C:RE
Communities of Resilience & Excellence

Quarterly Newsletter

A NEW CHAPTER FOR C.O.R.E.

This month marks an important moment in C.O.R.E.'s story.

As many of you have now heard, the boards of Communities of Resilience & Excellence and the Alliance for Performance Excellence have approved an agreement to bring our two organizations together, with the merger expected to become effective January 1.

For me, this is both an exciting milestone and a meaningful one.



"This merger represents an important evolution in how we think about excellence," said Stephanie Norling, President and CEO of C.O.R.E. "Strong organizations don't exist in isolation. They depend on strong communities—and communities depend on organizations willing to work across sectors toward shared goals. Together, we can help leaders build high-performing organizations, more resilient communities, and better quality of life for the people who live in them."

C.O.R.E. was built around a simple but ambitious idea: communities can achieve better and more equitable outcomes when people and organizations stop working in isolation and begin working together as a system. Since 2017, we've had the privilege of working with more than 30 communities representing over 15 million residents. We've watched community leaders tackle challenges ranging from mental health and childcare to workforce development, housing, education, and economic opportunity, not through another short-term initiative, but by building the capacity to work together differently.

This moment also brings me back to the vision of our co-founders, Lowell Kruse and Rick Norling. Sixteen years ago, they began exploring what it would look like to take the principles of performance excellence beyond individual organizations and apply them to entire communities. They believed deeply in the potential of communities to improve the lives of their residents through collaboration, systems thinking, and a shared commitment to excellence.

Even in those early days, they envisioned that this work might one day reside within the Alliance. What they set in motion has grown beyond an idea into an organization, a national network of communities, and an approach that has reached millions of people. This next chapter would not be possible without their vision, persistence, and belief in what communities can accomplish together.

That work isn't going away. In fact, it's one of the primary reasons I'm so excited about what comes next.

The Alliance brings a national network and decades of experience helping organizations pursue performance excellence. C.O.R.E. brings an approach for applying those same principles across communities, where no single organization is in charge and meaningful change requires many organizations, sectors, and residents to work
together.

Bringing those strengths together creates an opportunity to think much bigger about what performance excellence can mean.

Strong organizations are essential to strong communities. And strong communities create the conditions in which organizations, businesses, families, and individuals can thrive. By bringing organizational and community excellence together, we have an opportunity to build a stronger national ecosystem for both.

On January 1, I will transition into the role of Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the Alliance, working alongside CEO Brian Lassiter. I have tremendous confidence in Brian's leadership and in what we can accomplish together.This merger gives us an opportunity not only to expand the reach of C.O.R.E.'s community work, but also to strengthen and advance the broader Baldrige and performance excellence movement. I'm excited to help build an organization capable of carrying this work further, reaching new sectors and communities, and creating greater impact than either organization could achieve on its own.

There is still important work ahead between now and January 1, and we'll continue sharing information as the transition moves forward. But one thing I want our C.O.R.E. community to know clearly: the mission that brought us here continues.

I'm incredibly proud of what this organization, our communities, our volunteers, our partners, and the many people who believed in this work have built. And I'm even more excited about the opportunity ahead, to take what we've learned, expand its reach, and help many more communities move from fragmented efforts to aligned action and measurable impact.

This isn't the end of the C.O.R.E. story.

It's an opportunity to write a much bigger next chapter together.

Stephanie Norling
President & CEO
Communities of Resilience & Excellence

Read more about the merger here.

Thank you to our sponsor!

Methodist Healthcare Ministries
OF SOUTH TEXAS, INC.
SERVING HUMANITY TO HONOR GOD

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

The Pursuit of Excellence: MHM's Journey to Baldrige



The roadmap to excellence is shaped by lessons learned and opportunities for improvement; however, it is also a commitment from team members across Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc. (MHM). To transform its internal culture and strengthen the level of care and partnerships in the communities it serves and walks alongside, MHM began exploring the Baldrige Excellence Framework.

Over the years, MHM has created policies, processes, and procedures, sharpening its focus on continuous improvement. This intentional approach led to significant milestones in the organization's excellence journey, including submitting an application for the 2025 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award—the nation's only presidential honor recognizing performance excellence. MHM received the prestigious recognition as a 2025 finalist and was one of only six organizations across the country to advance to the awards' final phase and receive a Best Practice Spotlight for its Thriving Workforce.

In March 2026, a delegation of MHM team members traveled to Baltimore, Maryland, to attend the Baldrige Award Ceremony, which was held ahead of the 37th annual Quest for Excellence Conference. Team members attended various sessions during the three-day convening, learning and engaging with other Baldrige recipients. The conference also provided an opportunity for MHM to share its story of excellence on a national stage.

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

Officials with the Baldrige Foundation, the U.S. Department of Commerce, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) presided over the award ceremony and presented the six organizations with their respective awards and recognitions. Representing MHM on stage was Oanh Maroney-Omitade, Senior Vice President of Organizational Excellence. “When I stop and think about all the things we have done over just the past five years, it’s been phenomenal, and it has helped us become better as an organization,” she said.



Maroney-Omitade believes embracing change has strengthened the organization’s mission of Serving Humanity to Honor God. “We have to decide if we are going to let change happen to us or if we are going to manage change in ways that help us be successful as an organization and accomplish our mission, which is about our patients.” Jaime Wesolowski, President & CEO of MHM, credits team members across the organization for forging a path toward excellence. “Together, we have built a stronger culture that continues to elevate how we work, lead, and serve. At MHM, our commitment to excellence is more than just high standards; it is embracing our responsibility to serve the least served with integrity, compassion, and lasting impact.”

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

The conference opened with keynote remarks from speaker Molly Baldrige, daughter of Malcolm “Mac” Baldrige, for whom the award is named. He was known for his dedication to and advocacy for American industry, trade efficiency, and global competitiveness during his tenure as the 26th U.S. Secretary of Commerce. Courage, humility, and discipline were described as hallmarks of his character—virtues which shape modern-day approaches to leadership and excellence.

Various sessions were held throughout the conference, including panel discussions presented by MHM leaders and staff. Jennifer Knoulton, Vice President of Community Health & Wellness, and Jessica Muñoz, Vice President of Communications, led the Serving Diverse Customers & Markets session. MHM team members, Melanie Call, Community Investments Manager; Lorraine Hernandez, Director of Patient Services; and Matt Leonard, Director of Communications, served as panelists.

The discussion highlighted how MHM refined its key processes to provide exceptional integrated and patient-centered care, elevate customer voice, and build trusted relationships. “People were interested in our model of working with uninsured and underinsured populations; they recognize that it is a huge need. The way we work with the broad definition of healthcare, moving across different sectors, is essential for organizations to think about,” said Knoulton.

Muñoz emphasizes the importance of improvement and believes communities benefit when organizations can learn from one another. “This is about us sharing what we’ve learned in the markets that we serve and then drawing inspiration from what other people have learned so that we can continue to get better.” She said listening and partnering with communities is critical to creating processes that work. “We don’t ever want to think we have the right answer; we want it validated by the people who live there and who are experiencing the access to care that we are trying to create.”

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

Maroney-Omitade and Bridget Lamme, Vice President of Human Resources at MHM, led the Developing a Thriving Workforce session. Panelists included MHM team members, Mike Cervera, Director of Human Resources; Sophia London, Community Health Worker Manager; and Melody Swisher, Director of Organizational Learning and Development. The session focused on MHM's practices and model for workforce engagement, which led to a Baldrige Best Practice Spotlight. Lamme shared why it is important to take care of the workforce that takes care of the work. "There are so many things that we are doing in our strategy; you're going to need staff that are thriving to be able to do that work. You start with the staff, and it carries out into the community."

The conference concluded with a Q&A that featured the 2025 Award Recipients and Best Practice Spotlight Organizations. Maroney-Omitade sat down to reflect on MHM's journey to Baldrige, which had been years in the making. She said that by creating a capacity for excellence and organizational alignment, MHM reached numerous milestones and gained invaluable lessons, leading to national recognition. "We've moved along this process together, and we've learned as we've gone, and there have been wins along the way."

The MHM delegation departed Baltimore with a new perspective on their work and approach to excellence. Niebla Marcela Alba, RDH, Dental Hygienist at the Dixon Health & Wellness Center, and Alexandra Quintero, Dental Assistant at the Wesley Health & Wellness Center, were part of the team that attended the conference.

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

“Overall, attending the conference left me feeling motivated and better equipped to pursue meaningful improvements. It reinforced the idea that excellence isn’t a destination, but an ongoing process that requires commitment, adaptability, and a willingness to learn,” said Alba. Quintero shared, “I felt deeply grateful for the opportunity to learn from and witness the journeys of other organizations striving for excellence. It is a source of empowerment to realize that I am part of our own path toward creating a similar framework.”



Maroney-Omitade said she is grateful that team members were able to hear and learn from others during their time in Baltimore. She believes it is the lessons they take back that will lead to more change. “We don’t have to go back and move mountains every day; it’s incremental growth, and collectively, if we are all on that journey for improvement, that incremental growth is significant.”

WHAT'S NEW

Review of 2026 C.O.R.E. in Practice Workshops

Over the past year, we focused on equipping leaders and organizations with practical, high-impact tools to drive real change:

Convene With Purpose: Shifted meeting culture from passive attendance to active engagement, sharing strategies for intentional facilitation and meaningful collaboration.

Listening That Leads to Action: Explored thoughtful survey design to move past surface-level feedback and capture actionable community insights.

Running a Volunteer Organization Without Running Yourself Ragged: Tackled burnout and organizational capacity, providing leaders with sustainable frameworks for delegation and energy management.

Data That Matters: Demystified data collection through a hands-on approach, turning raw numbers into clear, compelling narratives for stakeholders.

Looking Ahead at 2027 Workshops

December 8, 2026: The Connection Deficit: Building Belonging
Strategies to cultivate belonging and strengthen organizational trust.

March 9, 2027: Building a Shared Community Scorecard
Aligning cross-sector partners around meaningful shared measures.

June 8, 2027: Rural by Choice: Building Vitality
Leveraging local assets to build resilience in rural organizations.

September 14, 2027: What's Working: Mental Health Approaches
Exploring community-wide, systemic solutions for mental health.

See our full calendar here.