



# The Outstanding Building of the Year TOBY Frequently Asked Questions & Best Practices

## **What are the TOBYs?**

TOBY stands for The Outstanding Building of the Year. The TOBY Awards Program was developed by BOMA International in 1985 to honor and recognize quality in office building operations and award excellence in office building management. The TOBYs are considered the most prestigious and highly celebrated awards of their kind in commercial real estate.

## **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 in July of each year. Application season closes in mid-September. BOMA/Chicago announces local winners at the TOBY/Gold Circle Awards Gala held in late January of every year. Regional winners are announced in mid-April and international winners are announced in June during BOMA International's Annual Conference.

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

If you did not win on the international level in previous years, you are allowed (and we encourage) you to apply again. If your building won an International TOBY Award, you cannot apply for the category in which you won for 5 years (at the local, regional and international levels). If your building won an International TOBY Award, you cannot apply for a different category in which you won for 3 years (at the local, regional and international levels).

## **How do I know if my building is eligible?**

There are [16 categories representing various square footages](#) of office buildings 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 16 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.

## **Is there a fee to enter the TOBY competition?**

Totals fees for the local TOBY process are \$350. When submitting the application, a non-refundable entry fee of \$300 is due to BOMA/Chicago. This must be paid to BOMA/Chicago before you submit your application. You will pay BOMA/Chicago through our website and then submit your TOBY application on [BOMA International's TOBY portal](#). When you log onto the BOMA International portal, you will be asked to pay \$50. This fee is paid to BOMA International.

If you proceed to the regional competition, you will pay another fee of \$325 (directly to BOMA International). If you proceed to international competition, there will not be any more fees.

**How do I enter?**

All local TOBY applications are submitted electronically to BOMA/Chicago through the [BOMA International TOBY application portal](#). This link will be open from Monday, July 8, 2019 to Thursday, September 26, 2019. Applications are due by 5 p.m. CST on September 26. This deadline will not be extended. To view the questions, relevant attachments and requirements for the TOBY application, please [carefully read through the 2020 Entry Requirements](#). The online application follows the exact questions, attachments and requirements for your category as outlined in this document. [Click here to learn how to register your building](#) on the portal.

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

Do not wait until the last second to log onto the BOMA International TOBY application portal. [Register your building on this portal immediately](#) (in July) and review the website so that you have time to ask BOMA/Chicago any questions or find any glitches. The system will close on Thursday, September 26 at 5 p.m. CST and 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 highly 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. So be sure that your regional application is 100% complete and finalized because you will NOT have the opportunity to edit it for the international competition.

**NOTE:** When submitting a regional/international application, BOMA International charges a fee of \$325.

**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 team-work 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.

### **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.

### **Besides completing the application, are there any other requirements to keep in mind?**

BOMA/Chicago requires buildings to have the following documents available for judges to review during the on-site inspections:

- A copy of the current year Statement of Energy Performance printed from ENERGY STAR and stamped by a Certifying Professional.
- Documentation verifying your building's compliance with the Chicago Energy Benchmarking Ordinance (for review at the on-site inspection). All entrants must show judges their "Data Request Response Receipt" that they received via email from the City of Chicago. This receipt is emailed when your building shares data through the ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager. For entrants whose buildings are exempt from the Ordinance, please have a copy of both the (1) Exemption Form you submitted to the City along with the (2) official email confirmation of your exemption from the City. As a reminder, buildings 250,000 square feet and over were required to begin benchmarking by June 1, 2014. Buildings between 50,000 to 250,000 square feet are required to submit their data to the City of Chicago by August 1, 2015.

### **Once I enter the competition, what happens next?**

The BOMA/Chicago TOBY Subcommittee reviews all of the applications submitted. After all applications are reviewed, a BOMA/Chicago staff member will contact your building to schedule an inspection. All applicants will be notified on the same day of when their inspection is scheduled. All buildings will have at least one week (and two full weekends) to prepare for the inspection. BOMA/Chicago suggests that you be prepared for an inspection from the moment you submit your local TOBY application. Approximately three to five judges will come to inspect your building. Inspections are held in October and November.

### **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 building inspection forms. You can (and should) review these forms before your inspection. These forms are located on the BOMA/Chicago website. 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 (two months after the TOBY/Gold Circle Awards Gala). 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 fierce 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 and scores from the local competition and incorporate that 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.

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