



# communities of excellence™ 2026

Improving Economic Vitality,  
Health, Education, and  
Quality of Life in America  
One Community  
at a Time

[www.coe2026.org](http://www.coe2026.org)



## America faces great challenges as we approach the year 2026 – the 250th anniversary of our nation’s founding.

Every year we invest trillions of dollars and untold hours attempting to improve our health, education, and economic opportunities. Despite this tremendous investment, many U.S. **communities are struggling to provide adequate health care, education, and jobs to their residents** and are ill-prepared for natural, environmental, economic, or other disasters.

**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. **Communities need 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.

**An approach exists to address these issues at a community level – the Communities of Excellence Framework.** As of April 2020, this framework has been adopted by 18 communities in 10 states representing a collective population of 8,732,000 people as a **roadmap to addressing their most pressing problems**. It is based on criteria developed by the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program. For 32 years the Baldrige Program at NIST has provided a framework to enable and achieve a systems approach to excellence within organizations, generating an estimated \$1 billion in economic benefit annually. Now they are partnering with private sector partners to do the same for entire communities.

**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.

### Seeing is believing:

“[We are] excited about the process... and energy. **Everyone is believing that change can happen... not only believing, but seeing it happen.**” —Linda Place, Albany, Missouri



**We educate leaders who want to improve the 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.



**A community is a set of systems that must function together to achieve optimal performance. Everyone matters.**

**How the framework is helping communities respond to crisis:**

“The networks, communication channels, and relationships established through our COE 2026 work over the 2 ½ years are proving extremely beneficial to community leaders during this time. As we move into recovery, these same channels will be used to coordinate a long-term response and recovery effort. We have a common strategic planning process that can be replicated to develop a community-wide response. Our shared processes or network would not exist without the work we've put in because of COE.

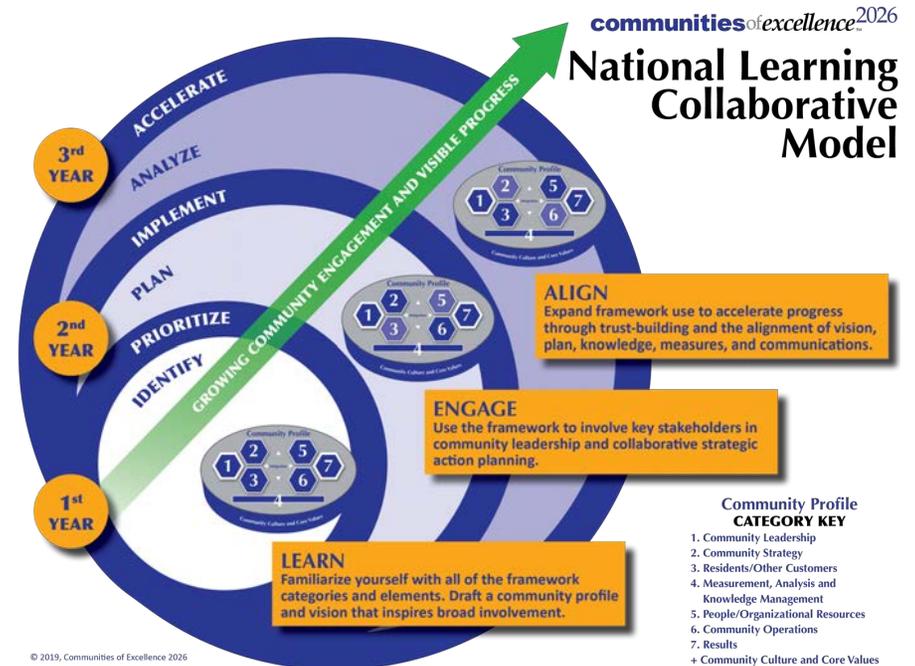
**The systems approach provided in the COE framework is an asset to communities anytime, but especially in times of crisis and instability.** —Kim Halfhill, Community Coach, Excelsior Springs, Missouri

**Join our National Learning Collaborative**  
**A Systematic Approach to Excellence in Communities**  
**Using a Baldrige-based Framework to Lead Transformation**  
**New Cohort Starts October 2020**

**The Learning Collaborative is a 3-year experience** designed for communities at varying levels of readiness to align and strengthen their community’s current efforts, and identify, prioritize, and implement needed efforts. Communities learn in cohorts of up to 6 communities, sharing challenges and best practices with each other.

**Activities include** 1 in-person meeting in October 2020, pre-work, twice monthly web-based sessions, mentor sessions and 1-on-1 expert progress reviews.

**Communities only commit to 1 year at a time.**



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“From my perspective, [COE 2026] is the only way that a community can truly have the right dialogue to advance. If you really want sustainability, change, and something to be proud of...I personally think this is the only structure that can advance the conversation in a meaningful way.” —Steve Wenger, Maximize NWMO, Northwest Missouri

## Participating Communities:

### The Communities of Excellence Framework in Action



## Helpful Information:

### Q. Who should be involved in my community?

#### A. You have options, such as:

- Pre-existing community leadership teams representing all sectors and generations. These take many forms including regional coalitions or
- pre-existing collaboratives;
- OR, committed leaders of key sectors – such as health, education, business, government, social services, and/or safety ready to participate.

### Q. How do we know we're ready to join?

#### A. Here are some initial considerations:

- You've identified a backbone organization(s) to provide the ongoing support required to sustain the effort and serve as the key contact.
- Your group is willing to share generously and commit the time and resources required to meaningfully engage in implementing the Framework.
- You have individuals engaged that possess a knowledge of Baldrige Performance Excellence Principles or a strong desire to learn.

### Q. How do we get more information?

- #### A. Visit our website at [www.coe2026.org](http://www.coe2026.org) or email us at [snorling@communitiesofexcellence2026.org](mailto:snorling@communitiesofexcellence2026.org).

