

EMPOWERING MEANINGFUL SOCIAL IMPACT: Welcome to the Communities of Excellence Newsletter!



Message from Stephanie

*Stephanie Norling, Executive Director,
Communities of Excellence 2026*

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the Communities of Excellence Newsletter! We are thrilled to share

our vision for communities across America and embark on this journey of knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and inspiration with all of you. Our aim is simple yet profound: to **encourage**, **support**, and **celebrate** community performance excellence within and across the diverse communities that make up our nation. With the Communities of Excellence (COE) Framework as their roadmap, communities are uniting individuals, groups, and sectors under a common vision while empowering their collective expertise and resources towards addressing our most pressing community challenges.



This newsletter will spotlight the extraordinary communities that are demonstrating meaningful social impact using the COE Framework. A deeper understanding on how these communities tackle issues like sustainability, education, access to healthcare, equity, and more.

Components of this and future newsletters will include:

1. **Impact Spotlights:** Discover the untold stories of individuals, organizations, and groups within communities who are leveraging their skills, knowledge, and passion to create lasting social impact.
2. **Collaborative Strategies:** Elevating the innovative approaches, tools, and strategies that successful community excellence groups employ to foster collaboration, generate

What's New with Us:

The 2023–2024 Revision of the Communities of Excellence Framework:

The much-anticipated revision has been successfully completed, and we couldn't be more thrilled to unveil the changes that reflect our dedication to continuous growth and improvement. In addition to input from community leaders and our performance excellence colleagues, a national task force of DEIA content experts contributed their insights and experience to help us ensure that the framework embodies the leading-edge practices for ensuring that excellence and equity are one and the same.

Inspire Fall Conference: We were delighted to see many of you on October 16–17 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for two days full of sessions designed to be inspiring and informative. We heard from nationally known keynote speakers, learned about promising practices from communities that have adopted the COE Framework, and networked with like-minded colleagues from across the country.

Partnerships: COE conducted research on the needs our communities are facing, as a result we have identified specialty technical assistance teams to support you! We are proud to announce a new partnership with PMG Consulting and Tapp Network to further our impact and ability to reach more communities. Through collaborative and organizational development specialists and marketing and technology expertise we can help grow, accelerate and stabilize your work. To learn more please visit: <https://communitiesofexcellence2026.org/>.

ideas, and execute initiatives that drive positive change.

3. **Announce New Partnerships:** Stay informed about the exciting new collaborations and partnerships that are expanding the horizons of our community and enhancing the impact we can make together.
4. **Insights Into Research:** Delve into the latest research and insights on the intersection of performance excellence and social impact, exploring how communities can amplify their influence for the greater good.
5. **Upcoming Events:** Stay informed about workshops, conferences, and events that focus on using the COE Framework as a catalyst for addressing systemic community challenges.

We believe that the pursuit of excellence is inseparable from the pursuit of a more equitable country. By sharing our stories and experiences, by providing you with the latest tools and technology we hope to inspire and empower you to make a positive impact within your own communities, whether big or small.

Thank you for joining us on this exciting journey of exploration, growth, and impact. Together, let's nurture collective action for a brighter future!

Warm regards,

Stephanie Norling

Executive Director



THE MEMBER SURVEY: Unveiling Community Needs

by Amal Reda, Consultant, PMG Consulting

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: COE'S JOURNEY TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

Communities of Excellence 2026 (COE) is on a mission to foster thriving communities across the United States by providing a platform for collaboration, learning, and performance excellence. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, COE's vision is to see communities that excel in addressing complex challenges and improving the lives of their residents. Since its inception in 2010, COE has made significant strides in this direction, expanding its reach from six initial communities to a diverse network of 25 communities, encompassing rural, suburban, and urban areas.

THE MEMBER SURVEY: UNVEILING COMMUNITY NEEDS AND PAIN POINTS

In this pursuit of excellence, COE, with support from PMG Consulting, recently conducted a comprehensive survey of all its community cohorts. This survey was meticulously crafted to capture nuanced insights from the community's perspective. We are excited to hear directly

from our communities; these insights will allow COE to provide additional training and support tailored to COE cohort's specific needs. The COE Framework is not prescriptive, it empowers communities to ask the right questions in order to identify the specific solutions they need to address their challenges. It gives cohorts a structure to understand gaps within their regional landscape and provides a strong organizational framework, which empowers communities to address their needs, to help the organization better serve its communities.

IDENTIFYING THE GREATEST NEEDS

The results brought to light the critical areas of need faced by partners: infrastructure development, data mastery, and a collaborative framework.

Board Development and Organizational Structure:

Astonishingly, 73% of respondents reported needing a formal board in place. This finding highlights the pivotal role of governance structures in community initiatives. Equally concerning, 73% of participants needed



a formal budget, emphasizing the necessity of solid organizational foundations to support their endeavors.

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Data Collection, Management, Evaluation, or Visualization: Data-driven decision-making is the bedrock of excellence, enabling communities to make informed choices. However, the survey revealed that 45% of respondents encountered challenges in mastering this vital area, underscoring the imperative need for capacity-building efforts and expertise enhancement. Effective data collection, management, evaluation, and visualization are essential to their journey toward excellence.

45%

of respondents encountered challenges in Data Collection

89%

of communities needed a more formalized approach for collaborative relationships and systems items

Formal Partnerships and Membership Structure: A notable 89% of communities needed a more formalized approach for collaborative relationships and systems items like Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with their partners. While 60% of respondents had not established a clear membership structure, this presents an opportunity to further enhance their collective progress.

COHORTS' DESIRES FOR SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

Beyond identifying these specific needs, the survey provided insights into the areas where participating communities sought support and guidance. Constituents expressed their desire for strategic guidance and 1:1 coaching to enhance their capabilities and to navigate

complex challenges effectively. They also sought leadership development resources tailored to multi-sector, multi-jurisdictional collaboration, recognizing the support needed due to the unique nature of their work.

There were additional common themes among communities, including a strong desire to foster a more genuine collaborative approach among independent leaders and organizations, one that moves beyond mere cooperation. The survey underscored the immense value of mentorship in guiding COE groups on their journey toward excellence.

Technical support findings included communication planning, marketing and branding, and data management. These three core areas were recognized as essential for driving informed decision-making, organizational advancement, partner development and resource development.

Furthermore, respondents expressed a pressing need for a well-resourced library that contains collaborative examples linked to the Baldrige-based Communities of Excellence Framework, enabling them to better understand and apply the principles of excellence in their own contexts.

ENHANCING PROCESSES AND FORGING PARTNERSHIPS

In response to the survey findings, COE is actively exploring various approaches to enhance its processes and services, with a primary focus on addressing member communities' concerns. These efforts encompass customized support options and the development of new strategies and partnerships to better align your evolving needs with innovative and supportive solutions.

In conclusion, COE's unwavering dedication to understanding and addressing its community cohorts' needs and pain points underscores its commitment to fostering excellence nationwide. COE is poised to continue its transformative journey toward thriving, resilient, and exemplary communities across the United States by listening to its members, adapting its approach, and forging strategic partnerships.

A Transformative Partnership with PMG Consulting and Tapp Network

COE is proud to announce our dynamic partnership with PMG Consulting and Tapp Network, two world-class organizations that share our vision of driving positive change and empowering communities across the nation.

THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

As we continue to drive Communities of Excellence 2026 through our mission to help communities improve their performance using the renowned Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, we firmly believe partnership and expertise are essential. Excellence is not a solitary journey, but a collaborative one and our approach is centered around providing communities with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need.

We welcome PMG Consulting and Tapp Network to our community of provider partners, these two organizations bring a wealth of experience, expertise, and innovation to the table, enhancing our ability to serve communities in a comprehensive and impactful manner.

WELCOME PMG CONSULTING

PMG Consulting is a leading strategic planning partner known for its dedication to helping communities overcome challenges and achieve their goals. Through a deep understanding of the unique needs of each community, PMG Consulting works closely with community leaders to develop customized strategies and solutions.

As Peggy Geisler,

CEO of PMG Consulting, eloquently puts it:

“Our partnership with Communities of Excellence allows us to combine the power of strategic partner development and community-based planning with a strong framework for community excellence. Together, we can unlock the potential of communities and create lasting positive change.”

PMG Consulting offers a range of services, including:

- **Collective Impact:** Comprehensive solutions for collective impact design and management, coalition building, infrastructure design and development, network management, collaborative financing, and communication planning.
- **Landscape Analysis:** In-depth analysis of your community’s current state, challenges, and opportunities.
- **Strategic Planning:** Developing strategic plans that align with your community’s vision and goals, enabling focused and efficient progress.
- **Customized Solutions:** Tailored strategies for resource development, organizational and



leadership development, business modeling, budget development, project planning, and pilot program testing.

Contact Peggy Geisler at:
PGeisler@PMGConsulting.net for more information or consultation.

WELCOME TAPP NETWORK

Tapp Network is a digital transformation partner renowned for its expertise in modernizing communities through innovative technology and communication solutions. Tapp Network’s suite of services is designed to empower communities in the digital age.

Joseph DiGiovanni, Co-Founder of Tapp Network, emphasizes the transformative potential of this partnership:

“By joining forces with Communities of Excellence, we can leverage our digital expertise to drive meaningful change in communities. Together, we’ll empower communities with the digital tools and strategies they need to thrive.”

Tapp Network's services include:

- **Marketing and Technology Audit:** Comprehensive assessment and enhancement of your digital presence and technology strategies.
- **Data and Systems Integration:** Ensuring seamless communication between your community's websites and critical systems.
- **Community Dashboard Deployment:** Providing real-time data access and customized dashboards.
- **AI-Powered Websites and Application Development:** Leveraging AI technology to enhance user experiences, automate processes, and deliver personalized content.
- **Communication Campaigns:** Helping communities connect with members across various platforms, maintain consistent messaging, and drive positive behavior change and community impact.

These services, combined with the expertise of  Tapp Network, empower COE communities to thrive in the modern world, streamline operations, enhance member engagement, and drive positive community change.

Contact Joe@TappNetwork.com for more information or consultation.

A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ALL

The collaboration between COE, PMG Consulting, and Tapp Network represents a powerful alliance with a shared commitment to excellence, innovation, and community well-being. Together, we are poised to tackle the unique challenges faced by each COE community, providing tailored solutions that drive lasting impact.

Stephanie Norling, Executive Director of Communities of Excellence 2026, reflects on the partnership:

“This collaboration embodies our commitment to helping communities achieve excellence. Together, with PMG Consulting and Tapp Network, we will empower communities to unlock their full potential.”

Stay tuned for more updates, success stories, and insights as we embark on this exciting new chapter in our pursuit of excellence. The future is bright, and together, we'll make it even brighter.



Thank you to our conference sponsors:



AND LONG TIME SUPPORTERS: Lowell Kruse, Richard Norling, and Molly Baldrige

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT:

Empowering West Kendall: A Decade of Progress Towards a Healthier Community

by Michelle L. Mejia, Health Promotion and Strategic Partnership Consultant, West Kendall Baptist Hospital and Doctors Hospital

Healthy West Kendall has been on a transformative journey to cultivate a healthier and vibrant community for over a decade. Under the visionary leadership of CEO Javier Hernandez-Lichtl, West Kendall Baptist Hospital assumed the pivotal role of serving as the backbone organization, uniting the community in a collective effort. It was evident to Hernandez-Lichtl that healthcare was evolving, requiring a transformation in our mission. Recognizing that health is intricately intertwined with various facets of community life, including education, the local economy, safety, and overall quality of life, we embarked on a new path.

Health isn't confined to hospital walls; it thrives where people live, work, and play. In this understanding, education, the local economy, safety, and the overall quality of life became paramount influencers of health outcomes. Teaming up with the Florida Department of Health, a group of dedicated and passionate leaders joined forces to launch Healthy West Kendall, an organization committed to realizing the vision of creating a thriving West Kendall community.



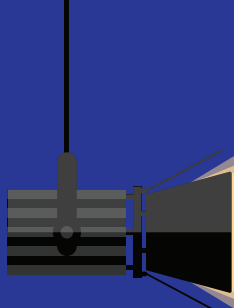
After years of dedicated effort and marked progress, Healthy West Kendall was honored to be selected as part of the inaugural cohort of Communities of Excellence 2026 (COE). Our efforts and results soared to new heights through this national collaboration and the COE Framework. Creating a community profile wasn't just about demographic data; it uncovered the unique culture and identity of West Kendall, a diverse community that values respect and mutual support.

During this process, the community rallied around critical issues that profoundly impacted the well-being of its residents. Initiatives were launched

to enhance pedestrian safety; water safety measures were put in place to prevent drownings and fatalities. Educational programs, including classroom sessions, webinars, swimming lessons, and scholarships, were established to eliminate barriers to learning. School pantries were stocked to ensure that housing-insecure students had access to the food and supplies needed to stay in school. Understanding the importance of a robust local economy, a 'buy local campaign' was initiated to support residents' employment and keep funds circulating within the community. COE introduced processes, goal setting, and metrics, but perhaps most importantly, it instilled a commitment to achieving results through continuous process improvement.

A healthy community is one where every resident can lead a dignified life, with access to essential services and the ability to actively participate in society. Recognizing that 20% of West Kendall's residents were 60 and above, a concerted effort was made to create a social environment that supports older adults. This journey led to a valuable partnership with AARP's Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, marking Healthy West Kendall as the first unincorporated municipality recognized within this esteemed network. The collaborative efforts of the Healthy West Kendall planning team and community stakeholders have been instrumental in crafting an action plan, serving as the bedrock for addressing and enhancing AARP's eight dimensions of livability. Applying the COE model to develop this action plan has been instrumental in crafting a deliberate and disciplined strategy.

Healthy West Kendall's unwavering commitment to cultivating a healthy and thriving community for all its residents remains steadfast. Being part of a national collaborative that brings communities together for learning and collaboration, armed with the necessary tools, is a recipe for lasting success. Healthy West Kendall continues striding forward, creating a West Kendall where health and well-being flourish for all.



SPOTLIGHT: AARP Age Friendly Communities

by *Laura Cantwell,*
Associate State Director, Advocacy and Livable Communities at AARP



The population of the United States is rapidly aging, as we already know in Florida. By 2030, 1 of every 5 people in the U.S. will be 65 or older. By 2034, the number of adults older than 65 will be greater than the number of children under 18.

At AARP, we see in survey and after survey from our members that they want to stay in their homes and in their communities – they want to age in place. A key to being able to age in place is ensuring that our homes, neighborhoods and communities are healthy.

The AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities supports the efforts of neighborhoods, towns, cities, and rural areas to be great places for people of all ages. We believe that communities should provide safe, walkable streets, age-friendly housing and transportation options, access to needed services and opportunities for residents of all ages to participate in community life.

In order to support this work, AARP staff and volunteers are working throughout the nation to engage and mobilize communities, share expertise, and deliver technical assistance. The AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities consists of over 780 communities across the nation and 10 states, including the state of Florida.

AARP Florida collaborates with more than 40 Age-Friendly Communities in the state to make impactful changes for residents of all ages and abilities. A key connection in all this work is health. Improving how our communities are built improves our physical health by providing more

options to get outside and to get moving through active transportation options, age-friendly parks and open spaces. Programs and resources that connect us all are essential for our individual and collective mental health and well-being.

Healthy West Kendall is the first of its kind in Florida to join as a health district, and one of the first nationally, which is led by its local hospital West Kendall Baptist Health. They are making great strides to create a vibrant and thriving community. The initiative is reaching out to older adults in the community to hear their needs. Through that work, they are also bridging the connection between their partner agencies to ensure the lens of older adults is being highlighted through their shared strategic goals and plans.

Nationally, communities report that enrollment in age-friendly has helped them become successful in incorporating private sector action, enacting public policies, improving regional and municipal coordination to name a few. Of those reported communities, 68% advocated for policy change.

In order to further the age-friendly work, AARP launched the AARP Community Challenge Grant program in 2017 to provide small grants to local governments and nonprofits in order to fund quick-action, ready-to-implement projects that can help communities. Since its inception, Florida has funded 42 community projects at over \$524,000 in the areas of transportation, housing, public spaces, civic engagement, and diversity and inclusion.

Well-designed, age-friendly communities foster economic growth and make for happier, healthier residents of all ages. **To learn more about Livable Communities, visit aarp.org/livable.**