



JOHN A. PIENO, JR.
LEADERSHIP AWARD

2026 APPLICATION



John A. Pieno, Jr. Leadership Award 2026 Nomination Form

Nominations must be received by midnight March 27, 2026

A nomination submission includes a cover page, information about the nominee's biography or curriculum vitae, and a nomination essay.

Part I - Nominee

Name: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Mail Address: _____

City, State and Zip Code: _____

Phone number: _____ Email address: _____

Nominator (single point of contact)

Name: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Mail Address: _____

City, State and Zip Code: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

If more than one nominator, include additional nominator's name, title, and current organization.

Name: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Part II – Nomination Instructions

Eligibility: Any organization that uses the Sterling Framework may nominate a Senior Leader for the John A. Pieno Leadership Award. Exceptions include organizations with members serving on the Sterling Executive Committee, current Governor's Sterling Award or Georgia Oglethorpe Award Applicants or current Role Model organizations are not eligible for the current year recognition.

Instructions Attach the nominee's biography or curriculum vitae as a separate document

Complete the nomination essay that uses up to 1,500 words to answer the two questions below:

1. **HOW** does the nominee approach seven of the John A. Pieno Leadership Award Core Value Attributes and Leader Behaviors (six required core values and one other core values of the nominator's choice)? Please provide examples illustrating the methods used.
2. **WHAT** specific results and performance levels have been achieved? This question must be addressed for each of the John A. Pieno Leadership Award Core Value Attributes and Leader Behaviors included in the essay.

For the Delivering Value and Results segment of the essay, please provide specific key examples of organizational and operational results inspired by your nominee, which demonstrate achievement in areas not previously covered in the narrative of the other Core Value Attributes and Leader Behaviors.

The essay should be double-spaced in a 12-point font.

Please note that letters of support or links to websites will not be considered in the selection process and should not be submitted with the nomination.

Guidelines that the John A. Pieno, Jr. Leadership Award Selection Committee will use to review the nomination essays are listed on the following page.



#We Are Sterling

ELEVATING PERFORMANCE EXCELLENCE

The John A. Pieno Leadership Award Selection Process

The John A. Pieno Leadership Award celebrates Excellence in Leadership among Senior Leaders of organizations fully engaged in the Sterling process and it uses the Sterling Core Values as a means to evaluate leaders who aspire to win this prestigious award. Applications for this process should consist of no more than 1500 words that illustrate how the applicant for this award has successfully implemented a Leadership System that emphasizes these values. The application should consist of 7 paragraphs that describe approaches used and results achieved within the organization that reflect an emphasis of these values. A detailed description of each Core Value is included in the latest version of the Sterling Resource Guide.

Judges for this Award Process shall include Current Chair of the Council, Chair of the Foundation, Council President, Lead Judge, and Chair of the Examination Committee. Award Recipients should score in the Top Box in both Approach and Results for most of the selected Core Values. The following Scoring Guidelines are to be used in the evaluation of applications for this award.

CORE VALUE	Rating								Total Score Maximum of 6 Points per Value (42 Possible Points)
	Approach				Results				
	No Evidence Provided (0 Points)	Early Stages of Alignment with Core Values (1 Point)	Well Defined, Repeatable and Aligned Approaches (2 Points)	Well Defined, Repeatable, and Integrated Approaches (3 Points)	No results Provided (0 Points)	Good Performance Levels Consistent with Mission/Goals (1 Point)	Good to Excellent Performance Levels Consistent with Mission/Goals (2 Points)	Breakthrough Gains and Sustained Performance Excellence Consistent with Mission/Goals (3 Points)	
Visionary Leadership									
Customer-Focused Excellence									
Valuing People									
Systems Perspective									
Ethics and Transparency									
Delivering Value and Results									
Value to be Selected by Nominator									
Grand Total Score									

Nomination Essays will be reviewed by the John A. Pieno Leadership Award Selection Committee using the following guidelines:

HOW/Approach

HOW does the nominee approach seven of the John A. Pieno, Jr. Leadership Award Core Value Attributes and Leader Behaviors. Provide examples.

The candidate demonstrates behaviors, which are in the early stages of alignment with the core value attributes and leader behaviors.

The candidate demonstrates behaviors, which are well defined, repeatable and aligned with the core value attributes and leader behaviors.

The candidate demonstrates role model behaviors, which are well defined, repeatable, innovative and integrated with core value attributes and leader behaviors.

WHAT/Results

WHAT specific results and performance levels have been achieved? (This question must be addressed for each of the John A. Pieno Leadership Award Core Value Attributes and Leader Behaviors included in the essay.)

The candidate has achieved good performance levels consistent with their organization's mission and goals.

The candidate has achieved good-to-excellent performance levels consistent with their organization's mission and goals.

The candidate has achieved breakthrough gains and sustained performance excellence consistent with their organization's mission and goals.

NOMINATION ESSAY REQUIREMENTS

Include the six required John A. Pieno Leadership Award Core Value Attributes and Leadership Behaviors listed below. Add one additional Core Value of the nominator's choice. List of Eleven Core Values included on page 6.

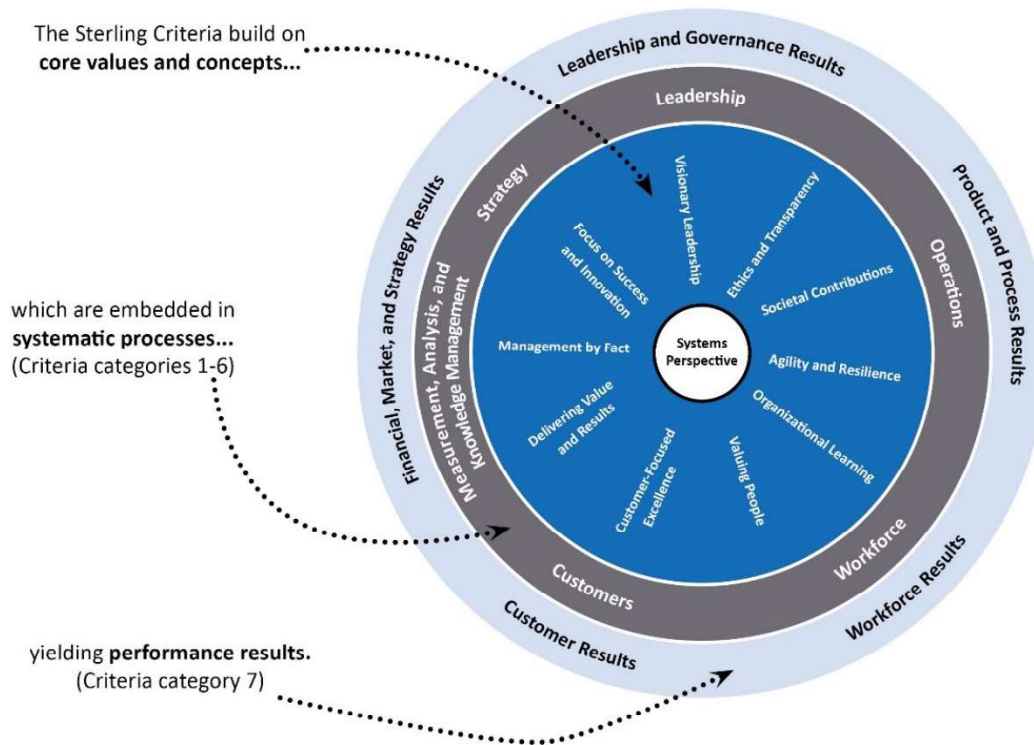
Insert the title of each Core Value as you address that item.

- 1. Visionary Leadership**
- 2. Systems Perspective**
- 3. Ethics and Transparency**
- 4. Delivering Value and Results**
- 5. Customer Focused Excellence**
- 6. Valuing People**
- 7. Core Value of Nominator's Choice** (insert title of selected Core Value here)

The entire essay has a 1,500-word limit.

Core Values and Concepts

The Role of Core Values and Concepts



These beliefs and behaviors are embedded in high performing organizations. They are the foundation for integrating key performance and operational requirements within a results-oriented framework that creates a basis for action, feedback, and ongoing success.

The Sterling Criteria are built on the following set of inter-related core values and concepts:

- Systems Perspective
- Visionary Leadership
- Customer-Focused Excellence
- Valuing People
- Agility and Resilience
- Organizational Learning
- Focus on Success and Innovation
- Management by Fact
- Societal Contributions
- Ethics and Transparency
- Delivering Value and Results

Systems Perspective:

A systems perspective means managing all the components of your organization as a unified whole to achieve your mission, ongoing success, and performance excellence. A systems perspective also means managing your organization within the context of an interconnected ecosystem of organizations that presents opportunities for new and possibly innovative relationships.

Successfully managing overall organizational performance requires realization of your organization as a system with interdependent operations. Organization-specific synthesis, alignment, and integration make the internal system successful. *Synthesis* means understanding your organization as a whole. It incorporates key business attributes, including your core competencies, strategic objectives, action plans, work systems, and workforce requirements and expectations. *Alignment* means using key organizational linkages to ensure consistency of plans, processes, measures, and actions. *Integration* builds on alignment, so that the individual components of your performance management system operate in a fully interconnected, unified, and mutually beneficial manner to deliver anticipated results.

In addition, your organization exists within a business ecosystem - a network of organizations, including your partners, suppliers, collaborators, competitors, customers, communities, and other relevant organizations inside and outside your sector or industry. Within this larger system, roles among organizations may be fluid as opportunities arise and needs change. For your business ecosystem, *synthesis* means understanding your organization as part of a larger whole. It incorporates the key attributes that you contribute to and need from your partners, collaborators, competitors, customers, communities, and other relevant organizations, including those not traditionally considered as collaborators.

When your organization takes a systems perspective, your senior leaders focus on strategic directions and customers. Your senior leaders monitor, respond to, and manage performance based on your results. With a systems perspective, you use your measures, indicators, core competencies, and organizational knowledge to build your key strategies, link these strategies with your work systems and key processes, manage risk, and align your resources to improve your overall performance and your focus on customers and stakeholders. The Core Values and Concepts, the seven Criteria Categories, and the Scoring Guidelines are the system's building blocks and integrating mechanism.

Visionary Leadership:

Your organization's senior leaders should set a vision for the organization, create a customer focus, demonstrate clear and visible organizational values and ethics, and set high expectations for the workforce. The vision, values, and expectations should balance the needs of all your

stakeholders. Your leaders should also ensure the creation of strategies, systems, and methods for building knowledge and capabilities; empowering the workforce; fostering, and capitalizing on diversity; stimulating innovation; managing risk; ensuring resilience; requiring accountability; and achieving performance excellence, thereby ensuring ongoing organizational success now and in the future.

The values and strategies leaders define should help guide all of your organization's activities and decisions. Senior leaders should inspire and encourage your entire workforce to contribute, to develop and learn, be innovative, and embrace meaningful change. Senior leaders should be responsible to your organization's governance body for their actions and performance, and the governance body should be responsible ultimately to all your stakeholders for your organization's and its senior leaders' ethics, actions, and performance.

Senior leaders should serve as role models through their ethical behavior and their personal involvement in planning, providing a supportive environment for innovation, communicating, coaching and motivating the workforce, developing future leaders, recognizing workforce members, promoting equity and inclusion, and reviewing organizational performance. Senior leaders should demonstrate authenticity and admit to their missteps and opportunities for improvement. As role models, they can reinforce ethics, values, and expectations while building leadership, commitment, and initiative throughout your organization.

Customer-Focused Excellence:

Your customers are the ultimate judges of your performance and the quality of your products and/or services. Thus, your organization must consider all product and/or service features and characteristics and all modes of customer access and support, and all organizational values and behaviors that contribute value to your customers. Such behavior leads to customer acquisition, satisfaction, preference, trust and loyalty; positive referrals; and, ultimately, the ongoing success of your business. Customer-focused excellence has both current and future components: understanding today's customer desires, and anticipating future customer desires and marketplace potential.

Many factors may influence value and satisfaction over the course of your customers' experience with your organization. These factors include your organization's customer relationship management, which helps build trust, confidence, and loyalty.

Customer-focused excellence means much more than reducing defects and errors, merely meeting specifications, or reducing dissatisfaction and complaints. Nevertheless, these factors contribute to your customers' view of your organization and thus, are important parts of customer-focused excellence. In addition, your success in

recovering from defects, service errors, and mistakes; fostering equity and inclusion; adapting to disruptions; and safeguarding customer information is crucial for retaining customers and engaging them for the long term.

A customer-focused organization addresses not only the product and service characteristics that meet basic customer requirements, but also those unique features and characteristics that differentiate the organization from competitors. This differentiation may be based on accelerated product development, innovative or customized offerings or customer experience, combinations of product and service offerings, price, societal contributions, or special relationships. These might include participation in alliances or collaborative, multilateral networks (ecosystems) of organizations that drive efficiency, effectiveness, and innovation.

Customer-focused excellence is thus a strategic concept. It is directed toward customer acquisition, retention and loyalty, stronger brand recognition, market share gain, and growth. It demands constant sensitivity to changing and emerging customer and market requirements and to the factors that drive customer engagement. It demands close attention to the Voice-of-the-Customer. It demands anticipating changes in the marketplace. Therefore, customer-focused excellence demands a customer-focused culture and organizational agility.

Valuing People:

An organization's success depends on an engaged workforce that benefits from meaningful work, clear organizational direction, the opportunity to learn, and accountability for performance. That work must also have a safe, trusting, and cooperative environment. The successful organization has a culture of equity and inclusion that capitalizes on the diverse backgrounds and characteristics, knowledge, skills, creativity, and motivation of its workforce, partners, and collaborators. Promoting equity means fostering the fair treatment of all customers and workforce members. Promoting equity also supports the ability of all workforce members to reach their full potential. Inclusion refers to empowering participation and promoting a sense of belonging. The successful organization also values all people who have a stake in the organization, including customers, community members, stockholders, and other people affected by the organization's actions.

Valuing the people in your workforce means committing to their engagement, development, and well-being. Major challenges in valuing your workforce members include (1) demonstrating your leaders' commitment to their success, (2) providing motivation and recognition that go beyond the regular compensation system, (3) supporting work-life balance through flexible work practices tailored to varying workplace and life needs; (4) creating an inclusive, equitable environment for a diverse workforce; (5) offering development and progression within your organization;

(6) providing support during disruptions and transitions; (7) sharing your organization's knowledge so that your workforce can better serve your customers and contribute to achieving your strategic objectives; (8) creating an environment that encourages intelligent risk taking to achieve innovation; and (9) developing a system of workforce and organizational accountability for performance. With increased remote and hybrid work, an additional challenge is ensuring that a geographically dispersed workforce benefits technology and other resource support, meaningful work, clear organizational direction, the opportunity to learn, and accountability for performance.

The success of your workforce members—including your leaders—depends on their having opportunities to learn. This learning includes preparing people for future organizational core competencies. On-the-job training offers a cost-effective way to cross-train and to link training more closely to your organization's capacity needs and priorities. If your organization relies on volunteers to perform core work, their personal development and learning are also important to consider.

To accomplish their overall goals, successful organizations build and value ecosystems of internal and external partnerships and collaborative, multilateral alliances. Internal partnerships might include collaboration between labor and management. Forming internal partnerships might also involve creating network relationships among people across work units and locations or between employees and volunteers to improve flexibility, responsiveness, learning, and knowledge sharing. As products and services become increasingly multidisciplinary, organizations may need new business models and ecosystems, including nontraditional partnerships with competitors or organizations outside the sector, alliances, consortia, and value networks.

Agility and Resilience:

Success in today's ever-changing, globally competitive environment demands agility and organizational resilience. Agility requires a capacity for rapid change and for flexibility in operations. Organizational resilience is the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and recover from disasters, emergencies, and other disruptions, and—when disruptions occur—to protect and enhance workforce and customer engagement, supply-network and financial performance, organizational productivity, and community well-being. Resilience includes the agility to modify plans, processes, and relationships whenever circumstances warrant.

Organizations face ever-shorter cycles for introducing new or improved products and services and for responding rapidly to new or emerging issues. Organizations must be capable of managing risk and making changes on an ever-shorter cycle time. Major improvements in response times often require new work systems; rapid decision making; reduced bureaucracy; the simplification of work processes; agile, efficient supplier and partner networks; effective, efficient

communication with the workforce, partners, and suppliers; and the ability for rapid changeover from one process or one location to another.

All aspects of time performance are now more critical, and cycle time is a key process measure. Other important benefits can be derived from this focus on time; time improvements often drive simultaneous improvements or changes in your work systems, organization, quality, cost, supply-network integration, productivity, and ongoing success in a challenging economy. A major success factor in meeting competitive challenges is design-to-introduction time (the time it takes to initiate a product or service feature) or innovation cycle time. To meet the demands of rapidly changing markets, your organization needs to carry out stage-to-stage integration of activities from research or concept to commercialization or implementation.

Disruptive events are occurring more frequently, triggered by economic or political upheaval or stress, major weather or health events, social or societal demands, or innovative technologies or product introductions. For an organization to be resilient leaders must cultivate the agility to anticipate opportunities and threats, adapt strategy to changing circumstances, and have robust governance with a culture of trust. Organizations must embrace data-rich thought processes and equip their employees with ongoing learning of new skills.

Agility and resilience can also be achieved through your business ecosystem, in which collaborations, strategic partnerships, or alliances might offer complementary core competencies that allow rapid response to disruptions, entry into new markets, or a rethinking of customer offerings in a larger context. Your ecosystem might also permit you to address common issues quickly by blending your organization's core competencies or leadership capabilities with other organization's complementary strengths and capabilities, creating a new source of strategic advantage. The result may be broad, interdependent, agile ecosystems that include traditional partners and collaborators, as well as suppliers, competitors, customers, communities, and organizations outside your sector or industry.

Organizational Learning:

Achieving the highest levels organizational performance requires a well-executed approach to organizational learning that includes sharing knowledge via systematic processes. In today's demanding environment, a cross-trained and empowered workforce and effective management of up-to-date organizational knowledge are vital assets. Organizational learning includes continuous improvement of existing approaches; the adoption of best practices and innovations; and significant, discontinuous change or innovation, leading to new goals, approaches, products, and markets.

Learning needs to be embedded in the way your organization operates. This means that learning (1) is a regular part of daily work; (2) results in solving problems at their source

(root cause); (3) is focused on building and sharing knowledge throughout your organization and your business ecosystem; and (4) is driven by opportunities to effect significant, meaningful change, and to innovate. Sources for learning include employees' and volunteers' ideas, research and development, customers' input, best-practice sharing, competitors' performance, and benchmarking. Your business ecosystem is another source of learning.

Organizational learning can result in (1) enhanced value to customers through new and improved products and customer services; (2) the development of new business opportunities; (3) the development of new and improved processes or business models; (4) reduced errors, defects, waste, and related costs; (5) increased productivity and effectiveness in the use of all your resources; (6) enhanced performance in making societal contributions; and (7) greater agility in managing change and disruption.

Focus on Success and Innovation:

Ensuring your organization's success now and in the future requires an understanding of the short- and longer-term factors that affect your organization and its environment. It also requires the ability to drive organizational innovation.

Sustained success requires managing uncertainty in the environment, as well as balancing some stakeholders' short-term demands with the need to invest in long-term success. The pursuit of sustained growth and performance leadership requires a strong future orientation and a willingness to make long-term commitments to key stakeholders—your customers, workforce, suppliers, partners, and stockholders; the public; and the community. It also requires the agility to modify plans, processes, and relationships whenever circumstances warrant, which may entail business transformation.

Your organization's planning and resource allocation should anticipate many factors, such as customers' short and long-term expectations; new business models and collaboration or partnering opportunities; potential crises, including events that disrupt economic and social conditions; technology developments; workforce capacity and capability needs; community and societal expectations and needs; your competitive marketplace; security and cybersecurity risks; evolving regulatory requirements; and strategic moves by competitors. Your strategic objectives and resource allocations need to accommodate these influences. A focus on success includes ensuring resilience; developing your leaders, workforce, and suppliers; accomplishing effective succession planning; and anticipating areas for societal contributions and concerns.

A focus on success also includes a focus on innovation—making meaningful change to improve products, services, programs, processes, operations, business models, or societal well-being, with the purpose of creating new value for stakeholders. Innovation should lead your organization to new dimensions of performance and success. Innovation may be present in organizations of all sizes, sectors, and

maturity levels; in some cases, an organization's genesis is an innovation, with work systems and work processes developing as the organization matures.

Innovation is important for all aspects of your operations and all work systems and work processes. Innovation benefits from a supportive environment, a process for identifying strategic opportunities, and the pursuit of intelligent risks. Innovation and continuous incremental improvement are different, but complementary, concepts. Successful organizations use both approaches to improve performance. Your organization should be led and managed so that identifying strategic opportunities and taking intelligent risks become part of the learning culture. Innovation should be integrated into daily work and be supported by your performance improvement system. Systematic processes for identifying strategic opportunities should reach across your entire organization and should explore strategic alliances with complementary organizations and with organizations that have historically been outside your ecosystem.

Innovation may arise from adapting innovations in other industries to achieve a breakthrough in your industry. It builds on the accumulated knowledge of your organization and its people and the innovations of partners, collaborators, competitors, customers, and other relevant organizations, including those outside your sector. It may involve collaboration among people who do not normally work together and are in different parts of the organization. This can lead to the maximizing of learning through shared information and the willingness to use concepts from outside the organization as idea generators. Therefore, the ability to rapidly disseminate and capitalize on new and accumulated knowledge is critical to driving organizational innovation and success.

Management by Fact:

Management by fact requires you to measure and analyze your organization's performance, both inside the organization and in your competitive environment. Measurements should derive from business needs and strategy, and they should provide critical data and information about key processes, outputs, results, outcomes, and competitor and industry performance. Organizations need many types of data and information to effectively manage their performance. Data and information may come in many forms, such as numerical, graphical, or qualitative, and from many sources, including internal processes, surveys, and the Internet (including social media). Performance measurement should include measurement of customer, product, and process performance; comparisons of operational, market, and competitive performance; supplier, workforce, partner, cost, and financial performance; governance and compliance results; and accomplishment of strategic objectives.

A major consideration in performance improvement and change management is the selection and use of performance measures or indicators. The measures or indicators you

select should best represent the factors that lead to improved customer, operational, financial, marketplace, and societal performance. A comprehensive, yet carefully selected, set of measures or indicators tied to customer and organizational performance requirements provides a clear basis for aligning all processes with your organization's goals. Measures and indicators support you in making decisions in a rapidly changing environment. By analyzing data from your tracking processes, you can evaluate the measures or indicators themselves and change them to better support your goals.

Analysis means extracting larger meaning from data and information to support evaluation, decision-making, improvement, and innovation. It entails using data to determine trends, projections, and cause-and-effect relationships that might not otherwise be evident. Analysis supports a variety of purposes, such as planning, reviewing your overall performance, improving operations, comparing your performance with competitors' or with best-practice benchmarks, and managing change. To facilitate analysis, data may need to be aggregated from various sources. Data may also need to be segmented by, for example, markets, product lines, and workforce groups so that you can gain a deeper understanding of significant differences.

Societal Contributions:

Your organization's leaders should stress contributions to the public and the consideration of societal well-being and benefit. Leaders should be role models for your organization and its workforce in the protection of public health, safety, and the environment. This protection applies to any impact of your organization's operations, as well as the lifecycles of your products. In addition, your organization should emphasize resource conservation, recycling, and waste reduction at the source. Planning should anticipate adverse impacts from the production, distribution, transportation, use, and disposal of your products. Effective planning should reduce or prevent problems; provide for a forthright response if problems occur; and make available the information and support needed to maintain public awareness, safety, and confidence.

Your organization should meet all local, state, and federal laws; and regulatory requirements, and should treat these and related requirements as opportunities to excel beyond minimal compliance.

Considering societal well-being and benefit means leading and supporting—within the limits of your resources—the environmental, social, and economic systems in your organization's sphere of influence. Such leadership and support might include improving education, health care, and other services in your local community and/or beyond; pursuing environmental excellence; being a role model for addressing socially important issues, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion; practicing resource conservation; reducing your carbon footprint; performing community service and

charity; improving industry and business practices; and sharing nonproprietary information. Increasingly, such social contributions are a customer or stakeholder requirement.

Leadership in this area may entail influencing other organizations, private and public, to partner for these purposes. Managing societal contributions requires your organization to use appropriate measures and your leaders to assume responsibility for those measures.

Ethics and Transparency:

Your organization should stress ethical behavior in all stakeholder transactions and interactions. Your organization's governance body should require highly ethical conduct and monitor all conduct accordingly. Your senior leaders should be role models of ethical behavior and make their expectations of the workforce very clear.

Your organization's ethical principles are the foundation for your culture and values. They distinguish right from wrong. Clearly articulated ethical principles, along with your organizational values, empower your people to make effective decisions and may serve as boundary conditions for determining organizational norms and prohibitions.

Transparency is characterized by consistently candid and open communication, accountability, and the sharing of clear and accurate information by leadership and management. The benefits of transparency are manifold. Transparency is a key factor in workforce engagement and allows people to see why actions are being taken and how they can contribute. Transparency and accountability are also important in

interactions with customers and other stakeholders, giving them a sense of involvement, engagement, and confidence in your organization. Ethical behavior and transparency build trust in the organization and its leaders, and engender a belief in the organization's fairness and integrity that is valued by all key stakeholders.

Delivering Value and Results:

By delivering and balancing value for key stakeholders, your organization builds loyalty, contributes to growing the economy, and contributes to society. To meet the sometimes conflicting and changing aims that balancing value requires your organizational strategy should explicitly include key stakeholder requirements. This will help ensure that plans and actions meet differing stakeholder needs and avoid adverse impacts on any stakeholders. A balanced composite of leading and lagging performance measures is an effective means to communicate short- and longer-term priorities, monitor actual performance, and provide a clear basis for improving results.

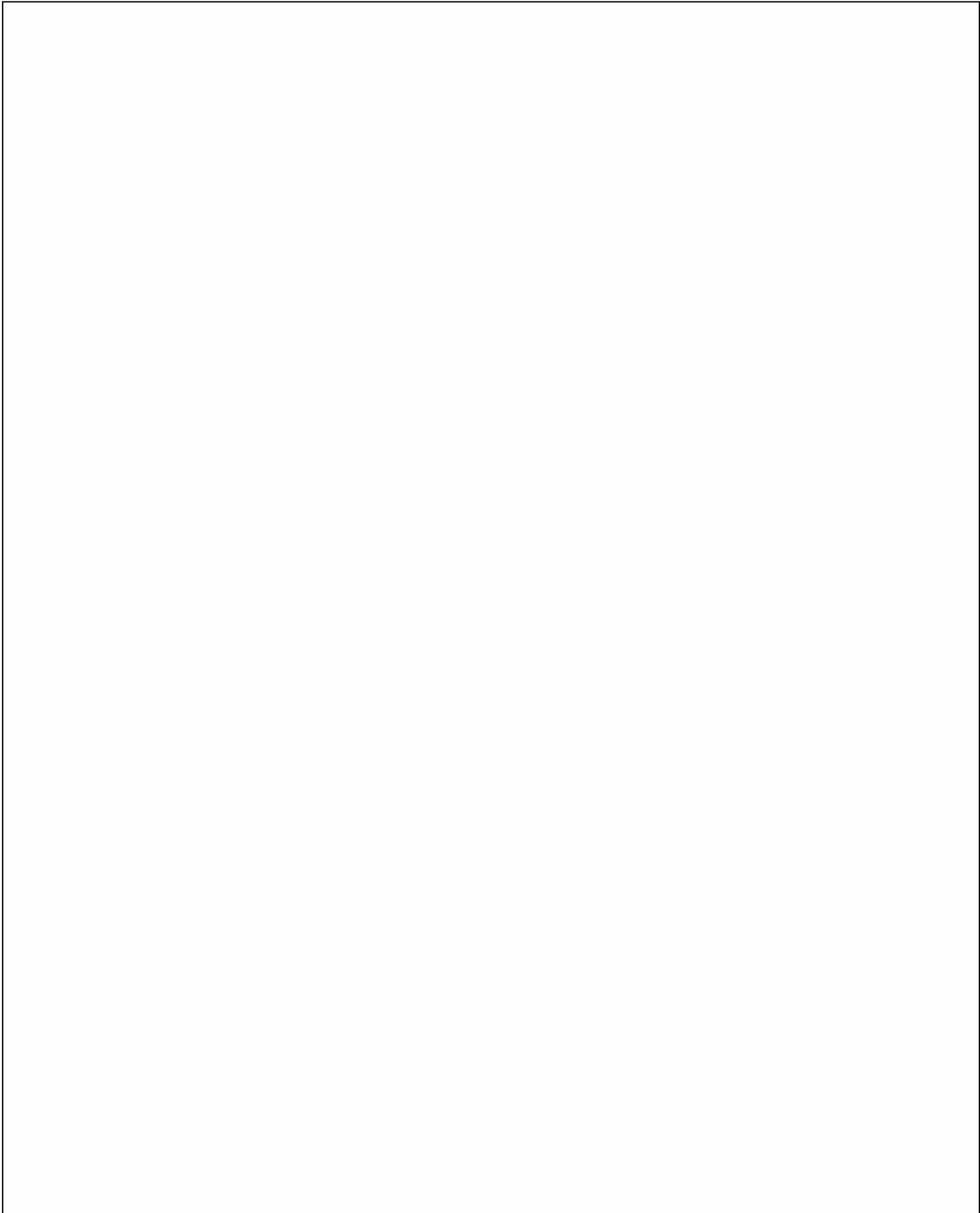
Your organization's performance measurements need to focus on key results. Results should be used to deliver and balance value for your key stakeholders—your customers, workforce, stockholders, suppliers, partners, and collaborators; the public; and the community. Thus, results need to be a composite of measures that include not just financial and market results, but product and process results; customer and workforce satisfaction and engagement results; and leadership, strategy, and societal performance.

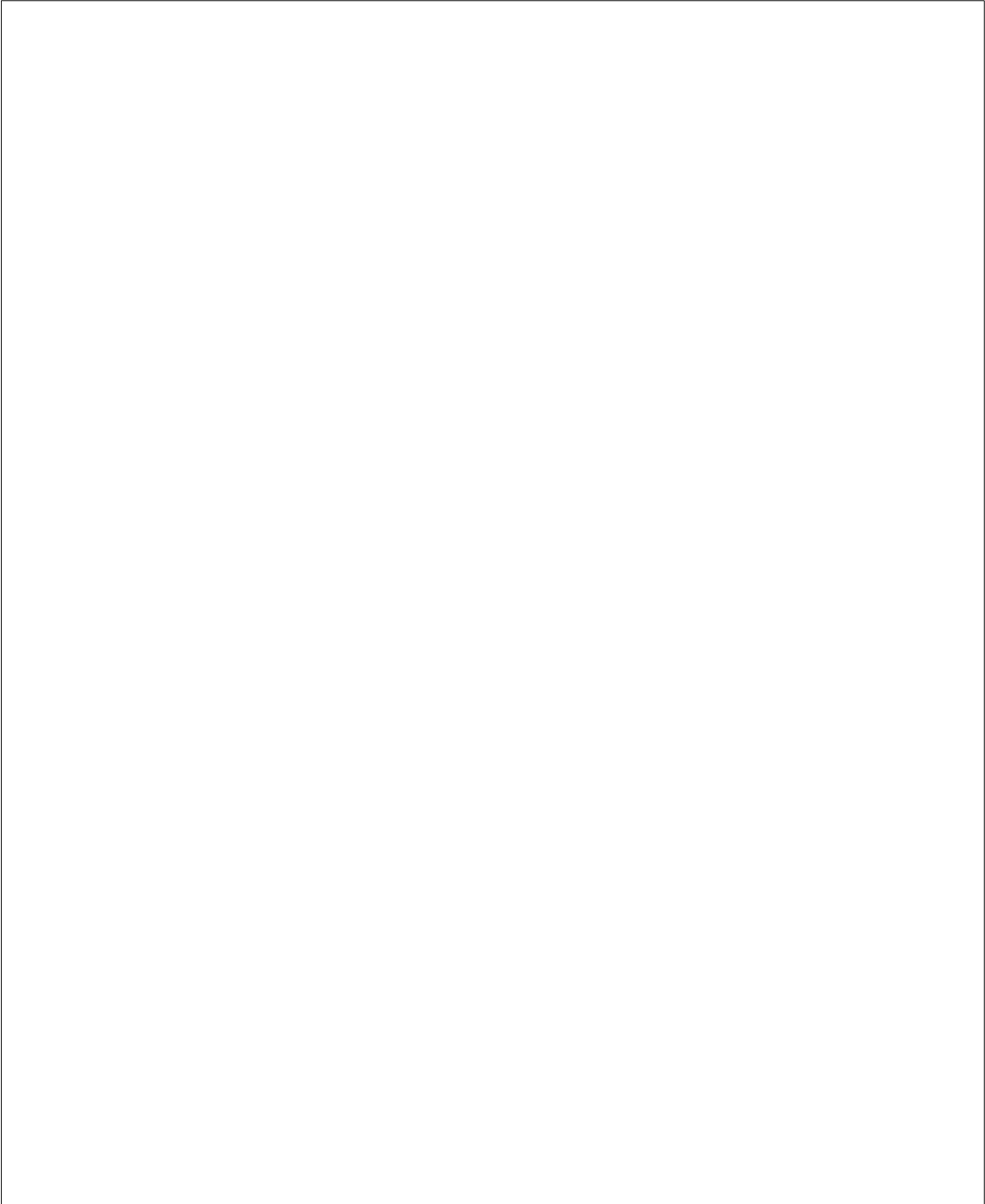
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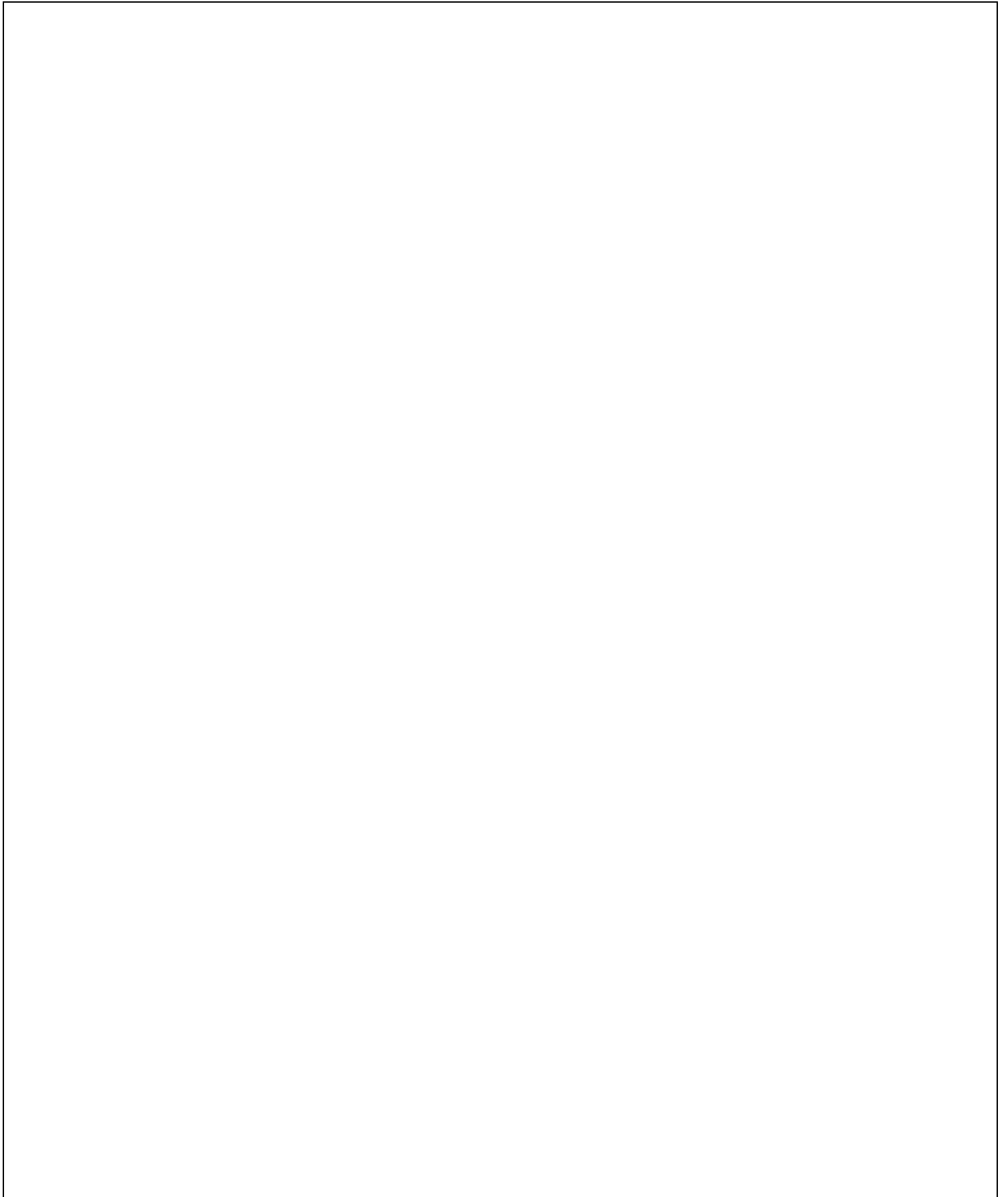


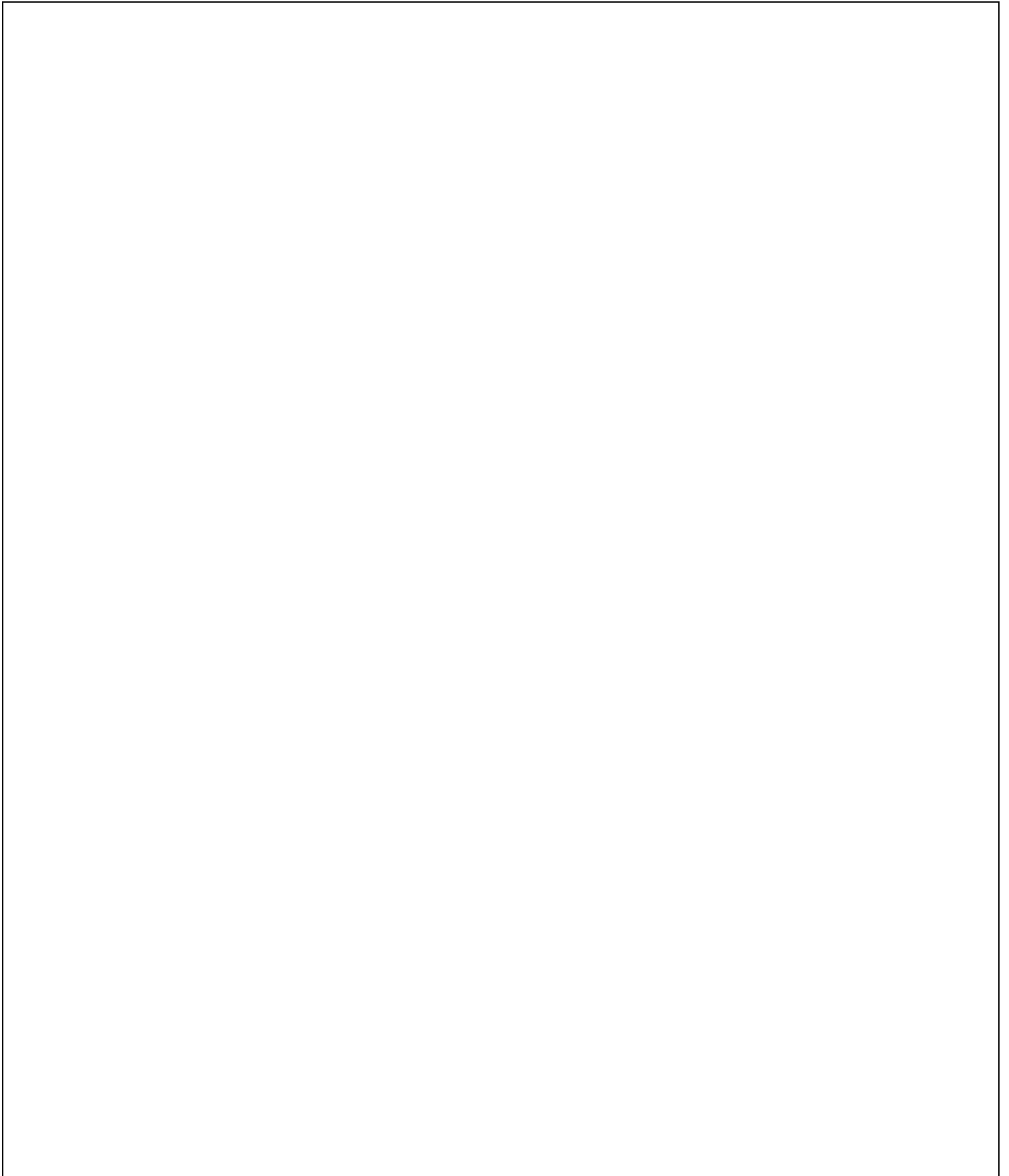
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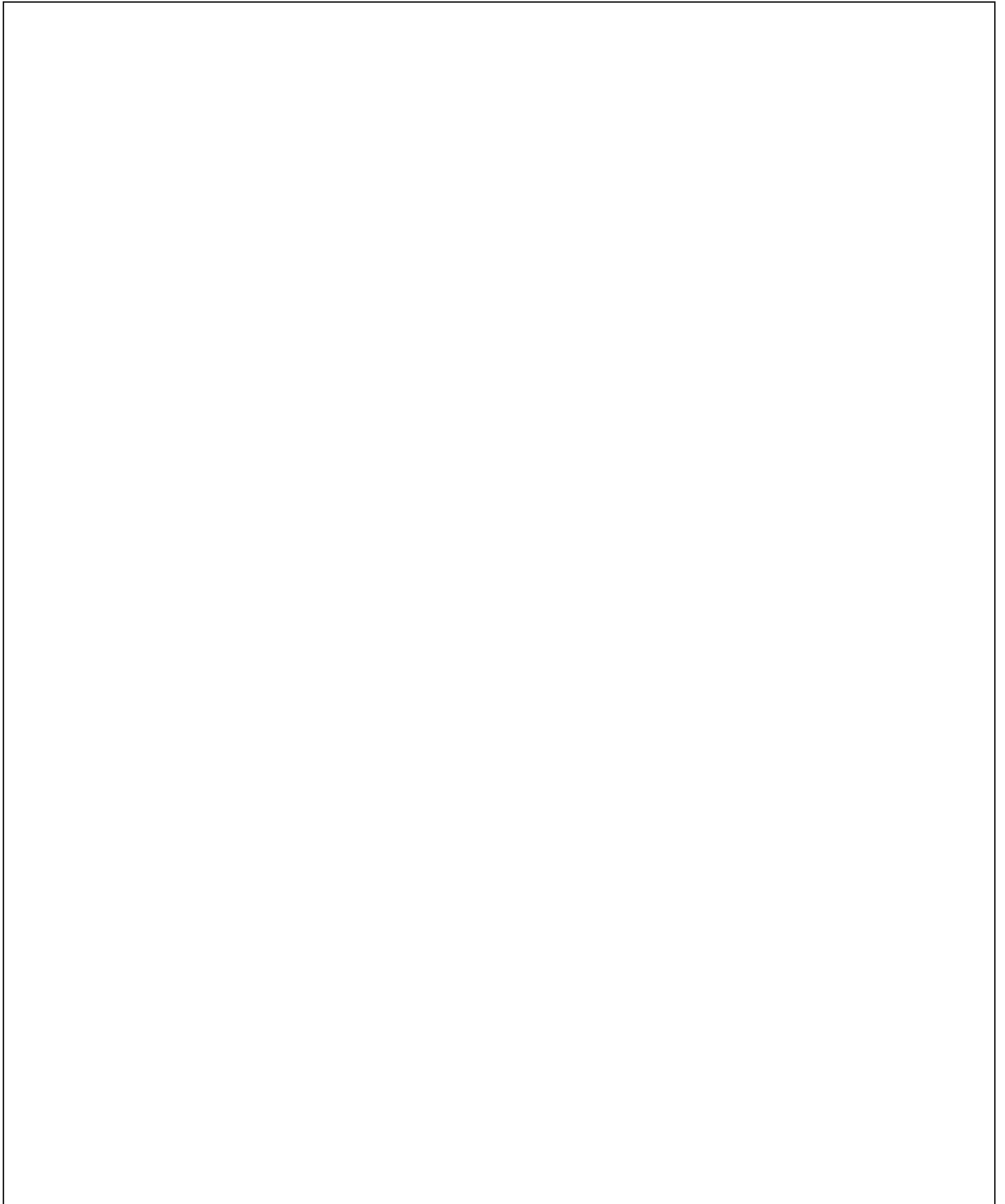
ELEVATING PERFORMANCE EXCELLENCE











Submitting Nomination

E-mail the submission to the following:

John A. Pieno, Jr. Leadership Award

Administrator

[SterlingCouncil@thesterlingcouncil.org](mailto: SterlingCouncil@thesterlingcouncil.org)

Check List

Nomination form completed

Nominee biography or curriculum vitae attached

Essay completed with seven core values included (limit 1,500 words)

Sign and Date

DATE: