



Communities of Resilience & Excellence



Quarterly Newsletter

REBRANDING FOR THE FUTURE: COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE EVOLVES INTO C.O.R.E.

Since 2017, Communities of Excellence 2026 has helped local leaders to transform their communities through inclusive, high-impact practices rooted in equity, collaboration, and measurable results. Now, the initiative is embracing a new identity that reflects both its enduring mission and evolving momentum: C.O.R.E. — Communities Of Resilience & Excellence.



"This rebrand is not a departure, but a natural evolution," said Stephanie Norling, President and CEO of C.O.R.E.

"It preserves the foundational purpose of uplifting communities through aligned, cross-sector action while introducing a name that is more current, accessible, and resonant with today's change-makers."

Honoring the Past, Embracing the Future

The transition to C.O.R.E. reflects a deep commitment to the values that have guided the initiative from the beginning: equity, integrity, and a focus on long-term impact. At the same time, the new name broadens the movement's relevance and reach.

C.O.R.E. symbolizes being at the center. The place where data, dialogue, and coordinated action come together to spark transformation. It conveys strength, clarity, and purpose, and reminds us that change radiates outward only when it begins from within.

Centered on What Matters Most

Across the country, communities face increasingly complex challenges that require collaborative, systems-level solutions. C.O.R.E. provides a proven roadmap for this kind of work, guiding communities through a seven-milestone journey that aligns public, private, and nonprofit sectors around shared priorities.

Tools, resources, and a rigorous assessment and recognition process help local leaders track progress, measure impact, and stay focused on what matters most, which is improving quality of life for all.



A Track Record of Impact

To date, the initiative has engaged over 26 communities, reaching more than 450 organizations and impacting 12.5 million people. These communities have used C.O.R.E.'s model to tackle pressing issues in health, education, economic vitality, and equity—building stronger systems and more resilient futures.

This track record offers a powerful foundation for growth under the new brand. C.O.R.E. will continue supporting communities through engagement packages, technical assistance, learning collaboratives, and national recognition. Now with an identity that better reflects the urgency and dynamism of the work.

A More Accessible, Inclusive Brand

The move to C.O.R.E. responds to feedback that the original name, while meaningful, could feel formal or distant. This new identity speaks in a voice that's clearer, more inclusive, and better suited to energize diverse stakeholders from grassroots organizers to institutional leaders, from funders to young emerging community leaders.

Importantly, the rebrand stays true to the original vision: a community-driven movement fueled by shared values and collective leadership.

What's Next?

This initiative is doubling down on its commitment to supporting communities where collaboration is the norm, not the exception—and where resilience and excellence go hand in hand. With new tools, renewed clarity, and a modern identity, C.O.R.E. is poised to inspire and support the next generation of place-based transformation.

Because transformation doesn't happen from the outside in. It starts at the core.

With deep gratitude,
Stephanie Norling
President & CEO
Communities of Resilience & Excellence
C.O.R.E.





WE'RE THRILLED TO ANNOUNCE THE 2025 COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE AWARD RECIPIENTS!

Celebrating Our 2025 Community Excellence Award Recipients

At this year's conference in Denver, we had the honor of recognizing four outstanding communities for their leadership, collaboration, and measurable progress in improving quality of life.

Each of these communities participated in our annual Assessment and Recognition Program, where communities apply by describing their systems, partnerships, and results using the Communities of Excellence Framework criteria. Their applications are reviewed by a team of trained volunteer examiners who provide a detailed Feedback Report highlighting strengths and opportunities for improvement.

"These communities exemplify what happens when people come together across sectors to create shared systems for improvement," said Stephanie Norling, President & CEO of Communities of Resilience and Excellence (C.O.R.E.) ***"Each one shows us that resilience and excellence are not separate goals – they're what make communities stronger over time."***

Bronze Recognition: Maximize Northwest Missouri

Silver Recognition: West Kendall, Florida and Coral Springs, Florida

Gold Recognition: Coral Gables, Florida

Together, these four communities represent what C.O.R.E. is all about: collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and a shared commitment to building stronger, more resilient places to live, learn, work, and play.

Learn more about the C.O.R.E. Guide and our national network at **connectwithcore.org**.





SPREAD THE WORD

TWO WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD - BEGINNING FEBRUARY 2026

We've updated how our programs are offered to meet communities where they are. The Impact Pathway now features five separate programs that you can leverage at the right time for your core group. Milestones 1 and 2 begin in February. Reserve your spot now!" Learn More button that take them to the website.



Milestone 1: Build Your Team for Long-Term Success

Every lasting community transformation starts with the right team.

The 3-month virtual program helps you:

- Bring the right people together
- Align around shared purpose
- Lay the foundation for action
- Create tools like a scorecard and partner pitch deck

Don't skip the groundwork—strong collaboration starts here.

Save Your Spot in Milestone 1

Already Have a Team? Start with Milestone 2

This 5-month program helps you uncover what's really happening in your community through data, listening, and reflection.

You'll develop:

- A Community Profile and stakeholder map
- Root cause insights and resident voices
- A refreshed mission and scorecard

Milestone 2 gives your team the clarity to make better, collective decisions.

Enroll in Milestone 2



WHAT'S NEW

We are honored to share with you the next chapter in our journey: the launch of The Communities of Resilience & Excellence (C.O.R.E.) Guide. For more than a decade, communities across the country have used our framework to align around shared priorities, strengthen collaboration, and improve quality of life.

The C.O.R.E. Guide is available in two formats—as a digital download (PDF) or a professionally printed book—so you can choose what works best for your team. [Purchase your copy here.](#)



IN CASE YOU MISSED IT,

Check out our last webinar: **Impact in Action: A Story of Community Progress in Excelsior Springs**

In this webinar, Molly McGovern (City Manager, Excelsior Springs) and Kim Halfhill (KH Consulting, Thrive Excelsior) share how Thrive Excelsior has united local leaders and residents to:

- Reduce suboptimal housing by 7% since 2018
- Cut chronic disease diagnoses by 15% since 2019
- Increase median income and community engagement

You'll hear lessons learned, strategies for cross-sector collaboration, and the impact of aligning community efforts toward shared goals.

