

2027 ATD BEST Awards Application

Applicant Instructions

Purpose of the BEST Awards

The ATD BEST Awards recognize organizations that demonstrate enterprise-wide success through talent development. Strong applications show that the talent development function understands consequential organizational needs, makes sound strategic choices, responds at meaningful scale, evaluates its work aligned with business measures, produces credible results, and learns from experience.

Reporting period and eligible evidence

- Use evidence from the designated 12-month reporting period; **for the 2027 application, the reporting cycle is July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026.**
- An initiative does not need to have launched during the reporting period. Ongoing or multiyear work is eligible when the application clearly identifies what occurred, changed, or was measured during the reporting period.
- Use current results. Historical context may be included only when needed to establish a baseline or explain a trend.
- Avoid repeating the same evidence across questions. Cross-reference another response only when the platform permits it and the evidence directly applies.

Selecting the three signature contributions

Select three strategically consequential, evidence-supported contributions. Together, they must differ meaningfully in all the following ways:

- the organizational need or opportunity addressed;
- the primary audience or stakeholder group; and
- the type of talent development contribution or solution.

A signature contribution is not necessarily the largest, newest, or most visible program. It is work that was strategically important, involved a deliberate choice among alternatives, and produced credible evidence of value.

What reviewers need to see

- Scope: who was affected, where, how many, and how the work fits within the broader talent development strategy.
- Strategic relevance: the organizational need or opportunity and why it mattered.
- Strategic choice: why the selected approach was better suited to the context than a reasonable alternative, including relevant constraints and tradeoffs.
- L&D contribution: what the talent development function specifically influenced, designed, enabled, or delivered.
- Evaluation: how success measures were chosen; when and how data were collected; and the quality and limitations of the evidence.
- Impact: baseline, result, timeframe, practical significance, and credible contribution to business, workforce, customer, mission, community, or other stakeholder outcomes.
- Learning: How evidence changed implementation or future talent development practice.

Evidence standard: Do not claim that L&D caused an outcome unless the evaluation supports that conclusion. When several factors contribute, explain L&D's credible contribution and identify other material influences.

Blind review and writing requirements

- Do not include the organization name, branded program names, named individuals, identifying achievements, URLs, or identifying file names outside the administrative cover page.
- Clear, direct writing is preferred. Reviewers will evaluate the quality of the practice and evidence, not literary style or English fluency.
- Define acronyms and avoid promotional language. Use tables or graphics only when they make evidence easier to interpret.
- Optional evidence uploads are limited to one page per designated upload and must be anonymous. Uploaded material should support, not replace, the written response.
- **A Note on the Use of AI:** With the growing usage of artificial intelligence (AI) in today's workplace, we acknowledge applicants may use AI tools to assist in completing the application, including brainstorming and proofreading. We do not encourage the use of AI to write the application copy; and we strongly urge applicants to not enter financial, HR, employee, or other proprietary information into such AI tools as that information could become public knowledge. ATD has no responsibility for such disclosures.

Application

Administrative Cover Page (not visible to reviewers and not scored)

All applicants are asked to provide the following information for ATD's use in applicant communications and winner publicity. This information will not be included in the application that judges review.

- Primary point of contact
- Primary shipping address
- Company logo
- Public-facing company name
- Applicant release acknowledgement

Reviewer-Facing Profile (not scored)

This section is for publishing purposes only if the organization is chosen as a BEST winner. Information may be used for winner profiles in *TD magazine*.

P1. Organization profile

Provide sector, geographic reach, approximate workforce size, primary workforce types, and whether the application represents the full enterprise or a defined business unit. Do not include identifying details.

Maximum 150 words | Not scored

P2. Talent development function profile

Provide the title of the senior executive with enterprise-wide responsibility for talent development; the number of L&D full-time-equivalent employees; the number of employees served; and a concise description of the function's operating model (centralized, decentralized, federated, or hybrid).

Maximum 150 words | Not scored

P3. Executive summary

In three to five sentences, state what distinguishes the organization's talent development work during the reporting period. Name the most consequential organizational needs addressed and the strongest evidence of value. Do not introduce evidence that does not appear elsewhere in the application.

Maximum 250 words | Not scored

Section A. Enterprise Strategy and the Role of Talent Development

Weighting: 25%

A1. Talent strategy and organizational alignment

Describe the organization's most important strategic priorities and workforce implications during the reporting period. Explain how the talent strategy was derived from those priorities, how L&D participated in planning or decision making, and how priorities were translated into the talent development portfolio. Include one or two concrete examples of decisions, investments, or tradeoffs that demonstrate alignment.

Maximum 500 words | Scored

A2. Leadership, governance, and shared accountability

Explain how senior leaders, business leaders, managers, and the talent development function share accountability for workforce capability and learning. Describe the governance, sponsorship, funding, communications, and manager practices that materially affect execution or outcomes. Include evidence of leadership behavior, not endorsement statements alone.

Maximum 400 words | Scored

A3. Enterprise access, participation, and application

Explain how learning is embedded in work and/or made relevant and accessible across the workforce. Use TWO examples with distinct audiences and include evidence of reach, adoption, application, and outcomes.

Maximum 400 words | Scored

A4. Capability of the talent development function

Explain how the L&D team builds the capabilities needed to serve the organization now and in the future. Identify the most important capability gaps within the team, development actions taken within the reporting period, and evidence that the team's effectiveness improved. You may reference relevant ATD Talent Development Capability Model capabilities when useful.

Maximum 350 words | Scored

Section B. Signature Talent Development Contributions

Weighting: 40%

Present three complete signature contributions. The same evidence structure is repeated so reviewers can compare strategic importance, judgment, scale, evaluation, impact, and learning without rewarding narrative style.

B1. Signature contribution 1

Present one strategically consequential, evidence-supported contribution using every response element below.

Response element	What to provide
Strategic importance and baseline	What organizational need, opportunity, risk, or capability gap made this work strategically important? Who was affected, and what baseline evidence defined the need?
Intended outcomes	What workforce, performance, customer, mission, community, or business outcomes were targeted?
Approach, L&D role, and scale	What did the talent development function design, enable, influence, or change? Include audience, reach, duration, locations or business units, partners, and resources when material.
Choice and reasonable alternatives	Why was this approach better suited to the need and context than at least one reasonable alternative? Identify the evidence, constraints, and tradeoffs that informed the choice.
Evaluation strategy	What measures, data sources, comparison points, timing, and methods were used? How were the measures connected to the intended outcomes?
Results and significance	Indicate which stakeholders benefited from this initiative and why. Provide baseline and ending results, the measurement timeframe, and the practical significance of the change. Separate activity or output measures from outcome or impact measures.
L&D contribution and limitations	Explain the evidence supporting L&D's contribution. Identify other material influences and limitations; do not claim causation unless the evaluation supports it.
Organizational learning and adaptation	Describe one important assumption that proved incorrect or incomplete and a meaningful adjustment made during implementation as a result; or one practice, principle, or capability adopted for future initiatives.
Transferable learning	What should other organizations learn from this work? Explain the conditions under which the approach may or may not transfer.

Maximum 900 words | Scored

Optional upload: One anonymous, one-page evidence graphic may accompany this contribution. It should clarify the evaluation or results and must not introduce unsupported claims.

B2. Signature contribution 2

Present one strategically consequential, evidence-supported contribution using every response element below.

Response element	What to provide
Strategic importance and baseline	What organizational need, opportunity, risk, or capability gap made this work strategically important? Who was affected, and what baseline evidence defined the need?
Intended outcomes	What workforce, performance, customer, mission, community, or business outcomes were targeted?
Approach, L&D role, and scale	What did the talent development function design, enable, influence, or change? Include audience, reach, duration, locations or business units, partners, and resources when material.
Choice and reasonable alternatives	Why was this approach better suited to the need and context than at least one reasonable alternative? Identify the evidence, constraints, and tradeoffs that informed the choice.
Evaluation strategy	What measures, data sources, comparison points, timing, and methods were used? How were the measures connected to the intended outcomes?
Results and significance	Indicate which stakeholders benefited from this initiative and why. Provide baseline and ending results, the measurement timeframe, and the practical significance of the change. Separate activity or output measures from outcome or impact measures.
L&D contribution and limitations	Explain the evidence supporting L&D's contribution. Identify other material influences and limitations; do not claim causation unless the evaluation supports it.
Organizational learning and adaptation	Describe one important assumption that proved incorrect or incomplete, and a meaningful adjustment made during implementation as a result; or one practice, principle, or capability adopted for future initiatives.
Transferable learning	What should other organizations learn from this work? Explain the conditions under which the approach may or may not transfer.

Maximum 900 words | Scored

Optional upload: One anonymous, one-page evidence graphic may accompany this contribution. It should clarify the evaluation or results and must not introduce unsupported claims.

B3. Signature contribution 3

Present one strategically consequential, evidence-supported contribution using every response element below.

Response element	What to provide
Strategic importance and baseline	What organizational need, opportunity, risk, or capability gap made this work strategically important? Who was affected, and what baseline evidence defined the need?
Intended outcomes	What workforce, performance, customer, mission, community, or business outcomes were targeted?
Approach, L&D role, and scale	What did the talent development function design, enable, influence, or change? Include audience, reach, duration, locations or business units, partners, and resources when material.
Choice and reasonable alternatives	Why was this approach better suited to the need and context than at least one reasonable alternative? Identify the evidence, constraints, and tradeoffs that informed the choice.
Evaluation strategy	What measures, data sources, comparison points, timing, and methods were used? How were the measures connected to the intended outcomes?
Results and significance	Indicate which stakeholders benefited from this initiative and why. Provide baseline and ending results, the measurement timeframe, and the practical significance of the change. Separate activity or output measures from outcome or impact measures.
L&D contribution and limitations	Explain the evidence supporting L&D's contribution. Identify other material influences and limitations; do not claim causation unless the evaluation supports it.
Organizational learning and adaptation	Describe one important assumption that proved incorrect or incomplete, and a meaningful adjustment made during implementation; or one practice, principle, or capability adopted for future initiatives.
Transferable learning	What should other organizations learn from this work? Explain the conditions under which the approach may or may not transfer.

Maximum 900 words | Scored

Optional upload: One anonymous, one-page evidence graphic may accompany this contribution. It should clarify the evaluation or results and must not introduce unsupported claims.

Section C. Enterprise Measurement and Value

Weighting: 25%

C1. Evaluation strategy across active work

Thinking about all talent development programs and initiatives that were active during the reporting period, explain how the organization decides what to evaluate and at what level. Approximately what percentage were evaluated for each of the following: participation or reach; learner experience; knowledge or skill change; application or behavior change; and organizational or stakeholder outcomes? Clearly define what is included in the total number of active programs and initiatives. Explain baseline practices, follow-up timing, data quality, and how findings influence funding, redesign, continuation, or discontinuation decisions.

Maximum 750 words | Scored

Reporting percentages: An initiative may be counted at more than one evaluation level therefore percentages do not need to total 100%.

C2. Enterprise-level value

Select two organizational or stakeholder performance measures that matter most to the organization's strategy. For each, provide the baseline, ending result, measurement timeframe, practical significance, and evidence of L&D's contribution across one or more initiatives. Measures may relate to productivity, quality, revenue, cost, risk, retention, readiness, customer outcomes, mission results, community impact, or another strategic priority.

Maximum 600 words | Scored

Section D. Future Readiness and Strategic Judgment

Weighting: 10%

D1. Strategic Judgment and Resource Allocation

Describe one consequential decision about how the organization allocated—or chose not to allocate—talent development resources during the reporting period. The decision may involve starting, expanding, sustaining, redesigning, reducing, delaying, declining, replacing, or stopping an investment program, practice, or proposed initiative. Explain the organization need or opportunity involved, the evidence and stakeholder perspectives that informed the decision, the reasonable alternatives and tradeoffs considered; why the decision was better suited to the organization's strategy and context, how resources, capacity, or leadership attention were allocated or redirected, and what resulted or was learned. Routine program maintenance or a decision based only on budget availability are not sufficient examples.

Maximum 500 words | Scored

D2. Skills strategy and future readiness

Identify one or two current or emerging changes that are expected to have the greatest effect on the organization's workforce and capability needs. Explain the evidence or signals used to identify and assess the changes, the workforce segments and capabilities more affected, the implications for your talent development strategy, the actions being taken to prepare (including relevant build, buy, borrow, partner or automate decisions), and the indicators being used to determine whether the organization is becoming better prepared. Include progress or outcome measures available during the reporting period.

Maximum 500 words | Scored

Section E. Research and Benchmarking Appendix (Unscored)

For applicants who give permission, this organizational data will be used in aggregate for ATD's *State of the Industry* Report.

R1. Formal learning delivery methods

Select all methods used;

- Live instructor-led traditional classroom
- Live instructor-led virtual classroom
- Hybrid learning (traditional and virtual classroom facilitated simultaneously)
- Blended learning (asynchronous and synchronous learning)
- Asynchronous e-learning
- Other (please explain)

R2. L&D staffing

Number of full-time-equivalent (FTE) talent development staff ____

Includes CLO/CTDO, learning/training managers, administrative staff, designers, developers, evaluators, performance improvement specialists, facilitators/trainers. If this application is for a division or business unit, include only the number of staff working on behalf of that division/unit.

R3. Employees served

Number of employees served by the reported L&D staff: ____

R4. Formal learning hours

Average formal learning hours used per employee during the reporting period; state the calculation method and coverage.

Formal learning hours are stand-alone learning hours that are NOT embedded in work or work processes (they do not include on-the-job learning hours). Formal learning hours may be used in-person or with the aid of technology.

R5. Learning expenditure

Formal learning expenditure per employee; state inclusions, exclusions, currency, and calculation method.

Learning expenditure includes all spending on: internally provided learning (L&D staff salaries and materials), learning suppliers, and tuition reimbursement.

R8. Operational efficiency measures

Which of the following metrics are used to measure success of the learning function? (Select all that apply.)

- Content development costs
- Content development cycle times
- Cost saving realized through outsourcing
- Cost savings realized through use of technology
- Learning hours delivered
- Lost work time for employees due to attending training
- Number of employees trained
- Time to deploy a new learning initiative
- Time to employee readiness or competence
- Timely completion of training required by law or outside body
- Travel and accommodation costs

- Whether courses are full or there are “empty seats”
- Other (please describe)