



communitiesofexcellence²⁰²⁶

2025 CONFERENCE

RISING to NEW HEIGHTS

Where Communities Lead & Impact Grows

October 14-15, 2025 | Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel

SCHEDULE-AT-A-GLANCE

Tuesday, October 14, 2025: Workshop Day

9:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. **Registration**

10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. **Impact Workshop: Community Data Lab**

This interactive, hands-on workshop is designed for community leaders who want to make smarter, more meaningful use of community data to advance local priorities.

Participants will bring their own strategic action plans, datasets, or community goals, and work alongside peers and expert facilitators to explore what they are, could be, and should be measuring to build healthier, more collaborative communities.

The workshop combines instructional guidance with collaborative working sessions. Facilitators will provide practical tools, real-world examples, and step-by-step support to help participants:

- *Distinguish between activities and outcomes, and understand how to connect day-to-day efforts to long-term impact*
- *Determine whether an intervention is making a difference using real-world data and community-driven indicators*
- *Identify and track meaningful measures such as increased access, improved trust, or reduced disparities*
- *Develop a sustainable process for managing data, ensuring the capacity to reflect, adapt, and improve over time*
- *Apply the Communities of Excellence Common Community Scorecard, including a new tool for monitoring internal process measures related to governance and operations*

Whether you're launching a new initiative, coordinating a multi-sector partnership, or building on a long-standing collaborative effort, this workshop will help you build the habits, knowledge, and shared language needed to evaluate progress and strengthen outcomes.

Note: *All participants should bring their current scorecards, dashboards, strategy maps and/or related data. Current participants and Alumni of the COE National Learning Collaborative should also bring their most recent COE application and feedback report.*

4:30 – 6:00 p.m. **Community Awards Celebration & Reception**



Wednesday, October 15: Community Spirit Day

You are encouraged to wear apparel to represent your community.

7:30 – 8:30 a.m.

Registration & Continental Breakfast

8:30 – 9:00 a.m.

General Session: Welcome and Communities of Excellence 2026 Update

9:00 – 9:45 a.m.

Opening Keynote: Building a Vibrant Community

Quint Studer

Drawing on the transformation of Pensacola, Florida, this session offers a practical blueprint for revitalizing communities and sparking sustainable economic growth. Studer shares lessons on mobilizing private citizens, engaging local businesses, revitalizing downtowns, and fostering education and inclusion—showing how shared vision and strategic action can turn decline into thriving vibrancy.

9:45 – 10:00 a.m.

Morning Coffee Break

10:00 – 10:45 a.m.

General Session: From The Future Is Already Here – Elevating the Next Generation

What do rising leaders want from the communities they call home, and how can we better understand and engage with younger generations as we climb toward stronger, more connected futures? In this dynamic panel, young professionals and students will share what inspires them, what challenges they see, and what they need to thrive. From affordable living and meaningful careers to belonging, creativity, and civic voice, these emerging leaders will offer a fresh perspective on the path forward. Join us as we explore how to:

- *Build bridges across generations and sectors*
- *Design strategies that elevate what matters to younger residents*
- *Shift from assumptions to authentic engagement*

Come ready to listen, reflect, and take away practical ideas for building stronger connections across generations.

10:45 – 11:00 a.m.

Stretch Break

11:00 – 11:45 a.m.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS: Tools for the Journey

Ready to scale the summit? These sessions will feature practical tools to help support your journey. Explore your interests with these sessions.

1. **Governance and Sustainability: Leadership that Endures**
Sustaining progress requires sturdy foundations. In this panel, community leaders share how they've built governance and leadership systems that provide stability, prevent burnout, and help them continue climbing toward long-term impact.
2. **Community Voice and Equity: Resident-Centered Engagement Strategies**
Learn how resident-centered engagement strategies can create meaningful opportunities for connection and progress in your community.
3. **Impact and Data: How to Create Your Community of Excellence Strategy Map**
Discover why creating a strategy map is a powerful way to align goals and outcomes across sectors. This session will walk through the how-to process and showcase real-world examples from communities.

Plus, you'll have the chance to explore select breakout sessions from The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy / Claremont Lincoln University Annual Convening. More details will be available soon.

11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Communities of Excellence Networking Luncheon

12:30 – 1:10 p.m. General Session: Roots of Collaboration – Community Roundtable

Every thriving community is built on strong roots – relationships, trust, and shared purpose. In this interactive roundtable, you'll join peers from across the country to exchange stories, successes, and challenges around building collaborative partnerships. Whether you're working across sectors, navigating power dynamics, or striving to deepen trust in your community, this is your space to connect. Come ready to:

- *Share what's working and what's not in your collaboration efforts*
- *Hear real-world strategies for building and sustaining cross-sector partnerships*
- *Reflect on the foundational values that drive your work forward*

This session is about conversation, not presentation, because real change begins when communities listen, learn, and grow together.

1:10 – 1:15 p.m. Stretch Break

1:15 – 2:00 p.m. BREAKOUT SESSIONS: Rising Together – Community Networking Sessions

Alumni Gathering

Impact Journey Gathering

General Participants Session – Getting Started with the Communities of Excellence Framework

2:00 – 2:15 p.m. Stretch Break

2:15 – 3:15 p.m. BREAKOUT SESSIONS: Lightning Rounds

Lightning rounds feature short presentations where communities share a promising practice. Each presentation is followed by a facilitated dialogue, giving participants the chance to reflect, exchange ideas, and brainstorm solutions to similar challenges in their own work.

- **Governance and Sustainability**
- **Community Voice and Equity**
- **Collaboration and Strategy**
- **Impact and Data**

3:15 – 3:20 p.m. Stretch Break

3:20 – 3:50 p.m. Keynote: Water, Policy, and the Future of Communities

John Farner, Global Policy Leader at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, will close the conference with insights on water policy, stewardship, and the critical role the physical environment plays in shaping thriving communities. His expertise connects local action to global sustainability, helping us all see why water matters to every community leader, no matter the sector.

3:50 – 4:00 p.m. Closing

