



Monday, October 12, 2026: Choose Your Learning Path

Preconference Workshops + Conference Kickoff

Monday sets the tone for the conference with a dynamic day of learning and connection. The day begins with pre-conference workshops and transitions into the official kickoff, featuring engaging sessions, cross-sector networking, and an evening Awards Recognition Reception—a signature event celebrating excellence across organizations and communities.

7:30 AM - 4:30 PM **CONFERENCE REGISTRATION OPENS**

8:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Preconference Workshops

Find your rhythm. Choose the learning path that best fits your organization's performance excellence journey.

Expand your impact

C.O.R.E. Workshop: Building the Foundation for Community Impact

Join Stephanie Norling and Christel Gollnick for an interactive workshop that explores how cross-sector partnerships, shared purpose, and collaboration create lasting, measurable community impact.

Find additional preconference workshop offerings online.

12:45 - 1:15 PM

CONFERENCE KICK-OFF!

Welcome to New Orleans. Let the Rhythm of Excellence begin. Join us as we officially open the conference, share what's ahead, and begin two inspiring days of learning and connection.

1:15 - 2:15 PM

Opening Keynote

More than a keynote—an experience. Join Michael Gold, Ph.D., and members of New Orleans' acclaimed Astral Project as the principles of jazz come to life through music, storytelling, and audience engagement—setting the rhythm for two unforgettable days of learning and excellence.

2:30 - 3:15 PM

C.O.R.E. Featured Presentation

Inside Philanthropy: A Courtyard Conversation with Jaime Wesolowski, CEO of Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas

What are grantmakers really looking for when they choose who to fund? This C.O.R.E. featured session brings community leaders into conversation with Jaime Wesolowski, President and CEO of Methodist Healthcare Ministries, a private, faith-based organization that is advancing health equity across South and Central Texas through community health, wellness, and investments. In this courtyard conversation, Wesolowski shares an inside look at how funders set priorities, what they look for in partners, and what keeps leaders in philanthropy up at night. Attendees will leave with a rare, candid perspective from the top of the philanthropic world, insight that can sharpen how they build relationships with funders and position their own organizations for support.

3:30 - 4:15 PM

Breakout Sessions - Round 2*Don't miss these Community Track breakout sessions scheduled throughout the conference.***Built to Belong: What the Next Generation Wants from Where They Work and Live**

Organizations and communities alike are asking the same question: what will it take to engage the next generation? This panel brings young professionals and students to the table to share what draws them toward meaningful careers and strong communities, and what pushes them away.

Community Wins: Promising Practice Lightning Rounds

Two communities, ten minutes each, two big ideas worth stealing. This fast-paced session features back-to-back presentations on promising practices driving real results, giving attendees a quick, high-energy dose of inspiration they can take home and adapt.

The Infrastructure of Trust: Leading Organizations and Communities in an Era of Skepticism (Panel Discussion)

Trust in national institutions such as government, media, and public life has declined broadly. This panel explores trust not as a soft value, but as infrastructure: the foundation that makes data credible, partnerships durable, and collaboration possible. Bringing together perspectives from organizational excellence, community leadership, healthcare, and national research, panelists will offer examples of what high-trust leadership actually looks like. Attendees will leave with ideas for building trust as a measurable, strategic advantage.

Getting Started with Data: A Primer for Community Leaders

This session offers a practical introduction to measuring cross-sector impact: how to gather the right information, ask better questions, and turn findings into a clearer picture of collective progress. Built with community leaders in mind, the session is just as valuable for organizational leaders looking to strengthen their own data practice. You'll leave with a clear next step and practical tools you can bring back to your work right away.

Rural by Choice: Building Vitality in the Communities and Organizations That Anchor Them

Rural vitality depends largely on two things working in tandem: communities that people want to stay in, and organizations strong enough to anchor them. Both face similar pressures — shrinking populations, stretched resources, and the challenge of proving that a smaller footprint doesn't mean a smaller future. This panel brings together leaders working on both sides of that equation, sharing how proven frameworks and local experience can strengthen economic vitality, organizational performance, and community trust in rural settings.

What's Working: Community Approaches to Mental Health

Mental health looks different in every community, and so do the solutions. This workshop brings together three communities, each taking a distinct approach to addressing mental health where they live. In quick, focused presentations, each community will share what they built to address a unique root cause, what they learned, and what's actually moving the needle, followed by open Q&A. Attendees will leave with a range of real-world models to consider and a clearer sense of where to start in their own community.

The Connection Deficit: Loneliness, Belonging, and Why It Matters Everywhere

In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General identified loneliness as a public health crisis that has direct implications for organizational performance, patient outcomes, and workforce engagement. This session examines the data behind loneliness, belonging, and connection, then translates it into action across three sectors: community engagement initiatives reducing isolation at the local level, a healthcare organization redefining excellence in care for its aging population, and a workforce engagement strategy built around connection. Attendees will leave with practical insight into what's driving disengagement and disconnection, and what leading organizations are doing about it.

4:30-5:00 PM

Celebration Kick-Off

Gather in the main ballroom for a welcome toast and an engaging story from Stephanie Norling as we transition from a day of learning to an evening celebrating excellence.

5:00 - 6:30 PM

The Alliance for Performance Excellence and Communities of Excellence & Resilience Recognition Reception

Join us as we honor top-tier organizations and communities recognized through Alliance programs and Communities of Resilience and Excellence.

Tuesday, October 13, 2026: Keep the Rhythm Going

Conference Day

Tuesday builds on the conference's momentum with a panel discussion, breakout sessions, and ongoing opportunities for cross-sector connections. The day culminates in a keynote luncheon and conference wrap-up, bringing the experience to a meaningful and engaging close.

7:00 - 8:00 AM

Breakfast / Networking

Please be sure to visit our exhibitors.

8:00 - 8:55 AM

One Big Idea and Panel Discussion - Award Winners and Finalists

What does it actually look like to pursue excellence, not as a finish line, but as a practice? Through a series of dynamic spotlight presentations, Baldrige National Quality Award Recipients and Finalists will share defining moments, hard-won lessons, and unexpected insights from their performance excellence journeys.

9:00 - 9:45 AM

Community Networking Sessions

These sessions are designed to connect you with peers from other communities to share new ideas, discuss challenges, and build relationships to carry the work forward long after the conference ends. There will be one session for alumni and one for communities new to C.O.R.E.

10:00 - 10:45 AM

Breakout Sessions - Round 3

Choose from breakout sessions in the Community or Baldrige Excellence Framework Tracks.

11:00 - 11:45 AM

Breakout Sessions - Round 4

Choose from breakout sessions in the Community or Baldrige Excellence Framework Tracks.

12:00 - 12:45 PM

Breakout Sessions - Round 5

Choose from breakout sessions in the Community or Baldrige Excellence Framework Tracks.

12:45 - 2:30 PM

Lunch & Closing Keynote

Enjoy lunch and conversation with fellow attendees before **Jovan Glasgow** delivers a powerful Closing Keynote that will challenge you to think differently, lead boldly, and leave inspired to put your conference experience into action.

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