2026 Seal of *Excelencia* Certification Application
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The FAQs for the 2026 Seal of *Excelencia* application are organized by the following topics:

- Information and Assistance Available to Help Complete Applications
  - General
  - Data Questions
  - Strategy & Program and Practice Questions
- Submission of Applications
- Review of Applications
- Announcement of Certified Institutions

If you have any other questions that have not been included in these FAQs, please send an email to Seal@Ed*Excelencia*.org with your specific question. Thank you.

INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE TO HELP COMPLETE APPLICATIONS

General

Q Do we have to be a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) to be able to apply for the Seal?

A No, it is not required that an institution be an HSI. However, institutions must be actively engaged in *Excelencia* in Action (E-Action) network by **March 2**. You can check here to see if your institution is part of E-Action. For more information on the E-Action network please contact our Institutional Engagement team at E-Action@EdExcelencia.org.

Q What is *Excelencia* in Action (E-Action) and why is it important that our institution be part of E-Action?

A Institutional transformation requires institutional commitment. The institutional leaders who are part of *Excelencia* in Action (E-Action) have committed to creating environments where Latino, and all, students thrive explicitly in discussions with *Excelencia*'s president. *Excelencia* in Education's E-Action network of presidents work with *Excelencia* to leverage collective expertise and resources, foster partnerships, and amplify current efforts at the national level to ensure Latino, and all, students thrive.

Q Can we continue to work on our Seal application while our institution checks if we are part of *Excelencia* in Action (E-Action)?

A Yes, your team can complete the application without submitting it. The application can be submitted by the deadline once affiliation is confirmed.

Q Is it required that we attend capacity building institutes before applying for the Seal?

A No, attending the capacity building institutes is not an eligibility requirement to apply for the Seal. However, it is highly encouraged that institutions attend capacity building opportunities to become familiar with demonstrating intentionality, impact, and alignment of data, practice, and leadership.

Q The online application seems difficult to navigate and to edit our responses. What can we do to make it easier?
   A Institutions in E-Action network may email the *Excelencia* team at Seal@Ed*Excelencia*.org to request a PDF version of the application.

Q Can I talk to someone about my application while I am preparing it?
   A *Excelencia* does not offer individual consultations. However, we can answer most questions submitted via email at Seal@EdExcelencia.org.

Q What kind of resources do you offer to help institutions prepare their application?
   A We offer an annual Certification Webinar. You can find several resources via our Seal portal. They include FAQs, the Seal framework, capacity building institutes, and other assessment tools.

Q Does the application contain character or word limits?
   A There is a word limit for every open-ended question. The 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 Will the application time out if I keep it open in my browser?
   A Yes, the application may timeout without notifying you. We recommend that you save often as you work through answering the questions.

Q If I exit the browser mid-way through completing our application, will my work be saved?
   A We recommend that you save your work before exiting to be sure all your work is saved.

Data Questions

Q. How do we complete the data tables in each section?
   A You will need to download the blank tables by clicking on the live link in each section, then complete the tables and save it to your files. Next, upload the completed tables in ***Excel format*** using the "Choose file" button within the application. Please save your application prior to downloading the tables to make sure you do not lose any information.

Q. What if we do not have the data requested (e.g., financial aid data broken down by race/ethnicity)?
   A. Please submit the data you do have and leave blank what you do not have. The *Excelencia* team will adjust the embedded % change formula as needed.

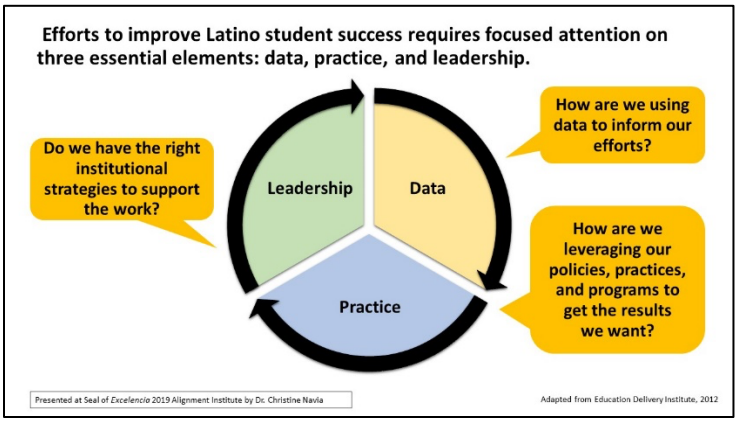
Q What data source is *Excelencia* expecting institutions to use when reporting data requested?
   A *Excelencia* generally expects institutions will use IPEDS data since it is based on institutionally reported data and can be verified; however, we will also accept data from your institutional sources.

Q How is *Excelencia* defining the data elements (e.g., retention/persistence, completion, etc.)?
A *Excelencia* is mostly following 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.

Q How do I calculate "% change?"
A The formula is: (latest year data minus first year data) ÷ by first year data.

Strategy & Program and Practice Questions

Q What is *Excelencia* looking for in the responses to the open-ended Strategy and Program/Practice questions?
A *Excelencia* is interested in learning the institution's intentional alignment of data, practice, and leadership. Specifically, we want to learn about the overall strategy that guides institutional efforts in that area (enrollment, persistence/retention, support financially, transfer, representation, and completion) and then we ask you to highlight your top 3 programs/practices within that area. Please note that you should provide disaggregated data as evidence of effectiveness for each of the programs/practices shared to show impact. Here's a graphic of key questions to consider as your team answers the questions:



Q What does *Excelencia* mean by "alignment?"
A *Excelencia* thinks of "alignment" as a verb. Alignment is the process of organizing an institution's decisions and actions based on disaggregated data so that they fully support the achievement of strategic institutional goals focused on Latino, and all, student success. To be in alignment means that an institution is:
- Focused on taking action that results in accelerating for Latino student success while increasing all student success;
- Routinely engaged in decisive and timely decision-making based on disaggregated data;
- 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 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 of your intent to serve and the measurable impact of your efforts on Latino, and all, student success. It is best documented with disaggregated data.

Q Enrollment: Should I 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?

B. If you do not have the data available, you can leave 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 I 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 or annualized data?

A. *Excelencia* generally expects IPEDS data as it is institutional data that can be verified. Estimates or annualized data is fine if IPEDS data is not available.

Q. Support Financially: Does *Excelencia* evaluate institutional awarding policies?

A. *Excelencia* focuses on the strategy for using financial aid and its impact on Latino students and 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 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 I report 3-year or 6-year completion rates for one cohort?

A. We prefer to see your institution's 6-year completion rate for a cohort.

SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

Q When is the application due?
A The application is due June 1 by 5:00pm ET.

Q May I fax, scan, or mail the completed application directly to the *Excelencia* in Education office?
A No, only applications submitted through our online application submission system will be considered.

Q How will I know If I successfully submitted our application?
A After submitting your application, an automated confirmation will be sent to the email addresses provided in the application for contact and president.

Q I received an email confirmation that *Excelencia* in Education received my application, are there additional steps that I need to take in this process?
A No, *Excelencia* staff will follow up about your submission should they have any additional questions.

Q Can I make changes to an already submitted application?
A You must email the Seal team at Seal@Ed*Excelencia*.org as soon as possible to notify *Excelencia* that you are requesting a change to your submission.

Q Can supplemental documentation be submitted with the application?
A No, *Excelencia* does 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* is holistically evaluating the applications. We are looking for institutions that are going beyond enrollment to intentionally SERVE Latino, and all, students. We are focusing on the alignment of data, practice, and leadership throughout the application and practices with evidence of effectiveness as measures of impact on student success.

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 efforts and achievements.

Q Who will review the applications submitted?
A The applications will be reviewed by *Excelencia* staff and members of the Seal Advisory Council. The final selection of institutions that will receive the Seal of *Excelencia* will be made by *Excelencia* staff.

Q How will we know the status of our application?
A Institutions will be notified of their application status in August.

Q If we are selected as a finalist for the Seal, what happens next?
A Institutions that are selected as finalists for the Seal of *Excelencia* will be required to participate in a leadership interview with *Excelencia*. These interviews with the president/chancellor of each institution will be conducted in July.

Q. Are Interviews with finalist institutions 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. The number and composition of the institutional group is left to each institution's discretion.

Q How long will the leadership interviews be?
A Seal of *Excelencia* finalists will be emailed a notification with all details and next steps in July.

Q If we aren't selected as a finalist, can we find out why?
A *Excelencia* offers a general feedback session in the Fall for all institutions that are not certified. *Excelencia* does not offer individual consultations at this time.

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

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CERTIFIED INSTITUTIONS

Q How will we know if we have received the Seal of *Excelencia*?
A The institutions selected as Seal of *Excelencia* certified institutions will be notified by email with additional details on the announcement.

Q When will Seal of *Excelencia* certified institutions be announced?
A *Excelencia* will recognize the institutions certified with the Seal of *Excelencia* on October 2026, in Washington, DC.

Q What if we do not earn the Seal of *Excelencia*?
A For institutions that do not earn the Seal, *Excelencia* offers a feedback session that includes the *Excelencia* capacity building support that is available to institutions.

Q When will non-certified Seal of *Excelencia* applicants be able to reapply?
A *Excelencia* intends to accept applications for the Seal of *Excelencia* annually. Prior applicants who were not certified are welcome to reapply.