant baccalaureate degrees, we prefer to see your institution's 6-year completion rate for a cohort.

Post-Completion

Q: Why does *Excelencia* ask about our post-completion efforts for preparing and linking Latino, and all, students for the workforce?

A: Latinos have the higher labor force participation and will account for 90 percent of new workers – the largest group of any – and one in five workers overall by 2031. However, Latinos are the most likely to be employed in manual labor occupations and earn lower salaries compared to other groups. As Intentionally Thriving Institutions, you are positioned to taking action to ensure America's future by advancing Latino talent.

SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

Q: When is the application due?
A: The application is due on May 1, 2026, at 5:00pm ET.

Q: May we fax, scan, or mail the completed application directly to the *Excelencia* office?
A: No, we only consider applications submitted through our online portal.

Q: How will we know if we successfully submitted our application?
A: After submitting the application, the institution's President/Chancellor will receive an automated confirmation email. If the confirmation email is not received, please email the *Excelencia* team at Seal@EdExcelencia.org. *Excelencia* will follow up to share next steps in the process.

Q: I received an email confirmation that *Excelencia* received our application, are there additional steps that we need to take in this process?
A: Please use the link provided in the application to schedule an interview with your institution's President/Chancellor. They are welcome to invite additional team members as they deem appropriate.

Q: Can we make changes to an already submitted application?
A: Please email Seal@EdExcelencia.org as soon as possible to notify the *Excelencia* team that you are requesting a change to your submission.

Q: Can supplemental documentation be submitted with the application?
A: No, *Excelencia* is not accepting additional attachments to the application to ensure all institutions are equally reviewed.

REVIEW OF APPLICATIONS

Q: How is *Excelencia* evaluating our responses?
A: *Excelencia* will review your application for ITI certification independently of your recertification application three years ago. We will continue to holistically evaluate the application, looking for evidence that institutions demonstrate intentionality in SERVING Latino, and all, students with sustainable strategies and practices with measurable impact. We are focusing on the alignment of data, strategies, evidence-based practices, and leadership strategies, as well your post-completion efforts, measures of impact, and financial investments throughout the application.

Q: Are sections of the application reviewed separately?
A: The application is reviewed in its entirety by each reviewer to better understand the alignment between institutional data, strategies, evidence-based practices, and leadership strategies and investments.

Q: Who will review the applications submitted?
A: *Excelencia* staff will review and make the final selection of institutions that are certified as Intentionally Thriving Institutions.

Q: Is an interview part of the ITI certification process?
A: Yes, all institutions are expected to take part in a leadership interview as part of your application. Please use the link provided in the application to schedule your institution's leadership interview.

Q: Are interviews limited to presidents?
A: While it is expected that Presidents/Chancellors will take the lead for the Seal of *Excelencia* leadership interviews, these are not limited to only Presidents/Chancellors. The number and composition of the institutional group is left to each institution's discretion.

Q: Is there a target number of institutions to be recertified every year?
A: No. *Excelencia*'s sole focus is to identify those institutions making significant progress in their transformative efforts to more intentionally serve Latino, and all, students.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CERTIFIED INTENTIONALLY THRIVING INSTITUTIONS

Q: How will we know if we have received certification as an Intentionally Thriving Institution?
A: The institutions selected as Seal of *Excelencia* 2026 ITI institutions will be notified by email in June with additional details on the announcement.

Q: When will Seal of *Excelencia* 2026 ITI institutions be publicly announced?
A: *Excelencia* will recognize the institutions certified as Seal of *Excelencia* Intentionally Thriving Institutions at our annual convening at the end of October in Washington, DC.

SUSTAINING YOUR SEAL CERTIFICATION

Q: How often must we apply for recertification?
A: Institutions recertified as Seal of *Excelencia* Intentionally Thriving Institutions are required to continue their affiliation in our E-Action network every year and engage with *Excelencia* during the three years until their next recertification.

Q: What if our institution does not receive ITI certification?
A: For institutions that are not selected for ITI certification, *Excelencia* will provide feedback on their application and help identify capacity building support. At the end of three years, institutions' Seal certification will be invalid until they successfully reapply for certification.

For any other questions, please reach out to the *Excelencia* team at Seal@EdExcelencia.org.

As of 2/19/26