

The Impact of Excellence

December 2, 2025



The Promise of Community Action

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

Action for a Better Community Silver Tier

Aaron Wicks, PhD, CCAP
VP Planning & Evaluation





Our Excellence Journey – In 5 Steps

Step 1: Board very supportive: “Do we care?”

- CEO presented the Pathways to Excellence program to the Board – they strongly supported it
- Incorporated excellence as a strategy in our Strategic Plan
- Two Board members volunteered to serve on the agency’s Excellence team

Benefits –

- Board support is always good
- Communicated to all staff that this is a non-negotiable priority
- Board used this as an opportunity to be more self-critical
- Opportunity to give Board deeper knowledge of the agency





Our Excellence Journey – In 5 Steps

Step 2: Organizational Profile – “Who are we?”

- Seems like a “check the box” requirement for Bronze – but it was transformative for us
- How do we describe everything we are in 3-5 pages? What are the essential facts about our agency for staff, Board, partners?

Benefits –

- Focused Board and staff on who we are before getting into how we become an excellent version of who we are
- Got the Excellence team on the same page
- “I’ve been here 20 years and there were things we put in the profile that I didn’t even know about us.”





Our Excellence Journey – In 5 Steps

Step 3: The Standards – “What is excellence?”

- The e-course provided an easy way for the Excellence team to become familiar with the Standards – they weren’t just black and white concepts on paper, they actually became real practices that excellent agencies follow
- Very charismatic presenter in the e-course. Maribeth was good too.

Benefits –

- Gave the entire Excellence Team a common foundation of knowledge about the Standards
- Prompted the team to begin thinking about how the standards would look in our agency. How would we implement them? What challenges have we had in the past? A LOT of stories of past efforts were shared...





Our Excellence Journey – In 5 Steps

Step 4: Self-Assessment – “Where are we?”

- Pursuing silver – we had to make a strategic decision: which groups of standards do we feel we have the strongest performance? As we reviewed each category we became aware of all the areas where we were underperforming.
- Challenge was not jumping ahead: let’s just complete our partial self-assessment, then think about full assessment, improvements, etc.

Benefits –

- *Strongly recommend silver before gold* – the partial assessment was sobering. We thought we would jump to gold; we realized we have some work to do first.





Our Excellence Journey – In 5 Steps

Step 5: The three components of Excellence –
“How do we do this all the time?”

- *Approach. Implementation. Results.*

Excellence is less about implementing the specifics of the Standards and more about adhering to a philosophy in everything we do:

- ✓ Do we have a formal approach, a written plan/process?
- ✓ Do we have data showing we are implementing approach with fidelity?
- ✓ Do we have data showing this approach is achieving results?

Benefits –

- We focus on developing SOPs – what is a good way to do things that we should regularly follow?
- We focus on operational measures – what can we monitor to ensure we are sticking to our SOPs?
- We focus on dashboards/scorecards to track results/impact.



Long Beach Community Action Partnership Silver Tier

Marise Semense
Executive Director



Long Beach Community Action Partnership

Long Beach City

- Located in the Southeastern part of Los Angeles County
- 7th most populous city in California ~ 447,228 population
- 44th most populous in the nation

Total Service Territory:

- CSBG: 13 Cities = 42 Zip Codes
- LIHEAP: 44 Cities = 115 Zip Codes



Path to Pathways to Excellence

2022

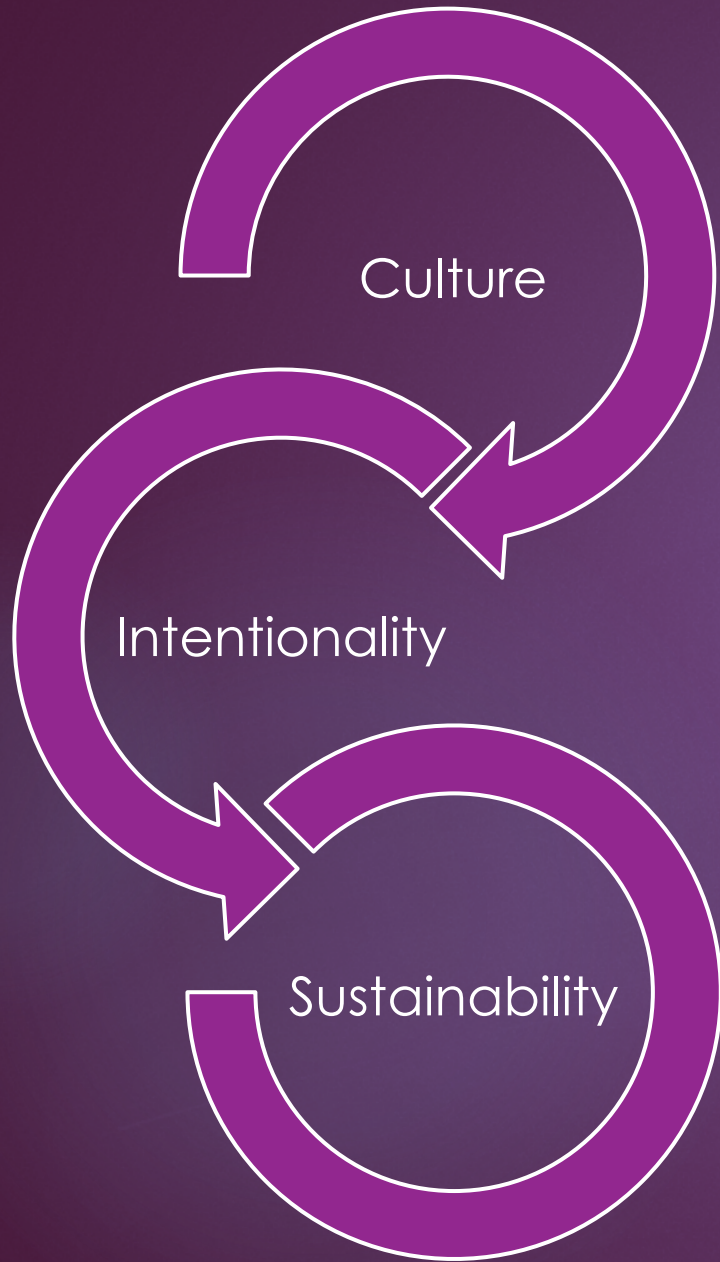
- CCAP Certification

2023

- Bronze Tier

2024

- Silver Tier



Pathways is the link

Culture

Built on shared values, connection, belonging, purpose, and fulfillment

Intentionality

Aligning actions with purpose. Choosing to operate in ways that inspire, support, and drive meaningful results

Sustainability

Navigating rapidly shifting environments, leveraging relationships, and optimizing resource allocations with strategic alignment and courage

Eastern Action Gold Tier

Matt Hinkle, CPA, CCAP, NCRA
Chief Executive Officer





Pathways Journey

The journey began in 2019 with a discussion about the Excellence Award with NCAP staff. We quickly realized that we were far from ready.

When the Pathways to Excellence program was introduced in late 2021, I discussed the program with the board chair and our state office to be sure they would both be supportive. They were. We enrolled in the Bronze Tier and Silver Tier at the same time. At our January 2022 board meeting the board passed the required resolution for the Bronze Award.

We submitted our Silver Self-Study in the spring of 2023. We chose to submit 3 categories instead of two.

Upon receipt of the feedback report we enrolled in the Gold Tier and began working the self-study.



The information received in the feedback reports was very valuable and helpful. From the Silver report we learned that we were actually in much better shape than we thought, but we needed to have a more formal and systematic approach to our operations. By the time we submitted our Gold self-study we had formalized most every thing in the Standards of Excellence and had developed some strong systems. But needed time to gather trended data and determine Impact. We received our Gold feedback report in December 2024. The timing couldn't have been better since 2025 was a Needs Assessment/Strategic Planning year for us.



We have updated policies and procedures and have a process for reviewing both on an annual basis.

When we had to adapt to unexpected changes in March 2020, we review the existing policies and they were frankly a mess. Some policies were irrelevant most there was no record of approval or effective dates.

Strong policies and procedures have allowed us to build a solid foundation upon which we have been able to grow as an agency. Over the past two years we've added about 5 new major programs to the agency, one of which covers over 2/3 of the state of West Virginia.

The process has also instilled a healthy sense of pride in Eastern Action by our entire team.

What would we have done differently?

For the Silver submission, we would have only done two categories instead of three. And a more extensive review of the document before we sent it in. We split the preparation of the self-study up amongst the Excellence team. Our Silver self-study lacked a uniform voice.

For Gold, we applied the lessons learned from Silver.

What are our future plans?

We created a “Platinum Dreams” scorecard.

We are implementing suggestions from the Gold self-study.

We plan to complete a Platinum Award self-study in the next three to five years.

NCAP's Pathways to Excellence Program



General Timeframe for Completion:

3 – 6 Months

6 – 12 Months

12 – 18 Months

24 Months

Submit an Enrollment Package	3 – 6 Months	6 – 12 Months	12 – 18 Months	24 Months
Enrollment Fee	\$850 – Flat Fee	\$1,850 - \$5,000 (based on agency total revenue)	\$3,000 - \$7,250 (based on agency total revenue)	\$6,000 - \$15,000 (based on agency total revenue)
Board-Adopted Resolution to Pursue Excellence	Required (before recognition)	Required if not on file	Required if not on file	Required if not on file
Excellence Point of Contact	Required	Required	Required	Required
Most Recent IRS 990		Required if not on file	Required if not on file	Required
Build an Excellence Foundation				
Formation of Agency Excellence Team	Required	Required	Required	
Excellence Team Meetings (including kick-off and close out meetings w/NCAP)	Required	Required	Required	
Standards e-Course Completion by Team	Required	Required	Required	
Cohort meetings		Up to 3 Required	Up to 4 Required	
Advanced Pathways Training for Staff		1 Implementer Required	1 Peer Reviewer Required	
Self-Study Training			Required of Excellence Team	
Assess Organizational Excellence	Required	Required	Required	Required
Agency Profile	Required	Required	Required	Required
Mini Organizational Assessment		Required	Required	
Self-Study		Abbreviated (2 - 3 Categories)	Complete (All 7 Categories)	Complete (All 7 Categories)
Required for Achievement Recognition	NCAP Member	Meet/Exceed 25% of Standards & NCAP Member	Meet/Exceed 50% of Standards & NCAP Member	Meet/Exceed 100% of Standards & NCAP Member

Want to Support Pathways to Excellence?

Become a Pathways Peer Reviewer!

Join NCAP's Pathways to Excellence team for a **two-part virtual training** that prepares you to serve as a **Pathways Peer Reviewer**—a valued role that supports agencies in assessing and advancing their excellence practices.

Two afternoons: WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10 & 17

From 1 pm - 5 pm ET (*Must Attend Both Days*)

Registration Fee: \$449 per person for Members; \$549 per person for Non-Members

Please note: All network members are welcome to attend this training; however, only those who meet the eligibility criteria may serve as Pathways to Excellence Peer Reviewers. Please review the criteria to confirm your eligibility prior to enrolling: [Peer Reviewer Criteria](#).



Register in MemberSuite:
<https://ncap.users.membersuite.com/events/9a6db3bd-0078-c886-364d-0b48de75c7ba/details>

2026 Management & Leadership Training Conference

Orlando, FL | January 28–30 (Pre-Con: January 27)

NCAP's MLTC is designed for both current and aspiring leaders in Community Action and human services. This special event will offer immersive training sessions, dynamic roundtable discussions, and meaningful networking opportunities. Whether you're a seasoned leader or preparing to take that next step into management, MLTC will equip you with the tools and insights to lead with confidence and impact.



Your Input Is Important to Us!

Please complete this brief survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ImpactofExcellence122>

