



Rural Democracy

Through our Rural Democracy program, we're working to increase civic participation—vital to an equitable and sustainable future.



Increasing Civic Participation and Supporting Leadership Development

In Minnesota, on average 1 in 21 individuals need to serve in positional leadership (local government or nonprofit) in their lifetime. In west central Minnesota, demand is higher, reaching 1 in 9 individuals in Wilkin and Stevens Counties, 1 in 8 in Traverse County, and 1 in 7 in Grant County—classifying nearly half of our region as “leadership distressed.”

We aim to strengthen rural democracy by helping residents meet these demands through the Rural Democracy program. We're offering training to individuals who are considering running for office, engaging historically excluded groups in civic processes, and supporting local leaders.



Run4Rural is our 1 ½ day public leadership training program designed for people interested in growing and strengthening their local communities through elected office and other forms of public leadership. This nonpartisan training is useful for existing and emerging rural leaders and people active in their community whether or not they have decided to run for office.

This program seeks to create a nonpartisan space for people interested in public office and other forms of public leadership. It equips participants with the practical skills needed to build a

local campaign that is authentic, community-focused, and can win.

Training topics include:

- Understanding what's at stake in our communities and the role local elections play.
- Finding personal motivation and the right position to serve.
- Communicating through stories and shared values.
- Implementing community engagement strategies and refining messaging to bring the community together.



ENGAGE IN DEMOCRACY

Scan for a video spotlighting our Rural Democracy program.



The **Rural Advocacy and Public Leadership Program** is our free six-month leadership and advocacy program designed for people interested in strengthening our democracy and supporting the development of good governance in their local rural community.

Cohorts are small, with around 20 participants from the public and the nonprofit sectors, including people

already serving in leadership positions, along with those seeking leadership roles in elected office, the public sector, or the region's civic organizations.

Course topics include:

- Connecting and collaborating toward common goals across a diversity of interests, experiences, and backgrounds.
- Developing organizing and advocacy skills for and in rural communities.
- Mapping your rural community to better understand the breadth of its resources, experiences, and interests.
- Learning about making policy and community change at the local level.
- Developing creativity and building resources to do this work over the long haul.

This program draws on and connects with the 20-year-old Master of Advocacy and Political Leadership (MAPL) at Metro State, a Minnesota State System Institution and offers each participant 4 credits towards a Bachelor of Arts or an Master of Arts degree.



Going Local is our free two-hour rural democracy workshop. At the Going Local workshops, we share food and stories, learn about some of the unique challenges rural communities face, and explore what we can do together to make our community stronger and healthier.



Lead Local is our network that connects and supports local, rural elected officials. It provides a supportive community for elected leaders interested in working with other elected leaders who share their commitment to good government and to using their local elected office to positively strengthen the community and improve the lives of their constituents.

Lead Local network activities include peer learning, mentoring for new leaders, speaker sessions, and relationship-building events for rural elected officials to connect, exchange ideas, and stay informed on regional trends.



Intro to Civic Life is our five-part training on engaging in public life in the United States. The sessions focus on introducing participants to civic life and methods of involvement. Attendees explore avenues for effecting social change, gain insights on participating in local public meetings, and have the opportunity to attend one themselves.

► *The Rural Democracy program is made possible by funding from the McKnight Foundation.*



There's a real opportunity with the Rural Democracy program to engage people where they're at on the ground—where they can truly make a difference in their community.

– **Ben Schierer**

West Central Initiative Director of Civic Partnerships

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