

Contact: Need help? Have questions? Contact **Jill Jusko**,
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2026 IndustryWeek Best Plants: Eligibility and Application Process

Established in 1990, the IndustryWeek Best Plants Awards program annually recognizes plants, located in North America, that are on the leading edge of efforts to increase competitiveness, enhance customer satisfaction, and create stimulating and rewarding work environments. Its further goal is to encourage other manufacturing managers and work teams to emulate the honorees by adopting world-class practices, technologies, and improvement strategies.

Candidate facilities are judged by a panel of IndustryWeek editors, who may solicit independent evaluations from manufacturing experts and other knowledgeable people. The panel looks for evidence of:

- A comprehensive effort to achieve world-class manufacturing capability.
- Management practices geared to motivating achievement of breakthroughs in operating performance and customer satisfaction, as well as cultivating continuous improvement.
- Strong quality systems and results, including evidence of low defect rates and good process-control capability.
- Employee involvement and empowerment programs, especially efforts to create and provide training for high-performance work teams.
- Effective supplier-partnership programs.
- Appropriate use of technology, as required by changing business needs.
- Flexible and/or agile production systems capable of responding quickly to customer needs and shifts in the marketplace. The flexibility may be the result of intelligent automation and information technology, just-in-time/continuous-flow production systems, use of quick-changeover methods, a multiskilled workforce, small-lot production, focused-factory plant design, or other lean initiatives.
- Improvements in manufacturing operations, including shortening of manufacturing cycle times, improvements in productivity, and reduction of inventories.
- Proactive environmental and safety practices.

Eligibility

Candidates for IndustryWeek's 2026 competition must:

- Be a single manufacturing plant or a combination of related facilities within a specific geographic location (not to exceed a 25-mile distance from plant to plant) and under the direction of a single management team. To qualify as a manufacturing facility, the plant's output should be a physical product representing value-added.
- Have completed at least three years of operation as of **January 1, 2026**. Plant startup on or before **January 1, 2023**.
- Be located within the United States or its territories, Mexico, or Canada. Eligibility is not limited to plants owned by U.S.-based parent companies.
- Not have been honored as an IW Best Plants in the **previous two years**.

Selection Process

Completed applications are reviewed by a judging panel of IW editors and trusted advisors. Using a weighted scoring system, the composite ratings of the judges determine the Best Plants finalists. The finalists receive a second questionnaire seeking documentation of achievements and presenting plant-specific follow-up questions.

After a subsequent review of the information submitted in the follow-up questionnaire, along with additional supporting materials, the IW judging panel tentatively selects North American winners, pending validation. The confirmed winners are publicly recognized.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Complete the online entry form, including application fee, no later than **April 3, 2026**. Do not submit any other additional material at this time. If your plant is selected as a finalist, supplementary information will be requested at a later date.

Please note that it is not mandatory to fill out every item in this entry form (there are a few exceptions, which are identified); however, **completeness of an entry is considered by the judges**.

Do not attempt to alter or revise this entry form. If clarification of an answer to explain unique circumstances or explanation as to why a question was left unanswered is necessary, please clarify in the "footnotes" box at the bottom of each section/page.

When responding to an essay question, provide as much detail, metrics, and anecdotal support as possible in the space provided.

Please note the following recommendations:

- For questions where percentage reductions are requested, use 100% as the base level. *Nothing can be reduced more than 100%*, and, thus, no answer should be greater than or, in many cases, equal to 100%.

- If your plant uses metrics that differ from those requested, please attempt to convert to the requested metric, and also **submit the actual plant metric** (add a footnote if necessary). If still unknown, leave the space blank; do not answer “0.”

- Avoid acronyms and abbreviations. If they are necessary, be sure it is clear what they mean.

So that responses are comparable among applicants, please report data for time frames indicated. Three-year change or improvement metrics require four years of data, beginning with the base year of 2022.

- For clarification of terms and metrics used in this entry form, refer to the Glossary on the IndustryWeek.com Web site (www.industryweek.com/manufacturing-glossary).

- A Final Note: Don't understand a question? Need clarification about a definition? Uncertain about how data may be used? If you need assistance or have questions regarding ANY ASPECT of the IW Best Plants competition, do not hesitate to contact **Jill Jusko**, jjusko@industryweek.com, or call **518-323-9117**.

APPLICATION FEE

How application fees are assessed:

A fee of \$495 for small companies; \$995 for medium companies; and \$1,495 for large companies must be submitted along with the application. **Early Bird Discount:** Return your completed application on or before **March 16** and take 20% off the application fee.

Fee is based on total company-wide employment, not the number of employees at the specific manufacturing location entering the competition. **Small companies** are defined as independent corporations with fewer than 250 full-time and equivalent hourly and salaried employees. **Medium companies** are defined as corporations with 250-999 full-time and equivalent hourly and salaried employees. **Large companies** are defined as corporations with 1000 or more full-time and equivalent hourly and salaried employees.

There are no additional fees for the validation site visits. Companies that enter three or more plants in the competition receive a \$300 discount off of the application fee for each facility. (The three-plant discount is not applicable to small companies with fewer than 250 employees.)

Completed applications are due on or before **April 3, 2026**.

Timeline for 2025 IW Best Plants Competition

January 2026: 2026 Competition opens

March 16, 2026: Early bird deadline for return of completed entry forms

April 3, 2026: Deadline for return of completed entry forms.

April-May 2026: Selection of finalists.

June 2026: Round 2 questionnaires to finalists

Late June 2026: Deadline for Round 2

August 2026: IW Best Plants winners announced.

Fall 2026: IW Best Plants winners articles published.

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