The Impact Pathway

Your Roadmap for Lasting Community Transformation

Real, lasting change doesn't happen by accident. It happens when passionate people come together with a shared purpose, the right tools, and clear processes. The Impact Pathway offers a step-by-step roadmap grounded in the C.O.R.E. Guide (formerly the Communities of Excellence Framework) and built from real-world experience across diverse communities. Whether you're just getting started or ready to scale what works, this roadmap helps you move from ideas to action, and from action to impact.

The five-milestone Impact Journey supports community cross-sector teams in making measurable, sustainable progress toward systems-level change. Each milestone builds on the last, aligning people, data, and strategy to drive lasting improvements in quality of life.

Rooted in the C.O.R.E. Guide (formerly the Communities of Excellence Framework), the Pathway is grounded in systems thinking, cross-sector collaboration, and continuous improvement. It offers flexibility in pacing and support, meeting communities where they are while maintaining a clear path of development.

Impact Pathway
The Five Milestones

IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE THROUGH SYSTEMS-LEVEL TRANSFORMATION

1 — COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP — Build Your Team for Long-Term Success
2 — RESIDENT VOICE — See the Whole Picture
3 — DATA ALIGNMENT & SHARED MANAGEMENT — Plan for Impact
4 — PROCESS IMPROVEMENT — Put Your Plan Into Practice
5 — SYSTEM THINKING — Sustain, Celebrate, & Scale What Works
CONTINUOUS LEARNING

The process is intentionally iterative, designed to build capacity over time and ensure that insights from early actions inform future planning, team development, and strategic refinement.

Together, the five milestones guide teams through every stage of the journey from forming the right team and understanding the current landscape, to taking action, learning, and sustaining what works. **Explore each milestone of the journey below.**

What You'll Advance —A Note on Timing: Each milestone includes a set of outcomes your team will work toward with the support of tools, training, and guidance. These outcomes are not rigid deliverables, but rather key building blocks we recommend having in place before moving to the next milestone. While some may be fully developed within the 3–5 month milestone course, others may evolve as your team grows and adapts. You set the pace, we're here to help you stay focused, aligned, and supported at every step.

Milestone 1: Build Your Team for Long-Term Success

Three-month live virtual program with optional coaching.

Based on our optional team readiness assessment, some already formed teams may move directly into Milestone Two.

What This Milestone is About:

This is the starting point for lasting, cross-sector collaboration. In this milestone, your team will come together around a shared purpose, begin building trust, and set a clear direction for your work. You'll identify who needs to be at the table, why this work matters, and how you'll move forward together. It's not about jumping into action, it's about laying the groundwork: forming the right team, defining what success looks, using baseline data to drive decisions from the start, and getting aligned on your community's most pressing needs and opportunities.

Why This Milestone Matters:

Big change starts with the right team. This milestone gives your work a strong foundation by helping you build trust, align your purpose, and clarify how you'll work together. When cross-sector teams skip this step, they often struggle with confusion, turf issues, or misaligned priorities later on.

What You'll Advance:

- ✓ **Cross-Sector Team**
  Form or grow a team whose membership reflects your community's priorities and diversity of perspectives.
- ✓ **Living Team Plan**
  Draft or refine your shared mission, vision, and values; clarify each member's roles and responsibilities; and agree on how you'll communicate and make decisions.
- ✓ **Case for Change and Goal Statement**
  Develop a compelling "burning platform" and a long-term goal that describes the change you're pursuing—complete with meaningful measures of progress.
- ✓ **Readiness Assessment Insights**
  Complete the Team Readiness Assessment and identify 2–3 priority areas for improvement.
- ✓ **Baseline Community Scorecard**
  Generate a customized digital scorecard of key community measures using our Common Community Scorecard.
- ✓ **Partner Pitch Deck**
  Create a concise slide deck to explain your work, rally stakeholders, and secure early buy-in.
- ✓ **Optional: Community Results Statement**
  Summarize the core outcomes your team will focus on in a one-page statement.

Milestone 2: See the Whole Picture

Five-month live virtual program with optional coaching.

What This Milestone is About:

Now that your team is formed, it's time to take a deeper look at what's happening in your community by examining what's working, what's not, and why. You'll gather data, listen to residents, and bring together different perspectives to create a shared picture of your current state. This milestone is about replacing assumptions with understanding so that your team is grounded data and information before setting goals or choosing strategies.

Why This Milestone Matters:

Understanding your community's current state, through both data and lived experience, helps your team make better decisions together. This milestone ensures you're not working from assumptions or jumping into quick fixes. It builds a shared view of where your community is now, what's working, what isn't, and why that matters, especially for those who've been left out in the past.

What You'll Advance:

- ✓ **Community Profile**
  Document your community's key characteristics, assets, challenges, and history—drawing from data, lived experience, and team insight. This living document builds shared understanding and informs future priorities.
- ✓ **Resident and Stakeholder Insight**
  Gather input through interviews, focus groups, or surveys to understand what matters most to residents and key partners. Use these insights to strengthen your Community Profile and clarify your focus.
- ✓ **Root Cause Analysis Summary**
  Explore the deeper conditions influencing outcomes like housing access or chronic disease. Document key findings in a visual or written summary to guide future goal setting.
- ✓ **Customized Community Scorecard**
  Refine or expand your digital scorecard to reflect baseline data and additional measures aligned with your emerging priorities.
- ✓ **Refreshed Mission, Vision, and Values**
  Revisit and revise your team's guiding statements based on new insights, ensuring they reflect what you've learned and what you're committed to achieving.
- ✓ **Community Asset and Stakeholder Map**
  Create a visual inventory of key organizations, networks, and assets tied to your priority areas. This helps identify gaps, overlaps, and opportunities for collaboration.
- ✓ **Working Team Structure**
  Establish a simple, shared structure for how your team will communicate, make decisions, and stay aligned as the work progresses.

Milestone 3: Plan for Impact

Three-month live virtual program with optional coaching.

What This Milestone is About:

With a shared understanding of your community's current state, it's time to plan your next steps. In this milestone, your team will prioritize the issues that matter most, set shared goals, and develop a realistic strategic plan. You'll define where to focus, how to coordinate across sectors, and how to manage change as a group all while embedding systems thinking in your strategy.

Why This Milestone Matters:

Planning together keeps your work aligned, focused, and achievable. It's not just about making a to-do list, it's about setting goals that matter, identifying the roadblocks, and building a plan to get there together. This milestone ensures your team is equipped to manage cross-sector decision-making, navigate bias or conflict, and make lasting change.

What You'll Advance:

- ✓ **Prioritized Needs and Opportunities**
  Identify the most critical issues or opportunities to address, based on data, lived experience, and stakeholder input gathered in earlier milestones.

- ✓ **Shared Community Goals**
  Define measurable, high-level goals that reflect your team's priorities and guide your strategic direction moving forward.

- ✓ **Multi-Year Community Strategic Plan**
  Shape a multi-year plan that outlines your goals, strategies, key actions, partner roles, and timing. This plan will continue to evolve in later milestones.

- ✓ **Updated Community Scorecard**
  Align your digital scorecard with your strategic plan by refining your goals, adding new measures, and improving clarity on how progress will be tracked.

- ✓ **Team Coordination Plan**
  Create or refine a practical plan for how your team will stay aligned, communicate, and maintain momentum during implementation.

- ✓ **Initiative and Resource Alignment Map**
  Develop a visual map or summary that shows how existing programs, initiatives, and resources support or connect to your strategic goals.

- ✓ **Refreshed Messaging Tools**
  Update your pitch deck and shared messaging to reflect your refined goals and strategic direction—helping you build clarity and support among partners and stakeholders.

Milestone 4 – Put Your Plan Into Practice

Three-month live virtual program with optional coaching.

What This Milestone is About:

It's time to put your plan into action. In this milestone, your team will begin implementing selected strategies from your Community Strategic Plan. You'll test ideas, manage partnerships, and track your progress using your scorecard. It's also about learning as you go; adjusting your approach based on feedback, data, and what's working on the ground using time-tested process improvement methods.

Why This Milestone Matters:

Even the best plans hit bumps in the road. This milestone helps your team stay adaptive and focused as you move from planning to action. It creates space to reflect, learn, and improve so you can strengthen your strategies, build momentum, and stay aligned with your shared goals.

What You'll Advance:

- ✓ **Early-Stage Strategy Implementation**
- ✓ Launch early-stage strategies from your Community Strategic Plan, focusing on actions that can build momentum and demonstrate feasibility.
- ✓ **Scorecard-Based Tracking**
  Use your updated community scorecard to monitor progress, identify trends, and share updates with your team and partners.
- ✓ **Team Reflection and Learning**
  Conduct regular learning sessions to reflect on what's working, where adjustments are needed, and how to improve implementation efforts.
- ✓ **Process and Role Adjustments**
  Make practical updates to roles, communication processes, or strategies based on what your team is learning through action.
- ✓ **Documentation of Results and Insights**
  Capture early outcomes—both quantitative and qualitative—to support learning, storytelling, and future planning.
- ✓ **Expanded Partnerships**
  Identify and engage new partners or sectors needed to support implementation, fill gaps, or extend your reach.

Milestone 5 – Sustain, Celebrate, and Scale What Works

Three-month live virtual program with optional coaching.

What This Milestone is About:

As your work matures, it's critical to think beyond the next project. This milestone is about strengthening what's working, sustaining momentum, and spreading your approach to other areas of the community. You'll refine your team's structure, embed your work into existing systems, and explore ways to expand your impact, without burning out or losing focus.

Why This Milestone Matters:

Long-term change requires staying power. This milestone helps your team think about what it takes to sustain progress; not just in funding, but in people, systems, and culture. It supports your team in sharing success stories, building ownership across sectors, and planning for the next phase of growth and learning.

What You'll Advance:

- ✓ **Sustainability Planning**
  Develop a plan for sustaining your work considering funding, partnerships, staffing, and integration into local systems.
- ✓ **Scaling and Adaptation Strategy**
  Identify opportunities to replicate, expand, or adapt successful strategies to new issues, sectors, or neighborhoods.
- ✓ **Team Reflection and Self-Assessment**
  Complete a structured team reflection to assess your growth, collaboration, and progress throughout the Pathway.
- ✓ **Storytelling Tools and Case Materials**
  Use templates and examples to begin crafting your team's narrative—highlighting lessons learned, measurable results, and your community's unique journey.

What's Included With Every Milestone:

Live Learning and Peer Exchange:

- Live, expert-led virtual sessions that include peer learning, facilitated discussions, and practical exercises for each milestone.
- Connections to other communities through our national network and milestone-based cohort groups.
- Workshops and webinars on topics like storytelling, community engagement, systems thinking, and data-informed decision-making.

Tools and Resources:

- Access to our custom Learning Management System (LMS) with session recordings, downloadable resources, and milestone-specific guides.
- Ongoing access to our Online Resource Library, featuring tools, templates, and promising practices from other communities.

Data and Scorecard Access:

- Use of the Common Community Scorecard, which includes seven indicators across economy, education, health, social connection, natural environment, built environment, and housing.

Community and Visibility:

Opportunities for visibility and recognition at our Annual Conference.

Coaching Support

In addition to milestone programming, communities have the option to add customized coaching support. Our trained coaches provide expert guidance to help your team apply what you're learning, work through challenges, and accelerate progress. Coaching is tailored to your goals and can include support for:

- Team development and group dynamics.
- Applying the C.O.R.E. Guide.
- Interpreting and using community data.
- Strategic planning and execution.
- Strengthening cross-sector collaboration.
- Preparing for recognition and storytelling opportunities.

Coaching packages can be added to any milestone and are also included at higher tiers of our Engagement Program options. Whether you're looking for a few key sessions or sustained support over the year, our coaching options are designed to meet you where you are.

About the C.O.R.E. Guide

The C.O.R.E. Guide (formerly the Communities of Excellence Framework) is our signature difference-maker—a proven guide rooted in the Baldrige Excellence Framework, adapted specifically for community transformation. It provides community cross-sector teams with a holistic, systems-based approach to aligning people, data, and strategy across sectors. What makes the guide unique is its ability to help communities:

- Think systemically about their challenges and opportunities.
- Engage cross-sector partners in a structured, collaborative way.
- Use data intentionally, from baseline measurement to tracking progress and equity gaps.
- Drive continuous improvement, embedding learning and adaptation into every phase of the journey.
- Align strategy, leadership, and resident voice to create meaningful, lasting change.

The guide ensures that transformation efforts go beyond short-term projects. It builds the leadership capacity, systems thinking, and culture necessary for long-term, equitable results. Whether you're tackling housing, health, education, economic development, or other issues that matter to your community, the guide provides a common language and structure to guide your efforts.

By embedding the C.O.R.E. Guide into the Impact Journey, we help teams not only take action, but take smarter, more sustainable, and more strategic action.

About the Common Community Scorecard

The Common Community Scorecard is a shared measurement tool designed to help communities track progress on outcomes that matter. It includes nationally available census tract–level data across seven domains: economy, education, health, social connection, natural environment, built environment, and housing. Most importantly, it provides a common starting point and a shared language for cross-sector work.

C.O.R.E. Alumni: Continued Learning and Support

After completing Milestone 5, teams are invited to join our C.O.R.E. Alumni, a space for continued learning, peer support, and shared progress. The Alumni Program includes monthly virtual alumni sessions with facilitated discussion and community spotlights as well as ongoing access to the LMS, resource library, and updated tools.

Next Steps and Pricing

Current pricing, milestone schedule, and package options are available at: https://communitiesofexcellence2026.org/what-we-do/impact-pathway/the-impact-pathway.html. We'll work with you to build a custom plan that aligns with your goals, timeline, and available resources. To request a quote or schedule a conversation, contact us at info@communitiesofexcellence2026.org or 619-719-1045.