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Leadership Lynchburg Selected for National Pilot to Strengthen Collaborative Problem-Solving Among Community Leaders

Leadership Lynchburg is one of 14 Community Leadership Programs nationwide participating in a new initiative from Convergence and the National Community Leadership Collaborative to equip leaders with tools to navigate differences and solve complex challenges together.

This new national initiative is designed to strengthen the ability of community leaders to work across differences, build trust, and develop solutions to complex challenges facing their communities.

Leadership Lynchburg is one of 14 Community Leadership Programs selected to participate in a national pilot launched by **Convergence Center for Policy Resolution (Convergence)** and the **National Community Leadership Collaborative (NCLC)**. The initiative will integrate Convergence's collaborative problem-solving methodology into established leadership programs across the country, building on the deep local relationships and leadership development work already taking place in communities like Lynchburg.

"In an ever-increasing polarized society, having our Leadership Lynchburg alumni and participants equipped to lead hard conversations among varied perspectives and help our region tackle complex issues together feels like a calling" stated Leadership Lynchburg director, Christine Kennedy. "Further, we have the ability to model the way of what civility and collaborative problem solving can look like and to actually put that into practice instead of accepting the current climate of incivility."

The national and locally award-winning Leadership Lynchburg program has nearly 50 years of experience developing leaders in the Lynchburg Region. Through its programming, the organization brings together business, nonprofit, government, education, and civic leaders to build relationships, deepen their understanding of the community, and develop the skills needed to lead effectively.

“As we head into our 50th year in 2027, we can think of no better way to bring enhanced programming and this new curriculum to our region. By providing tangible and practical tools, we see this as one of our “give backs” to the region in celebration of 50 years” says Kennedy. Leadership Lynchburg has graduated more than 2,000 leaders since its founding, representing more than 60 organizations/sectors across the Lynchburg Region.

Now, through the Convergence-NCLC pilot, participants in Leadership Lynchburg will have the opportunity to develop an additional set of skills: how to navigate disagreement constructively, understand different perspectives and interests, build trust across differences, and work collaboratively toward solutions.

Cynthia Knappek, Executive Chair of NCLC notes that, “Leadership Lynchburg was an easy choice for this pilot because it pairs a best-in-class reputation with a real appetite for what comes next. As the organization approaches its 50th anniversary, Christine Kennedy and the Council have been clear that they don’t simply want to celebrate what Leadership Lynchburg has accomplished; they want to use that legacy as a launching point for even greater impact. Christine, in particular, has been a visionary leader in thinking beyond today and helping shape what community leadership needs to become. That forward-looking mindset is exactly what this pilot is about.”

“Community Leadership Programs are uniquely positioned to help strengthen the collaborative capacity communities need right now. They already have the relationships, trust and reach to bring leaders together,” says Mariah Levison, CEO and President of Convergence. “Our role is to add practical tools that help those leaders navigate differences and work together to solve the challenges their communities face.”

“For our region, this could mean applying collaborative problem-solving to challenges such as e.g., housing affordability, workforce development, economic mobility, public safety, education, transportation, growth, etc.” stated Leadership Lynchburg Council Chair, Maegan Fallen.

The 14-city pilot builds on the complementary strengths of Convergence and NCLC. Convergence brings nearly two decades of experience helping people with different perspectives, interests, and lived experiences build trust and work together to solve difficult problems. NCLC brings together a national network of locally rooted Community Leadership Programs that have spent decades developing leaders and building relationships across business, government, nonprofit, and civic life.

Rather than creating another standalone leadership program, the pilot embeds collaborative problem-solving skills and practices into leadership programs that are already deeply connected to their communities. Participating organizations will adapt the curriculum to local issues, relationships, and experiential learning that are central to their existing programs.

Leadership Lynchburg’s participation in the pilot will engage and equip a group of program Alumni with comprehensive training and opportunities to practice these skills. With the long-term goal of working together to integrate this collaborative problem-solving framework into its existing curriculum and experiential learning activities.

Across all 14 participating communities, NCLC and Convergence will measure outcomes and share learning to refine an approach that could ultimately be adopted by Community Leadership Programs nationwide.

The long-term goal is to make collaborative problem-solving a core civic leadership competency—**developed locally, practiced on real community challenges, and available to leaders across the country.**

About Leadership Lynchburg

Leadership Lynchburg is a nationally recognized leadership development program of the Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance, dedicated to developing informed, engaged and connected leaders who are committed to strengthening the Lynchburg region. Since its founding, the program has brought together emerging and established leaders from across the community to deepen their understanding of regional issues, build meaningful relationships and develop the skills needed to lead with purpose and impact. Through its Flagship nine-month program and additional programs including Leadership Lynchburg 2.0, and SHE Week for teen girls, Leadership Lynchburg invests in leaders at every stage of their journey. The program's graduates represent a diverse cross-section of the community and continue to serve, lead and make a difference throughout the Lynchburg region and beyond. In 2025 its SHE Week program won the national award for innovation from the Association of Leadership Programs and for the past three years, Leadership Lynchburg has earned Best Professional Development program" from Lynchburg Business Magazine. Learn more at <https://www.leadershiplynchburg.com/>

About the National Community Leadership Collaborative

The National Community Leadership Collaborative builds the national capacity and visibility of Community Leadership Programs so they can grow their impact in communities across the country. Through national strategy, partnerships, research and shared initiatives, NCLC helps locally rooted leadership organizations meet today's civic challenges. NCLC is housed at and supported by the Leadership Louisville Center. Learn more at nclcpartners.org.

About Convergence Center for Policy Resolution

Convergence is a national nonprofit organization that builds trust, bridges divides, and solves critical challenges through collaborative problem-solving. For nearly two decades, we have brought together leaders, practitioners, experts, and people with lived experience from across ideological, political, cultural, and sectoral differences to develop durable, consensus-based solutions to complex and contentious public issues. Our evidence-based collaborative problem-solving methodology enables people to move beyond compromise to identify shared interests, strengthen relationships, and achieve lasting results without requiring participants to compromise their core values. Through our Collaboratives and Learning Lab, Convergence equips leaders and communities with the tools to navigate conflict constructively, strengthen democracy, and improve lives. Learn more at convergencepolicy.org.