

BALDRIGE FOUNDATION

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“Baldrige:
America’s Best
Investment!”



communities of excellence²⁰²⁶



Meeting with the first cohort of the Learning Collaborative, from left to right: First row: Lowell Kruse (COE 2026 Chair), Elena Quintanar (San Diego South Region, CA), Valerie Brew (San Diego South Region, CA), Brenda Grant (Kanawha County, WV) Margaret Sotham (West Kendall, FL), Jason Bell (West Kendall, FL), Ximena Lopez (West Kendall, FL), Darrell Gardner (Brookfield/Marceline, MO), Bob Fangmeyer (Baldrige Program Director). Second row: Manuel Castaneda (San Diego South Region, CA), Judy Crabtree (Kanawha County, WV), Michelle Mejia (West Kendall, FL), Karen Vassell (West Kendall, FL), Rosalina Butao (West Kendall, FL), Donell Robidoux (Maryville, MO), Josh McKim (Maryville, MO), Al Faber (Baldrige Foundation President and CEO). Third row: Liz Menzer (Alliance for Performance Excellence), Stephanie Norling (COE 2026 Director)

Communities of Excellence 2026 Expands

by Stephanie Norling, Executive Director, Communities of Excellence 2026

Communities of Excellence 2026 is an effort to apply the Baldrige Excellence Framework to communities. It conceives of the community as the organization, and adapts the principles of the Baldrige Framework to the community structure and processes.

Beginning in 2010 as an idea among two former health care CEOs whose organizations received the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, and continuing through 2016, our work focused on creating a draft of the Baldrige-based Communities of Excellence Framework and the necessary tools and education to support its adoption in communities. In 2015 we partnered with two communities to help us test the framework. Based on their experiences the COE 2026 Board decided in last October to significantly expand the number of communities we would work with and test a new approach for engaging with communities—The National Learning Collaborative. This past year has focused on creating

an exceptional experience for our ten Learning Collaborative communities.

2017 has been a significant year of growth. On May 2, 2017, we held the first session of the National Learning Collaborative—A Systematic Approach to Excellence: Using a Baldrige-based Framework to Lead Transformation. From May to September, five communities agreed to work with us to test an online collaborative learning model prior to the full year-long launch of online training sessions planned for October 2017. The five communities took part in twice-monthly online sessions and assignments designed to build their collaborative leadership teams' knowledge of community performance excellence and to help create their Community Profiles. This first cohort of five communities represents a diverse cross-section of American communities from large urban regions to small rural areas, and each has brought something unique to the Collaborative.

The Kanawha Coalition for Community Health Improvement (KCCHI) in Kanawha County, West Virginia, formed over 20 years ago. With its long history of collaboration comes many years of accomplishments and a role-model example of sustainable leadership. In addition, KCCHI has conducted a Community Health Needs Assessment every three years since its inception. Aspects of this strategic planning process have already been adopted by other Learning Collaborative communities as they work on their Baldrige-based Community Strategic Plans.

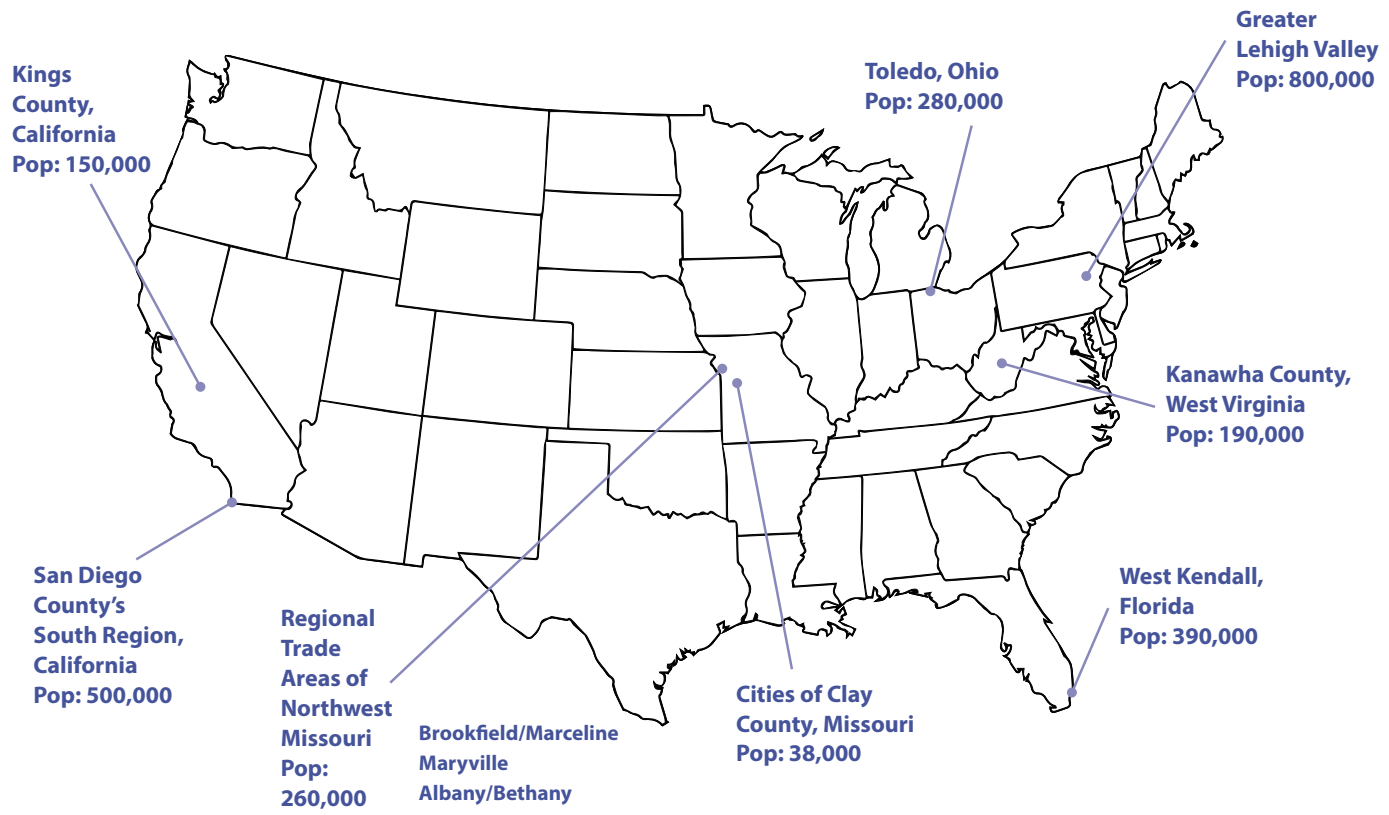
In northwest Missouri, two regional trade areas joined the Learning Collaborative cohort as part of a broader Regional Vitality Initiative with the goal of incorporating all six regional trade areas. One of these trade areas, the cities of Brookfield and Marceline, have come together to jointly adopt the COE Framework. The collaboration between these two cities reflects their broader recognition that in order to be competitive

nationally they need to plan for their future as a region. From turning a high school football rivalry into an opportunity for collaboration, to their partnership to build a regional airport, they are forging a future of working together to achieve their goals.

The second regional trade area in northwest Missouri, Maryville, is the only community in the group that created a community leadership team as part of its journey. This represented an opportunity to initiate a journey using the COE 2026 Core Values as the foundation and to engage both formal and grassroots leaders from the beginning. Maryville has a long tradition of quality and performance improvement. Many organizations within Maryville use Baldrige, and their involvement will be a strong driver in their community's success.

The Communities of Excellence journey in West Kendall, Florida, a suburban area south of Miami is led by West Kendall Baptist Hospital. The hospital-led

communities of excellence 2026





Healthy West Kendall Coalition is made up of a diverse group of organizations, including many local business partners. They have a strong focus on the Voice of the Resident and brought a unique best practice to the group: an innovation committee that meets to identify innovation opportunities to better the community and serve residents.

San Diego County's South Region in California was the first community to adopt the COE Framework. The region's formal collaborative leadership team began in 2005 from the Chula Vista Healthy Eating Active Living Coalition with the goal of reducing childhood obesity. Today, through the vision and direction of the County's Health and Human Services Agency, the Live Well San Diego South Region Leadership Team is composed of over 30 partner organizations and 150 collaborators, and is open to all residents. By being one of the first communities to adopt the Framework it developed the first ever Community Profile and is already working as a community on a shared Community Strategic Plan using Baldrige and Communities of Excellence principles.

"We believe that helping communities improve their performance is the best way to improve America."

Also in the last year, COE 2026 finalized its assessment and recognition program for communities. In partnership with the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program and with the help of the Alliance for Performance Excellence, we developed three levels of recognition. The first level of the Communities of Excellence Recognition Program, Commitment to Community Excellence, was announced in Spring of 2017. At this level, communities respond to the Community Profile section of the COE Framework, describing their mission, vision, and the key factors that lead to success. They also give an example of an improvement to a key initiative or process and describe the key results they will track related to the health, educational attainment, and economic vitality of the



At the 28th Quest Conference, from left, Anne Warner, Executive Director of the Granite State Quality Council and Northern New England Alliance for Excellence, Molly Baldrige, Stephanie Norling, Executive Director of Communities of Excellence 2026, and members of the Board of Directors of COE2026, Joann Sternke, former Superintendent of the Pewaukee School District, and Brian Lassiter, President of the Performance Excellence Network.

community. All five of our first cohorts of communities applied and all five received both formal recognition and a feedback report from volunteer examiners that included highlights and considerations to help accelerate their communities of excellence journeys.

Building off their momentum we added five new communities to the Learning Collaborative in September. The five communities in this second cohort are Albany/Bethany, Missouri (A regional trade area of northwest Missouri); the cities of Excelsior Springs, Gladstone and Smithville in Clay County, Missouri; The Greater Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania/New Jersey; Kings County, California; and Toledo, Ohio. Over the next year both cohorts of communities will collaborate on their Communities of Excellence journeys.

The sessions are led by three volunteer faculty and supported by our Board and guest presenters. By next September each of our communities will develop a Baldrige-based Community Profile and use it to identify the next steps towards the community of excellence journey; identify desired community outcomes;

develop a Community Strategic Plan focused on these outcomes; and establish a diverse, values-driven leadership team comprised of residents from the community's key sectors, generations, and social and economic groups. To kick off their year we held the first ever in-person COE 2026 meeting in coordination with the Baldrige Fall Conference in Tempe, Arizona. Forty-three attendees met for the first time in Tempe, for a full two days of learning, networking, and inspiring discussion.

We believe that helping communities improve their performance is the best way to improve America. We appreciate the willingness of these first ten communities to pave the way for others who will be involved in this important work in the years ahead. Communities of Excellence 2026 would not succeed without the support of many, including those in the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, the Baldrige Foundation, the Alliance for Performance Excellence, and the greater Baldrige community.

The next few years will be vital to our success. We will perfect our framework for use by any community across the nation who chooses to pursue excellence and eventually pursue Congressional approval to add communities as the seventh sector of Baldrige. We will share the insights and best practices of those communities as we work along the way with the vision that pursuing community performance excellence becomes the norm across our country.



Communities of Excellence 2026 Executive Director Stephanie Norling (left) talks with Jennifer Majewski, Senior Search Consultant, Healthcare Executive Recruiting at The Synergy Organization, during the 29th annual Quest conference.



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