



The Outstanding Building of the Year TOBY FAQs & Best Practices

What are the TOBYs?

The Outstanding Building of the Year (TOBY) Award is the most prestigious and comprehensive program of its kind in the commercial real estate industry. The TOBY awards recognize excellence in building management, operational efficiency, tenant retention, emergency planning and community impact. The competition begins with the local BOMA/Chicago awards. Local winners will be announced at the TOBY/Gold Circle Awards Gala in early 2026.

For an opportunity to win a BOMA International TOBY Award, a property first must earn the BOMA 360 designation and win both local and regional competitions. Whether winning at the local, regional and/or international levels of the competition, you gain the opportunity to showcase your building's strengths and gain recognition for best-in-class operations and management. Judging is based on criteria that includes community impact, tenant and employee relations programs, energy management, accessibility, emergency evacuation procedures, building personnel training programs and overall excellence.

What is the very first step to apply for a local Chicago TOBY?

If you are applying for a 2026 TOBY, your first step is to contact Jaclynne Madden at jmadden@bomachicago.org. Please let Jaclynne know as soon as possible that your building will be applying. You must also have the BOMA 360 designation in order to apply for TOBY and Jaclynne will walk you through these details.

Do I need to be a member of BOMA to compete for a TOBY Award?

Yes, you must be a member of BOMA/Chicago to compete. As a Chicago member, you are also a BOMA International member. All membership fees or outstanding balances must be paid prior to entry.

Are the TOBY Awards given at the local level only?

The TOBY competition consists of three levels. The first level is held locally by local BOMA associations (BOMA/Chicago). Buildings that win at the local level advance to the regional level. When (and if) a building wins at the regional level, that winner advances to the international level.

What is the timeline of the TOBY Awards?

BOMA/Chicago launches the local TOBY application season by March of each year. Application season closes in mid-September. Inspections are held between mid-October and mid-November. BOMA/Chicago announces local winners at the TOBY/Gold Circle Awards Gala held in January/February of every year. Regional winners are announced in mid-April and international winners are announced in June during BOMA International's Annual Conference.

Do I need to be a BOMA 360 designee to apply for a TOBY?

TOBY applicants must have the BOMA 360 designation. If you plan to apply for a TOBY this year, you will need to apply and/or maintain your BOMA 360 certification by the September 17 local TOBY deadline. You can learn more about BOMA 360 and access the 360 portal here: <https://recognition.boma.org/> Please contact recognition@boma.org for all questions about the BOMA 360 designation.

What should I do if I am already a BOMA 360 building?

If you have the BOMA 360 designation, please contact Jaclynne Madden at jmadden@bomachicago.org to let her know.

If I have previously won a TOBY Award, can I apply again?

If you have won locally and regionally, but not internationally, you are eligible to apply multiple years in a row. Once you win internationally, that is when you are no longer able to apply again until after a period of time. The rules for applying for a TOBY, once you win internationally, are:

- If a building is competing in the same category in which they have already won, they may not compete again until after 5 years.
- If a building is competing in a different category in which they have won, they may not compete again until after 3 years. (i.e., Same category winners from 2018 may not compete until the 2024-2025 TOBY cycle; buildings competing who've won in 2020 and wish to compete in a different category may not compete until the 2024-2025 TOBY Award competition cycle.)

Am I able to enter my building in more than category?

No, each building may enter in only one category per TOBY Award competition cycle.

Can more than one building be awarded a winner in any given category?

There is only one winner in each TOBY Award category.

How do I know if my building is eligible?

There are 19 categories representing square feet and other types of properties. For detailed category descriptions, review the current year's Entry Requirements. As long as your property falls into one of the 19 categories and also meets all of the criteria for that category, your building is eligible.

A building often qualifies for more than one category. However, a building can only compete in one category per competition cycle. [Contact BOMA/Chicago](#) if you have questions regarding your building's eligibility and category designation.

What are the 19 TOBY categories?

- Under 100,000 Square Feet
- 100,000 to 249,999 Square Feet
- 250,000 to 499,999 Square Feet
- 500,000 to 1 Million Square Feet
- Over 1 Million Square Feet
- Corporate Facility
- Earth
- Historical Building
- Industrial
- Life Sciences Building
- Medical Building
- Mixed-Use
- Public Assembly
- Renovated Building
- Retail – Enclosed Mall Under 1 Million Square Feet
- Retail – Enclosed Mall Over 1 Million Square Feet
- Retail – Open Air/Strip Mall
- Suburban Office Park - Mid-Rise
- Suburban Office Park - Low-Rise

In which category is my building eligible to compete?

Visit www.recognition.boma.org, hover over "Criteria" and then select the TOBY Entry Requirements for the category in which you are interested in competing. Review the eligibility criteria to determine if you can apply for that category.

Is there a fee to enter the TOBY competition?

To enter the local TOBY awards competition, you must first pay the \$300 entry fee directly to BOMA/Chicago.

If you proceed to the regional competition, you will pay another fee of \$450 (directly to BOMA International). This \$450 will be collected once the entry has been completed and the "Submit" button has been pressed. No additional fees are collected for the international competition.

How do I enter?

All local TOBY applications are submitted electronically to BOMA/Chicago through the [BOMA International TOBY application portal](#). Applications are due by 5PM on the deadline submission date. The TOBY deadline will not be extended. To view the questions, relevant attachments and requirements for the TOBY application, please carefully read through the Entry Requirements, which can be found at <https://recognition.boma.org/>. The online application follows the exact questions, attachments and requirements for your category as outlined in this document.

When should I log into the TOBY application portal and create a profile for my building?

Do not wait to log onto the BOMA International TOBY application portal. [Register your building on this portal immediately](#) and review the website so that you have time to ask BOMA/Chicago any questions or find any glitches. We highly recommend that you submit your application at least one day in advance of the deadline in order to identify any potential issues.

What are some best practices for using the online TOBY application system?

We recommend that you save your application within a Word document before you submit your application on the online portal. Thoroughly review and edit the Word document application before you finalize it. Once the application is finalized, visit the online portal and copy and paste in your answers to the online TOBY application portal. Also, have all of your attachments organized and ready before you fill out the online application form.

With the online application portal, can I save my application and go back to it at a later time?

Yes, you can save information and come back at a later time.

Once I submit my local application on the TOBY portal, will I be able to edit my application before submitting for the regional/international competition?

Yes, if you proceed to the regional competition, you can edit your application in the same portal that you used to submit your local application. The application you submit for the regional competition is the same application used if you proceed to the international competition. Once you submit your regional application, this is the same application used on the international level. Please ensure that your regional application is 100% complete and finalized because you will NOT have the opportunity to edit it for the international competition.

What are some best practices for preparing and writing answers to the TOBY application?

- Address every question as concisely as possible to maintain the word limit.
- Highlight what makes your property and your team the best of the best while chronicling the prestigious outcomes of your building and team.
- Tell the story of your building while stating all of the important facts. Make the application an exciting read for judges so that they want to read more and learn more about your building.
- Meet with your team long before the application is due to outline the successes of your building. Review the entry requirements, local judging sheets and inspection forms with your team before starting the application. Print the TOBY judging forms and inspection sheets and live by those.
- Organization and teamwork are crucial to your success.
- Work ahead in preparing your application and recruit your entire team in answering each question.
- Engage your tenants in the application process by asking for their feedback and to complete a member survey that you can use as an attachment in the application.
- Keep in mind that the TOBY awards honor excellence in CRE management rather than showcasing the architecture and features of beautiful buildings.

Can we attach photo collages as one photo?

No, collages are not permitted. Do not attach collages. Attach single photos only.

Are video attachments allowed during the application process?

Video attachments are not permitted or accepted in the online system. Permissible file types are. jpegs, pdfs & docx.

How important are building photos in the application process?

Submitting crisp, professional and high-resolution photos of your building will only strengthen your application. These photos can also be used for more than your application, such as in marketing pieces for your building. On the local level, judges will come and see your building with their own eyes, so pictures are important, but not as much as the onsite inspection. However, at the regional and international levels, judges will only see pictures of your building, as there is only an inspection on the local level. It would be wise to have professional and high-resolution photos for the regional/international submission. We also recommend a group photo of your team as opposed to individual headshots.

What is expected in identifying the buildings access controls?

Explain how the building controls entry into the building, especially during non-business/non-peak hours. Also explain how the building monitors activities in common areas. It is not necessary to include an entire policy manual on how this is handled.

Under Training for Building Personnel, what is appropriate for providing a list of qualifications for building staff?

Provide a list of any industry certifications such as RPA, FMA, CMCP, etc. as well as degrees held and/or continuing education or industry training programs that staff may have participated in. Any training or programs that staff has participated in that helps them do their job function better is appropriate for this section.

What do I need to do to prepare my building for the inspection/tour?

Your building is evaluated on specific criteria based on the local judging sheets and inspection forms. You can (and should) review these forms before your inspection. Contact BOMA/Chicago if you need a copy of the inspection form. You should prepare your on-site inspection to touch upon all aspects of the judging sheets and inspection forms. You should also have numerous items available and arranged for the judges to view, such as:

- Annual operating budget.
- Security Manual and floor plan binder.
- Disaster Plan / Emergency Plan.
- Certificate of Insurance binder or, if kept electronically, be prepared to show it if requested.
- Any tenant relations materials (i.e., newsletters, survey results, tenant amenity programs, etc.).
- List of historical operating expenses so the judges can see the trend.
- Any other materials/documents you feel are pertinent in telling the story about why your building is TOBY worthy.

How is my building graded/scored on the local level?

At the local level, both your (1) written portal application is scored along with (2) your three-hour building inspection. Please [reach out to BOMA/Chicago](#) to review the grading sheet used to score your written application along with the scoring sheets for your inspection.

The judge team captain will also complete the TOBY Inspection Verification Form when visiting your building. No points are assigned to this form. Please [reach out to BOMA/Chicago](#) for a copy of this form.

What are some best practices involving the local TOBY inspection/tour?

When on-site, judges will follow YOUR lead. We suggest that you:

- Practice your on-site inspection with all members of your team.
- Have an agenda for each judge during the inspection.
- Create a path of travel showcasing these areas outlined on the inspection form and judging sheets.
- Keep in mind that judges can ask to look behind any door. In other words, make sure that all areas of your building are clean and up to standards.
- Focus on the key features of your property that will stand out among the crowd.
- Highlight the best features of your building and explain their impact on both operations as well as sustainability.
- Make clear and strong statements to the judges about why your building is The Outstanding Building of the Year.

- Be succinct. While everyone wants to put their best foot forward in showcasing their building, keep in mind that the judges are volunteering their time and also have other commitments. Show what you have to show, make your point, ask for questions and offer to move on unless the judges say they want to spend more time focusing on an area/topic.

How much does it cost to prepare my building for the inspection/tour?

Well-managed and well-maintained buildings should be ready each day of the year for a tour. Therefore, it should not cost much to prepare your building for the inspection. Keep in mind that judges will be paying close attention to each detail of your building and your building's overall cleanliness. We therefore recommend that you complete a thorough cleaning of your building, especially in the areas outlined on the inspection form. It may also be a good idea to know your "weak areas" in advance and budget ahead for any improvements and/or updates you may need to make to your building to prepare for an inspection.

What happens after I win the local TOBY Award?

When you enter BOMA/Chicago's local TOBY Awards, your goal is to win at this level. But even as you are preparing your local application, keep your eyes set on proceeding to the regional and international competitions. The Chicago winners will go on to compete in the North Central Region TOBY Awards in April. To enter the Regional TOBY Awards program, you will re-submit the same application you submitted locally. You will use this same portal and you will be able to edit your application before you submit it to the regional competition. Regional TOBY Award winners compete in the International TOBY Awards. International winners will be announced at BOMA International's Annual Conference in June. If you win regionally, your application is automatically submitted to the international competition and you will NOT be able to edit the application.

What are best practices for competing in the regional and international levels?

The regional and international levels of the competition are highly competitive and, in many cases, one or two points separate the winner. At the international level, your written application and attachments are the sole basis of judging; you do not have the opportunity to showcase your property to judges via a property tour. It is therefore essential that you address every question as concisely as possible to maintain the word limit, but also highlight what makes your property the best. The attachments and supporting materials should reflect your programs, events, etc. that are included in the narrative section of the application. You should also review the comments/scores from the local competition and incorporate this feedback.

What are the benefits of applying for and/or winning a TOBY Award?

- First and foremost, you can take pride in your asset. Whether you win a TOBY award on the local, regional or national level, your building will automatically strengthen its resume, leasing power and overall competitive advantage.
- The application process itself brings together your diverse property management team in pursuit of a common goal and offers a great opportunity for team building. Because the competition touches upon every aspect of building management and operations, each member of the team becomes an important component and is integral to the success of the competition.
- Participating in the application and judging process will strengthen the programs already in place at the building, which will add value for the owner.
- You will receive local and national press coverage, recognition and exposure in trade publications, business journals and newspapers.
- You will gain recognition from colleagues and other industry professionals.
- It sends the message to your boss and/or Asset Manager that "We are serious about providing the highest level of service for this building."
- The TOBY Award is not just a beauty contest. Winning a TOBY signifies management expertise. It becomes a symbol for years to come of your ability to operate a property at a peak level of financial performance for your owner and deliver a true value-enhanced occupancy to your rent paying tenants.

My building is old. How can I compete with newer buildings?

The TOBY competition is about "recognizing excellence in building management, operational efficiency, tenant retention, emergency planning and community impact." Architecture is not the focus. However, the building's public spaces as well as "back-office spaces" should be clean and presentable.

If I am interested in entering as a data center, what category do I fit into?

Data centers can submit in the Industrial Category if it has more than 5% office space but less than 50%. If the data center is an industrial scale operation, then it can submit in the Industrial Category.

My building does not have a specific area outlined on the inspection sheet (e.g., no parking, no outside tenant seating, etc.). Am I not eligible to apply because of this?

A building will not be penalized if it was constructed without certain items listed in the inspection form. The point total of the inspection form will be adjusted to reflect the omission of these items. For example, if the maximum points possible totals 100 and 2 points are allotted for parking (and your building does not have parking), the new total will be 98 and the final percentage will be derived from that total.

Should I wait to apply until next year?

Now is a better time than ever! Commercial real estate is a dynamic, ever-changing industry. If you enter and do not win this year, you will have gained invaluable experience that will better prepare you to enter and win next year. In fact, we encourage all buildings that did not win at the local and/or regional level to apply again the following year.

What do former TOBY winners have to say about the TOBY process and the benefits of winning?

150 North Riverside: Over 1 Million Square Feet

<https://vimeo.com/702203936/5379f5cfba>

AMA Plaza: Over 1 Million Square Feet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fr1rdC08miU>

Renovated Building: 1 North Dearborn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0G0ffWQcD4>

100,000 to 249,999 Square Feet: 1515 West Webster

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9t6xJGnv2I>

500,000 to 1 Million Square Feet: 401 North Michigan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1zEtOsJ6DQ>

Good luck to all TOBY applicants and remember to contact BOMA/Chicago with any questions!