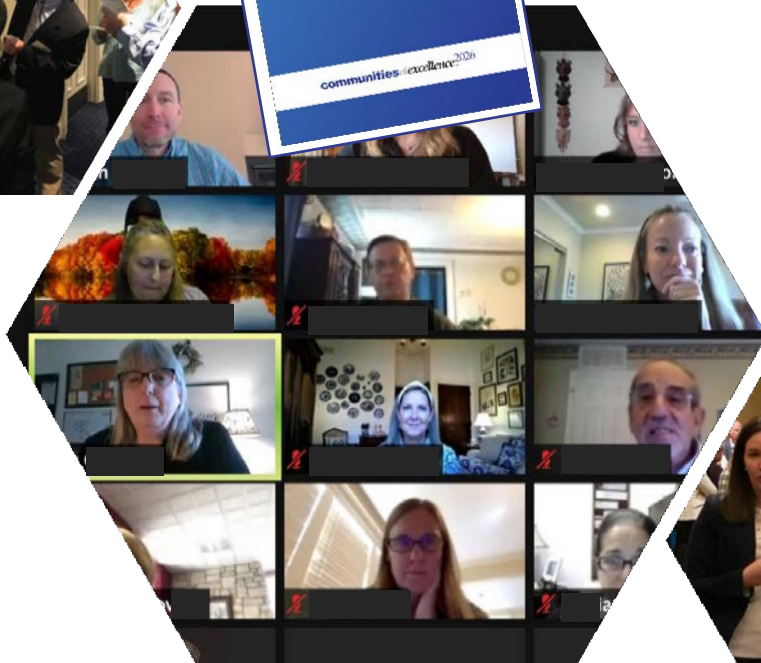


communities of excellence²⁰²⁶

National Learning Collaborative Information

OCTOBER 2023 TO SEPTEMBER 2024



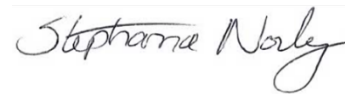
Welcome

What we imagined might happen with the launch of Communities of Excellence 2026 and the Learning Collaborative is starting to come true. Leaders in communities are coming together across multiple sector and geo-political boundaries, and they are finding the Baldrige-adapted Communities of Excellence Framework to be an effective guide and catalyst in their collaboration efforts.

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated how important it is for us to work together. Competition for resources, silo-ed activities across sectors, and duplication of efforts across organizations and businesses in communities are just a few of the many challenges we are facing. To ensure better outcomes, all community voices need to have a seat at the planning table, understand their role in improvement efforts, and work together on shared priorities to coordinate resources and activities that address root causes and achieve measurable results.

We began in 2016 with two pilot sites; San Diego County's South Region and the 18 Counties of Northwest Missouri. The progress of these pilots convinced us that we should take our effort to the next level and in 2017 we launched our first national learning collaborative of communities. 6 years later, 25 communities are participating in the three phases of the collaborative and alumni program, include rural communities and rural regions, suburbs and cities, and large urban regions.

We are pleased to add a 7th cohort of communities to participate in the learning collaborative this year. We know that America faces great challenges as we approach the 250th anniversary of the nation's founding – the year 2026. We invite you to join Communities of Excellence 2026 and communities from coast to coast in this movement to reshape America's communities.



Executive Director,
Communities of Excellence 2026



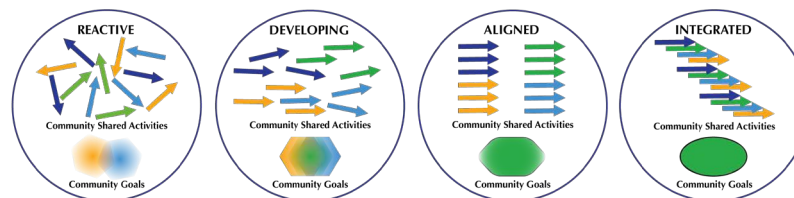
Background

When it comes to making meaningful change in communities, it is the leaders and stakeholders of each community who must take ownership. The declining indicators of the overall health, wealth, and wellbeing of the majority of American citizens are due to systemic problems. These challenges are primarily created by the culture, habits, and systems of communities and their regulating entities.

Confronting these challenges will require a higher level of performance—a commitment to community performance excellence that grows out of the recognition that the social determinants of educational achievement, economic vitality, and health status are inextricably interwoven. A commitment among leaders across sectors and generations to take **a systematic approach to community performance**.

We are educating leaders who want to improve quality of life in their communities. To do so, they are learning they must shift mindsets, change partnership processes, and transform their culture for the better by capitalizing on their assets and opportunities. They are seeing how beneficial it is to bring all sectors together to talk and acknowledge their interconnectivity as a community system.

Communities benefit from a systematic approach familiar to and used by all entities within communities that ensures federal, state, local, and private sector efforts are aligned and integrated to maximize their benefit and impact.



A New Approach Based on Proven Principles and Promising Practices

In 2010, two former healthcare CEOs, whose organizations won the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award under their leadership, brainstormed ways to confront systemic problems that are eroding the fabric of our society, including inequitable access to education, seismic shifts in the nation's and world's economy, and escalating costs of health care, with no improvement in outcomes. They discussed their belief that a systems-based approach built on the same principles of performance excellence that created significant and sustained improvements in performance, quality, and cost savings in their former organizations could also address today's concerns about community performance.

Their vision led to more conversations with Baldrige representatives and government, business, university, and foundation experts from coast to coast. By 2012, a steering committee began to adapt the Baldrige Excellence Framework for use by communities. COE 2026, named in honor of the United States' upcoming 250th anniversary, was established to test the founders' hypothesis through a nationwide pilot.

HYPOTHESIS

That a framework proved to drive performance excellence in companies and organizations (the Baldrige Excellence Framework) can be adapted to achieve performance excellence in communities and improve the quality of life for all Americans.

The Communities of Excellence Framework provides a proven systematic approach familiar to six sector categories (*manufacturing, health care, education, government, small business, and nonprofit*) within communities that ensures all silo-specific and special interest efforts are aligned with each other and integrated through common language and processes to maximize their benefit and impact.



Why Join?

Envision what our country could be like if people with many different perspectives, experiences, and dreams could agree to work together on the priorities they share while also respecting the pursuit of their individual goals.

Imagine...

... a time when leaders – elected, appointed, and volunteer – within a community decide and act together to:

- **Listen** to the full range of stakeholders to better understand the community's assets, needs, and dreams,
- **Identify** challenges that are shared by a majority or all,
- **Define** a shared community vision ,
- **Prioritize** what to work on first,
- **Access** trusted data to **gain** a deeper understanding of their priorities,
- **Plan** how to best (re)allocate resources of people, time, finances, and energy through alignment, engagement, and mobilization,
- **Implement** difference-making strategies,
- **Monitor** progress by tracking output activities and outcome impacts,
- Openly **communicate** the progress to the full range of community stakeholders, and
- **Decide together** what is working, what is not, and what to do next to continually **pursue** their shared vision while also **progressing** in their areas of interest.

This endless cycle is how high performing organizations succeed in meeting their goals.

We believe this asset-building systems approach is how high performing communities can also succeed in goal attainment to improve their economic vitality, educational attainment, health and well-being, and overall quality of life.

Learning Activities and Program Cost

This is a 3-phase experience designed for communities to align and strengthen their collaborative efforts while learning how to identify, prioritize, and act on strategic advantages, challenges, and opportunities. Multi-sector groups learn in cohorts of several communities that have committed to participate in each phase facilitated over 12 months.

Online sessions are led by COE 2026 [faculty](#) and invited presenters and allow communities to ask questions, discuss challenges, and share promising practices among cohort communities. They often include assignments that assists the community to build their Profile and develop their Leadership System and Strategic Plan.

Included:

- Pre-collaborative leadership team-building sessions
- Annual kick-off conference
- Monthly online sessions
- Access to community development tools, resources, and proven promising practices
- Monthly connections with a community excellence group mentor
- Quarterly online skill-building sessions with guest speakers
- Opportunity to engage in the Assessment and Recognition Program
- Post-collaborative Alumni Group for continuous improvement

Program Cost

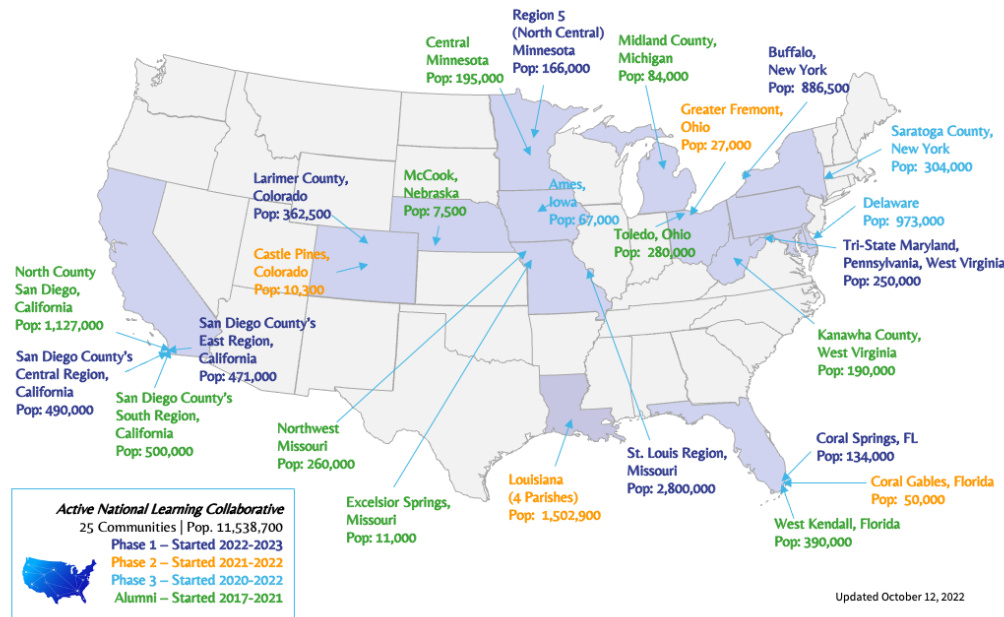
The Phase 1 fee is \$25,000. In Phases 2 and 3 the cost is reduced to \$15,000 per phase. While communities only have to commit to one phase at a time, this collaborative is designed as a 3-phase engagement. As Learning Collaborative participants, the fee for our annual Assessment and Recognition Program is waived.



Key Dates

The learning collaborative officially begins in October 2023. However, immediately after your application is received there is an initial assessment involving confirmation of key dates, roles, and expectations.

1. Initial Assessment Video Conference set up when application is received
2. Onboarding – Initial Assessment Meeting through September 2023
3. 1st Online Session – Thursday October 5th, 2023, at 11:00 am PT/2:00 pm ET (2 hours)
4. Kick-Off Conference/Baldrige Fall Conference – October 16-17th, 2023, in Milwaukee, WI
5. Online Sessions – 1st Thursday of every month at 11:00 am PT through September 19th, 2024 (2 hours)



Overview of Activities

Phase 1

Phase 1 introduces the principles of community performance excellence to your community excellence group. We begin with the development of your Baldrige-based Community Profile, which helps your collaborative group understand your community's current story and together envision a future story. It is a powerful process that supports community-wide engagement and can assist in establishing a common language across the many sectors and voices in a community. Throughout the first phase we focus significantly on community leadership and identification of shared priorities.

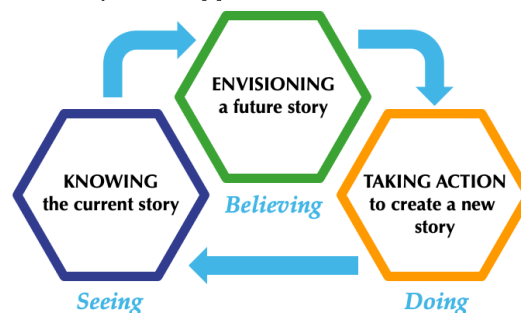
OBJECTIVES:

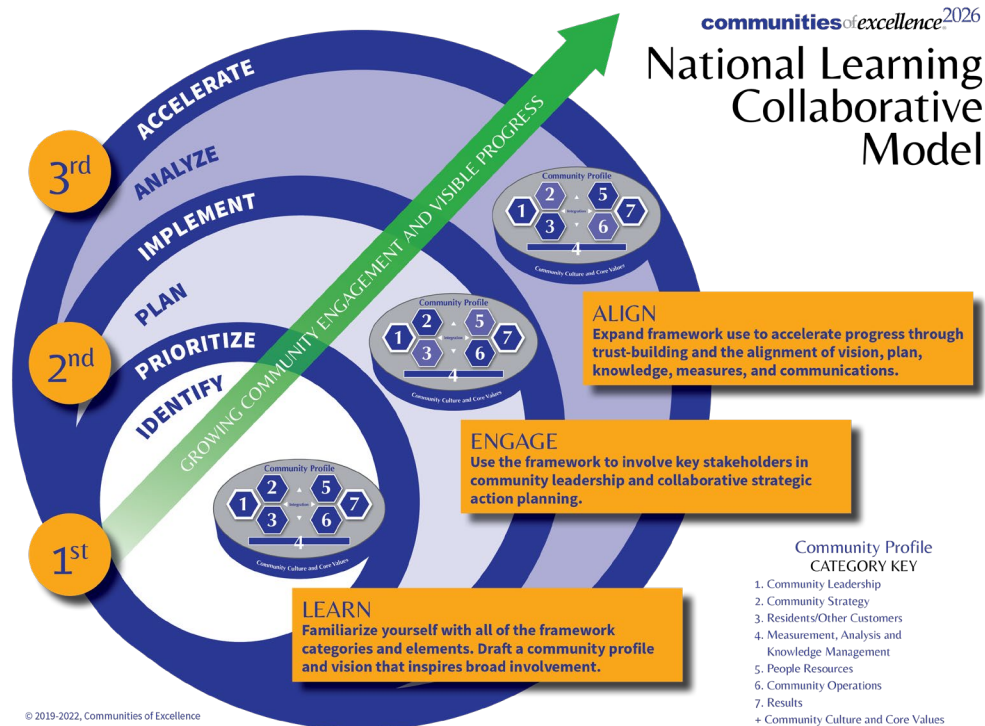
1. Engage your group in a Communities of Excellence Journey.
2. Ensure your initiative includes the many diverse perspectives of your community.
3. **Know Your Community's Current Story:** Understand your community and the role of your community excellence group [CEG] by developing your first Baldrige-based Community Profile for submission to receive objective feedback through COE's Assessment and Recognition Program.
4. Learn the basics of the Communities of Excellence Framework by applying it to one roundtrip of the COE Journey Roadmap through a listening project.
5. Learn about and engage with the other communities in the National Learning Collaborative.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- COE 2026 Universal Scorecard Baseline Data Gathered and Community Assets Mapped
- Community Excellence Group Initial Vision, Values, Brand Identity, and Digital Communication Platform Developed
- Initial Community Listening Project Completed to Identify Initial Action Project
- COE Progress Self-Assessment Completed

A Systems Approach in Communities





Phase 2 moves from planning to action, with a focus on leadership, communication and development and deployment of community strategies based on the priorities identified in phase one. Emphasis is on identification of key results your community will track and the measures critical to understanding how successful you are at reaching your goals, and engagement of diverse voices to achieve your goals.

Phase 3 assesses the systems and structure in place that are needed to sustain your community excellence efforts. Continuous improvement is emphasized through prioritization and planning to address opportunities for improvement from your community's feedback report from previous years. Key concepts around leadership, strategy, measurement, and engagement are revisited and reinforced, with an emphasis on best practice sharing between all the communities in the Learning Collaborative. By the end of phase three your community should be well on its way to having established, values-driven community leadership who collectively visualize a shared future, speak a common language across sectors, share responsibility for community outcomes and have structures in place for sustainability, succession planning, and data-driven decision making.

Benefits of Participation

- Collaborate with sector leaders and Baldrige experts; sharing approaches, innovations, best practices, successes, and challenges to accelerate your community's collective efforts;
- Learn from and network with other communities on their community performance excellence journeys;
- Engage with community leaders and Baldrige experts in facilitated sessions designed to accelerate your systems thinking knowledge; and
- Become trailblazers to an innovative approach to community improvement.

As an advocate of performance excellence, COE continues to welcome independent evaluations of our programs. The University of San Diego's Nonprofit Institute, JUPER Communications, and George Washington University have reported evidence that participating communities:

- Are satisfied with and appreciate their COE's experience
- Identify important key issues for their community and are developing action plans; some are starting to be implemented with success
- Are identifying and strengthening backbone organizations while holding partners accountable
- Benefit from learning with and from other communities
- Transfer learning, tools, and techniques back to their communities, thereby reaching countless others in communities through this ripple effect
- Build trust and a network of diverse relationships that did not previously exist
- Increase their cross-sector inclusion, engagement, and collaboration



Who Should Participate?

We work with communities ranging from a small rural city of 7,500 residents to a large urban region of over 2 million. What they have in common are cross-sector, inter-generational groups of formal and informal community leaders who are willing to commit the time, energy, and resources to apply the principles of community performance excellence to their community with a committed backbone organization(s) to support them.

We are looking for communities that:

- Have commitments from members of key sectors such as health, education, business, government, social services and safety, as well as generations to participate; OR
- Have a pre-existing community leadership team representing multiple sectors. This could take many forms including regional coalitions or a pre-existing collaborative.
- Have an identified backbone organization(s) that will provide the ongoing support required to sustain the effort and serve as the main contact.
- Are willing to share generously and commit the time and resources required to meaningfully engage in implementing the Communities of Excellence Framework.
- Have individuals engaged that possess a knowledge of Baldrige Performance Excellence Principles or a strong desire to learn.

Take our Getting Started Community Readiness Self-Assessment to ensure you have the most positive and productive experience with us!
<http://bit.ly/3nu0TFy>



Expectations of the Participating Communities

To fully benefit from this collaborative, we believe that communities will need to understand and meet the following expectations:

Key Leadership Commitment

To maximize results, the Learning Collaborative should be a recognized priority by each individual participant as well as participating organizations' senior leadership and governing boards.

Dedicated Project Resources

This effort requires a committed backbone organization(s) to manage the collaborative, and within it, at least 2-3 individuals to serve as project leaders for the collaborative. It is expected that these individuals will attend and participate in all sessions, complete assignments as required, and be able to educate the broader collaborative leadership on the COE Framework and its implementation. The project leaders will oversee the day-to-day activities of the team and the time, resources, and accountability needed to succeed.

A Commitment to Applying the Baldrige Principles

Succeeding in this work requires a willingness to embrace systems-wide thinking and action.

Successful communities will commit to learning the Baldrige Principles or will have leaders that are already skilled in its implementation.

Valuing Diversity and Inclusiveness

Participating communities must recognize the importance of celebrating diversity and actively seeking to include diverse opinions. They acknowledge that they must engage and consider all resident voices to create and enjoy living in a community of excellence.

Dedicated Support for Measurement and Data Infrastructure

Few organizations or collaboratives have all the data they need to understand and improve their communities. In addition to using the data already available, communities may need to develop new ways to collect and use data, including looking beyond their own data systems to external sources.



COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE 2026 FOUNDATION STATEMENT

For America to sustain its vitality, promote opportunity, and create a more equitable society during its second 250 years of existence, we must improve the performance of communities and the people who lead and live in them.

CORE PURPOSE

To ensure that every person in America has the opportunity to live their best life in communities that are thriving

For More Information or to
Request an Application

Visit: www.coe2026.org

Email: snorling@communitiesofexcellence2026.org

Call: 619-719-1045

Stephanie Norling
Executive Director

