

Pathways to Excellence

Tiered Approach to Excellence

Overview – September 2021

This approach to excellence follows similar approaches utilized by state-based Baldrige Award application methodologies beginning with an entry-level or “commitment” level with additional levels of progressive engagement and required agency/staff work. The final level is the Award for Excellence.

The tiered approach is designed to permit entry by a CAA at any point; **there is no requirement to formally complete one level to access another**. However, it is strongly recommended that agencies consider proceeding through the levels, as they build on one another. Furthermore, successful completion of some levels requires the completion of some requirements of previous levels.

An agency’s level of engagement and enrollment in the Pathways to Excellence program is **voluntary**. Agencies completing each level will receive formal recognition at the National Community Action Partnership Annual Convention if they have completed the level prior to June 1st of that year.

The Pathways to Excellence Tiered Approach will begin formal operation of its pilot year during 2022, with recruitment of participants beginning in Fall 2021.

Bronze Level: Commitment to Excellence

The focus of the Bronze Level is to allow an agency to take the initial step toward excellence, learn more deeply about the Standards of Excellence, and begin moving beyond the threshold levels of the Organizational Standards.

Requirements for completion of this level by a CAA include:

- Kick-off meeting with NCAP and CAA staff to plan activities.
- Completion and submission of a Board Resolution formalizing the agency’s commitment to pursue excellence.
- Convening of a core Agency Excellence Team and an Excellence Point of Contact (EPOC) for leading communications with NCAP.
- Completion of an Agency Profile.
- Completion of the Standards of Excellence eCourse on [Community Action Academy](#) by the Core Agency Excellence Team.
- Convening of Agency Excellence Team with NCAP staff to confirm achievement of key activities and to discuss potential next steps.

Successful completion of the Bronze Level will entitle a CAA to the following:

- **Qualification to apply** for designation by the Excellence Commission as a Bronze-Level CAA;
- Framed **certificate of achievement** for the CAA; and
- Ability to use the **“Bronze-Level Commitment to Excellence” logo** for use on agency website, agency printed materials and/or social media promotion

Silver Level: Implementation of Excellence

Bronze Level completion is not required to participate in the Silver Level, but key elements of the Bronze Level are requirements of the Silver Level. At the Silver Level, the CAA invests in a staff member to become “expert” in the Standards and to help their CAA begin to document their achievement of the Standards of Excellence. This staff expert is not required by other levels but can be a valuable resource to support a CAA’s active implementation of excellence practices in concert with the Agency Excellence Team.

CAAs participating in this level of the Pathways program will form a “cohort” of CAAs. They will experience this tier together, with their staff members participating in Pathways Implementer training as a group and T/TA activities for the CAA happening primarily within the cohort setting. The agency cohort will be convened primarily virtually, with some in-person engagement at NCAP conferences for portions of the Pathways Implementer training (dependent upon ability to gather in person due to COVID-19).

Key activities by each CAA in this tier include:

- Completion of the following Bronze Level requirements prior to participating in cohort kick-off meeting: (1) Board resolution; (2) Convening of core Agency Excellence Team/identification of EPOC; (3) Completion of Agency Profile; (4) Completion of Standards of Excellence e-Course by Agency Core Team.
- Cohort kick-off meeting with NCAP and CAA staff to plan activities.
- Completion of an agency-wide staff and Board member Mini-Assessment Survey.
- Sending an agency team member through the Pathways to Excellence Implementer training program where an individual engages the agency to complete **an abbreviated self-study of two to three categories** of the Standards of Excellence and receives a peer review and feedback report.
 - Implementer training will consist of a one-day virtual or in-person training to prepare for the abbreviated self-study process/peer review and learn how to implement the Standards through experience with a few of the categories in the current Standards of Excellence.
- Participation in up to 3 Technical Assistance Web Meetings for the cohort to assist in the development of the abbreviated Self-Study/review Standards.
- Participation in a review of the feedback report to assist the agency in planning next steps.
- Convening of Agency Excellence Team with NCAP staff to confirm achievement of key activities and to discuss potential next steps.

Successful completion of the Silver Level will entitle a CAA to the following:

- **Qualification to apply** for designation by the Excellence Commission as a Silver-Level CAA;
- Framed **certificate of achievements** for the CAA and for each CAA’s Implementer(s); and
- Ability to use the **“Silver-Level Implementation of Excellence” logo** for use on agency website, agency printed materials and/or social media promotion

Gold Level: Pursuit of Excellence

Bronze/Silver Level completion is not required to participate in the Gold Level, but key elements of the Bronze/Silver Levels are requirements of the Gold Level. At the Gold Level, a CAA invests in a thorough assessment of its achievement of each of the Standards of Excellence. Completion of the previous levels provide key support for this activity.

Participation in the Gold Level involves formation of a “cohort” of CAAs. They will experience this level together, with CAA staff members participating in the Agency Self-Study e-course training as a group and T/TA activities happening primarily within the cohort setting.

Key activities by each CAA in the Gold Level include:

- Completion of the following Bronze Level requirements prior to participating in cohort kick-off meeting: (1) Board resolution; (2) Convening of core Agency Excellence Team/Identification of an EPOC; (3) Completion of Agency Profile; (4) Completion of Standards of Excellence e-Course by Agency Core Team.
- Completion of the following Silver Level requirement prior to participating in cohort kick-off meeting: Completion of an agency-wide staff and Board member Mini-Assessment Survey.
- Participation by the CAA’s Core Agency Excellence Team in a one-day virtual or in-person training to prepare the agency for the self-study process and to understand the requirements, approach, and deployment of the Standards of Excellence.
- Participation in up to four (4) Technical Assistance Web Meetings for the cohort to assist in the development of the Self-Study/review Standards.
- Completion of the full agency-wide Pathways Self Study with peer review and feedback report within the year of participation. Agencies that enroll in the Gold Level will have 7 months to complete their Pathways Self-Study; and will receive a comprehensive feedback report from Peer Reviewers no later than 45 days following the submission.
 - As a component of the self-study, CAAs will upload key files to document formal policies that are in place or examples of deployment that demonstrate level of achievement of a standard to Community Action Academy.
- Convening of Agency Excellence Team with NCAP staff to confirm achievement of key activities and to discuss potential next steps.

Successful completion of this tier will entitle a CAA to the following:

- **Qualification to apply** for designation by the Excellence Commission as a Gold-level CAA;
- **Agency plaque** recognizing Gold Level achievement;
- Up to **3 framed certificates of achievement** for the CAA’s stakeholders (e.g., Board Chair, CEO/ED and project lead staff person); and
- Ability to use the “**Gold-Level Implementation of Excellence**” logo for use on agency website, agency printed materials and/or social media promotion

Platinum Level: Award for Excellence

Bronze/Silver/Gold Level completion is not required to participate in the Platinum Level, but key elements of the Bronze/Silver/Gold Levels are requirements of the Platinum Level. At the Platinum Level, a CAA demonstrates its **achievement** of the Standards of Excellence, onsite, before a team of experienced peer reviewers who confirm the CAA's achievement of Excellence. The previous levels provide key support for achievement of this accomplishment.

Key activities by each CAA in this tier include:

- Completion of the **full award application** (which includes two years to complete), the self-study, peer review, site visit by up to 5 Excellence commissioners/reviewers and NCAP staff, and one additional revision to the self-study and an additional verification site visit (if required). CAAs applying for the Award for Excellence are required to cover all site visit costs for reviewers.

Agencies reaching the required scoring levels will be recognized as a national **Agency of Excellence** – the highest level of excellence achieved by a CAA. This includes:

- Designation by the Excellence Commission as a national **Award for Excellence agency**;
- Agency **crystal plaque/trophy** recognizing Award achievement
- Up to **3 framed certificates of achievement** for the CAA's stakeholders (e.g., Board Chair, CEO/ED and key Board/project staff persons);
- Ability to use the "**Award for Excellence**" logo for use on agency website, agency printed materials and/or social media promotion