

NATIONAL LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

A Systematic Approach to Excellence in Communities: Using a Baldrige-based Framework to Lead Transformation

America faces great challenges as we approach the year 2026 – the 250th anniversary of our nation’s founding. Communities across our country have struggled to confront systemic problems such as:

- *Education disparities* – the average performance levels for students in the least socioeconomically advantaged districts are at least four grade levels below students in the most socioeconomically advantaged districts.
- *Deteriorating public health* - life expectancy of Americans is now below the OECD (Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation) average and the U.S. has the highest prevalence of obesity in the developed world.
- *Inequalities in economic opportunity* - 40-45 million Americans live in poverty and smaller cities, towns and rural areas are particularly suffering, with average annual incomes about \$54,000 less than larger metropolitan areas.

Efforts to address these and other critical issues are often carried out in silos and without a solid, proactive framework for cross-sector collaboration and performance excellence among key players and stakeholders. The ongoing challenges that are prevalent throughout our country must be tackled with systemic thinking and action, collaboration and cooperation, and a commitment to performance excellence *at the community level*.

THE COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK – adapted from the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework - is a systematic approach for community leaders, residents and collaborative partners to **align and strengthen the effectiveness of their efforts** towards healthy and thriving residents and safe communities. Using this framework, communities can achieve **better results, faster**, in the areas that really matter: educational attainment, economic vitality (jobs), health status and safety.

CURRENT COLLABORATIVE PARTICIPANTS

Our communities range from **small rural** communities of 7,500 residents to **large urban** regions of 1,000,000 + residents. What they have in common are cross-sector, inter-generational groups of formal and informal leaders who are **committed** to applying the principles of community performance excellence with a backbone organization(s) to support them. These communities recognize that **meaningful, lasting change** does not happen overnight, but takes all sectors and all generations of the community working together towards a shared vision with shared community values.



Communities of Excellence 2026 is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that hosts a national learning collaborative of communities across the country, trains communities in the Baldrige-based Communities of Excellence framework, and provides opportunities for communities to work together, share successes, challenges, ideas and best practices, and learn from each other on their performance excellence journeys.

The National Learning Collaborative Structure and Activities

The Learning Collaborative is a **twelve-month long effort, beginning in October, 2019**. Activities include an in-person meeting in October 2019, pre-work and assignments, twice monthly web-based sessions, and one-on-one expert progress reviews. The curriculum is designed for communities at varying levels of readiness to advance their community's current efforts, learn from and share best practices with each other and includes access to our online communications platform.

By the end of year one, communities participating will:

- (Re) define and activate your community excellence team - a **diverse, values-driven leadership team** comprised of residents from the community's key sectors, generations, social and economic groups.
- Develop your first Baldrige-based **Community Profile**.
- Use the information in your Community Profile to identify the **next steps** towards your community of excellence journey.
- Identify one or more **community strategic objectives and outcomes** based on your Community Profile.

Year Two and Beyond

The Learning Collaborative is designed as a three-year effort. For 2019-2020, we will have three cohorts involved spanning the three years of curriculum. Communities commit to one year at a time.

Criteria for involvement:

- Have a pre-existing community leadership team representing all sectors and generations. This could take many forms including regional coalitions or a pre-existing collaborative;
- OR have commitments from members of key sectors - health, education, business, government, social services and safety, and generations to participate.
- Have an identified backbone organization(s) that provides the ongoing support required to sustain the effort and serve as the key contact.
- Willingness 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.

WHAT OUR PARTICIPANTS ARE SAYING:

"From my perspective, [COE] is the only way that a community can truly have the right dialogue to advance as a complete community. If you really want sustainability and change and something to be proud of...I personally think [COE] is the only structure that can really advance that conversation in a meaningful way."

"[COE is] going to be a spark that lights a fire across the country... I see a long, bright future for [Baldrige and COE]."

"[We are] excited about the process...and energy. Everyone is believing that change can happen...not only believing, but seeing it happen."

"[COE] has given us hope. There are a lot of great things happening. People are willing to work together."

Learn More and Apply for the Fall 2019 Cohort

Visit our website for more information, including the application form: www.communitiesofexcellence2026.org, or contact Stephanie Norling, Director, at info@communitiesofexcellence2026.org.

The fee to participate in year one of the National Learning Collaborative is \$20,000 and includes all online sessions, expert reviews, access to the communications platform and registration fees for two (2) participants to attend the COE 2026 Annual Conference and Baldrige Fall Conference on October 24-25 in Nashville, TN.