

communities of excellence[®] 2026

Summer Edition



Message from Stephanie

Stephanie Norling
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What You've Helped Build: Our Next Chapter Together

Over the past decade, we've had the privilege of walking alongside dozens of communities—made up of people who care deeply, think boldly, and work tirelessly to build a better future. You've come from different geographies, sectors, and starting points, but with a shared belief: that collaboration matters, systems can improve, and every resident deserves the opportunity to thrive.

We've listened. We've learned. And we've evolved—together.

Thanks to the insights, innovations, and honest feedback from so many of you, I'm excited to share the next phase in our journey: The **Impact Pathway** and our new **Community Engagement Packages**.

These offerings were not created in a vacuum. They're a direct reflection of your experience—of what worked, what didn't, and what's most needed now. This is our effort to build on the momentum we've created together and make it easier for more communities to access the kind of structured, supportive, and sustainable approach you helped pioneer.

From Practice to Progress: A Pathway Guided by You

The Impact Pathway is a milestone-based roadmap designed to guide cross-sector community teams through five key stages of transformation. It helps answer questions we've heard again and again:

“Where do we begin?”

“What comes next?”

“How do we stay aligned when the work gets messy or momentum slows?”

While no two communities are alike, we've seen some consistent patterns in how successful transformation efforts take shape. The Pathway captures those patterns and turns them into a clear, flexible guide—rooted in the Communities of Excellence Framework and strengthened by real-world experiences.

It's not a program you check off. It's a living journey that adapts to your pace and your context, supported by tools, coaching, and connection every step of the way. It gives structure without rigidity—and helps your team focus on what matters most: results that improve lives.

Support That Meets You Where You Are

To support communities in a more customized way, we've also developed Community Engagement Packages. These packages offer different levels of support depending on your goals and capacity—whether you're an individual wanting to get involved, an organization trying to spark collaboration, or a community team ready to commit to the full Pathway. Some of you asked for lighter-touch ways to explore the work before diving in fully. Others wanted more coaching, more accountability, or more help aligning with funders and partners. These packages reflect that range. They're designed to be flexible, practical, and responsive—not one-size-fits-all.

Honoring the Learning Collaborative That Got Us Here

As we introduce these new offerings, we also want to honor what came before. With deep appreciation, we're retiring the National Learning Collaborative—the program that launched this movement and gave so many communities a space to learn, grow, and lead together. The Learning Collaborative was never meant to be the end; it was a bold beginning. And like any good beginning, it taught us what's possible. The Impact Pathway now carries that vision forward, with more clarity, more adaptability, and a deeper alignment with what communities need today.

Join Us in Denver

If you'd like to explore the Impact Pathway more deeply or see how others are applying it, we'd love to have you join us at the 2025 Communities of Excellence Conference, October 14–15 in Denver, Colorado.

This year's gathering will offer hands-on workshops, peer learning, and honest conversation about what it really takes to move from intention to impact. It's a space to connect, recharge, and take the next step—whatever that looks like for you.

To every community, partner, and changemaker who has helped shape this work: Thank you. Your commitment, creativity, and trust have brought us to this moment. Because of you, the path ahead is not just clearer—it's stronger, more inclusive, and more hopeful.

With gratitude and hope,

Stephanie Norling
President & CEO
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