

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2026 Bellwether Award Finalists Announced

Bellwether Award Finalists to Compete for Top Honors in Innovative Community College Programming

(SAN ANTONIO, Texas) – The Bellwether College Consortium has announced the 30 finalists selected to compete for the prestigious Bellwether Award at the 32nd Annual Community College Futures Assembly (CCFA). This nationally recognized award honors outstanding and innovative programs in U.S. community colleges across three categories.

The **Bellwether Award** honors excellence in three categories:

- **Instructional Programs and Services** – recognizing programs and services that foster student success and teaching innovation.
- **Workforce Development** – highlighting strategic alliances between community colleges and workforce partners that address regional labor market needs.
- **Planning, Governance, and Finance** – celebrating innovative approaches in college planning, management, and resource optimization.

“We broke last year’s record with a total of 114 submissions from 91 community colleges across 30 states,” said Rose Martinez, Ph.D., director of the Bellwether College Consortium. “The large number of competitive entries reflects the impactful work community colleges are doing nationwide—and the academic and economic boost they provide to their local communities. The consortium looks forward to hosting the 2026 Community College Futures Assembly and recognizing three top colleges with the Bellwether Award.”

A Bellwether Finalist represents a community college program that earned one of the highest scores in the first round of the national competition and has been invited to present in the final round. Finalists were announced on November 3.

Finalists in the Instructional Programs and Services category are:

1. Bergen Community College
2. Brookdale Community College
3. Cerritos College
4. Dallas College
5. Florida Gateway College
6. Itawamba Community College
7. Joliet Junior College
8. Odessa College
9. Springfield Technical Community College
10. SUNY Orange

Finalists in the Workforce Development category are:

1. Barton Community College
2. Cerritos College
3. Community College of Rhode Island
4. Illinois Central College
5. Jackson State Community College
6. Kansas City Kansas Community College
7. Merced College
8. Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College
9. Pikes Peak State College
10. Rio Salado College

Finalists in the Planning, Governance, and Finance category are:

1. Des Moines Area Community College
2. Gavilan Joint Community College
3. Hudson County Community College
4. Marion Technical College
5. South Louisiana Community College
6. St. Louis Community College
7. Stanly Community College
8. Truckee Meadows Community College
9. Victor Valley College
10. Wayne Community College

The Bellwether College Consortium issued a call for nominations in the summer of 2025. Finalists representing 20 states and 29 community colleges were selected to compete from a large pool of submissions. College teams will conduct presentations to a jury of anonymous judges and fellow community college practitioners and CEOs and share how they significantly addressed a critical issue affecting community colleges. Event co-sponsors include the Association of Community College Trustees, the National Council of Instructional Administrators, the National Council for State Directors of Community Colleges, the National Association of Community College Entrepreneurship, and the National Council for Continuing Education and Training. The national competition will be held February 22 - 24, in San Antonio, Texas. The 2026 Bellwether Award recipients will be named at the event.

The Community College Futures Assembly convenes annually as an independent national forum for innovators to work as a think tank. It identifies successful responses to critical issues facing the future of community colleges and hosts its national award competition annually. Visit the Bellwether College Consortium website for more information, www.bellwethercollegeconsortium.com, or email rmartinez1702@alamo.edu.