

DARE MIGHTY THINGS



2022~2023
ANNUAL REPORT



THE WHY OF OUR WORK

America is an audacious idea. Born from an argument, it is equal parts competition and consensus, conflict and compromise, individual freedom and common good. For everyone to succeed, America requires resilient, engaged, courageous citizens. Civic Nebraska's youth education, civic health programs, and voting rights efforts empower and embolden Nebraskans to take meaningful action to strengthen our democracy. Democracy is not for the meek. It's for those who **DARE MIGHTY THINGS**.

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CIVIC NEBRASKA VALUES

Community is built on trust and engagement. It is at the heart of everything we do, and we're better when we work together. A community thrives when people trust each other and show up for one another.

Innovation leads to continuous improvement and greater impact. We embrace new ideas and put them into action. We learn together today so we can implement change tomorrow.

Learning creates pathways to participation and progress. We are driven to advance learning as an act of civic engagement. Learning in all its forms strengthens us and our communities.

Power is inherent in every person. We connect people to power and believe that power should be shared. Anyone can lead change in their community.

Optimism is a driving force for change. We believe that our work matters and expect to make an impact. We're optimistic about our democracy, and we're hopeful for Nebraska's future.

"Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

– Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life"

At Civic Nebraska, we believe democracy is much more than the institutions that make up our governmental system. We view democracy as a practice, a way of life springing from devotion to the common good. And we know that it's in all of us: in our words, in our deeds, in our civic actions, and in how we work to extend the benefits of democratic life to everyone.

Of course, democracy has never been easy; nothing great ever is. Especially during times of turmoil and uncertainty, democracy requires people's vigilance, faith, and courage to persist. Backed by supporters like you, Civic Nebraska leads the defense of democracy in the Cornhusker State. We do this by building young civic leaders, enhancing civic life in towns and cities across Nebraska, and protecting every eligible Nebraskan's right to vote. In the pages of our 2022-23 annual report, you'll see how:

■ Our **Youth Civic Leadership** team, which provides safe and healthy outside-of-school spaces for more than 1,000 Nebraska students every day, stepped up to halt the "civic slide" among our young people. Our six Community Learning Centers in Lincoln and Omaha are built to help young people reinforce the building blocks of powerful democratic citizenship – such as critical thinking, collaboration, and civil discourse – in their daily lives.

■ Our **Civic Health Program** innovated to inspire Nebraskans away from toxic political fighting and toward shared problem-solving. In March, we paired hundreds of Nebraskans across the political spectrum during the online Unify Nebraska Challenge, which built bridges across both geography and political ideology. This was also the goal of our regular screenings of the short film PURPLE and our quarterly Civic Saturday gatherings.

■ Our **Voting Rights Initiatives** team organized, educated, and advocated on behalf of every Nebraska voter during a pivotal election year. In 2022, we deployed hundreds of nonpartisan Election Protectors to ensure our elections were ran smoothly. We battled harmful voter identification initiatives on the campaign trail and in the Nebraska Legislature, and we redoubled our efforts to bring more Nebraskans, including returning citizens, to the franchise.



Together, we are facing a momentous test of American resolve. But this test isn't new. Generations before us in times of war and strife and unrest also asked: Should this go on, this thing of ours? Can we push past our fears and take up the work to remake America again? Can we, as a people, still make this nation what it was meant to be?

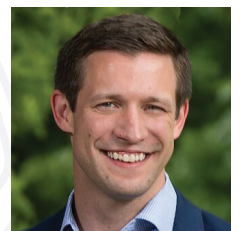
If you're reading this, you already know the answers to these questions. You understand what it takes to get there: Audacity. Resolve. Courage. And most of all, you share in our willingness to *dare mighty things*.

Thank you for your support this past year. We hope you enjoy this look back, as well as what's ahead, and that you consider renewing your support for our democracy-building initiatives.

Preeti Bansal, J.D.
Chair, Board of Directors



Adam Morfeld, J.D.
Executive Director



CivicNebraska.org/mightythings

Civic Nebraska is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

CIVIC NEBRASKA'S CORE VALUES

HIGHEST RESOLVE

COMMUNITY

is built on trust and engagement. It is at the heart of everything we do, and we're better when we work together. A community thrives when people trust each other and show up for one another.



Our school-based Community Learning Centers are true neighborhood hubs, providing space, resources, and tools for students to succeed and neighbors of all ages to thrive.



Owning issues together builds stronger communities. From Scottsbluff to Falls City, from South Sioux to McCook, our civic health programs show Nebraskans how collaboration fortifies the civic fabric of our state.

INNOVATION

leads to continuous improvement and greater impact. We embrace new ideas and put them into action. We learn together today so we can implement change tomorrow.



Civic Nebraska meets people where they are – in a pandemic world, that means connecting virtually as well as in-person in our drive for a more modern and robust democracy.



POWER

is inherent in every person. We connect people to power and believe that power should be shared. Anyone can lead change in their community.



Collective Impact Lincoln, now in its sixth year, continues to support resident-led change in the capital city's core neighborhoods.



Civic Nebraska is the state's pre-eminent force for voting rights, organizing Nebraskans as the Legislature's "Second House" to lobby for more efficient elections and as few impediments and hindrances to the ballot as possible.

LEARNING

creates pathways to participation and progress. We are driven to advance learning as an act of civic engagement. Learning in all its forms strengthens us and our communities.



Our before- and after-school programs and clubs allow young people to imagine, connect, collaborate and seek the change they wish to see in their communities.



OPTIMISM

is a driving force for change. We believe that our work matters and expect to make an impact. We're optimistic about our democracy, and we're hopeful for Nebraska's future.



Our book, Reclaiming We: Twenty Everyday Acts to Strengthen the Common Good and Defend Democracy, is a hopeful devotional for our democratic way of life.



Our Civic Saturday gatherings celebrate our nation's powerful "civic religion" – and hold space for new civic rituals that are joyful and communal.

VOTING RIGHTS INITIATIVES

PERSEVERANCE



Our Voting Rights Initiatives team (L-R: Chueqa Yang, Heather Engdahl, Nathan Leach, Mike Forsythe) is in our streets, neighborhoods, and halls of power to fight for you.

Voting is our most important American right. Without it, there is no avenue for change, no way for citizens to truly hold leaders accountable, no way for our collective values to take shape in our institutions and our society. That's why Civic Nebraska fights for elections to be fair, modern, and accessible – in 2022, we redoubled our efforts to defeat bad policies initiatives that threaten this most precious right.

Make no mistake: Nebraskans' voting rights are under attack. In the past year, anti-democratic forces have pushed forward a rewrite of the Nebraska Constitution to hinder tens of thousands of our state's eligible voters. Civic Nebraska led opposition to these and other assaults, which also included sweeping campaigns to undermine Nebraskans' faith in our institutions. We organized, educated, and advocated on behalf of every Nebraska voter. In November, we deployed nonpartisan Election Protectors to ensure our elections ran smoothly. We battled harmful voter ID initiatives in the Nebraska Legislature and on the campaign trail, and we redoubled our efforts to bring more Nebraskans, including returning citizens, to the franchise.

In 2022, our Voting Rights Initiatives team's priorities included:

- **Improving Nebraska's election infrastructure.** We worked closely with state lawmakers on a sweeping bill making meaningful upgrades to our elections, including the establishment of statewide standards for ballot dropboxes, processes to keep voter rolls current and accurate, and methods for ensuring voting is inclusive for all Nebraskans.
- **Countering conspiracy theories.** To counter the rising noise about election integrity, Civic Nebraska launched Safe, Secure, Certified – a statewide campaign that builds faith in Nebraska's elections systems and the bipartisan guardrails that ensure they remain a model for the nation. We also worked with the Secretary of State's Office to address false claims by bad actors about the 2020 election in Nebraska.
- **Stopping bad bills and initiatives.** As the fight to protect voters against harmful restrictions returns to the Nebraska Legislature, Civic Nebraska is working tirelessly to protect Nebraska voters' ability and opportunity to vote. Casting a ballot freely and fairly is fundamental to democracy, and all of us must be ready, willing, and able to step up and protect it.



I DARE SAY

Heather Engdahl, Director of Voting Rights

I stepped into the role of director of voting rights in July 2022, after three years at Civic Nebraska. I've prepared for this challenge by building a foundation of organizing and engaging with voters across the state. This work – which has involved relationship-building, coalition-managing, and so much more – has deepened my connection to my state and her people.

This has also increased my resolve to protect everyone's right to vote – and therefore, our democracy. We've had several battles, a few setbacks, and any number of big and small victories over the years. But I also know that the fight for voting rights is never over. It's one of persistence and vigilance and consistency. That's what, and why, I do what I do.

Civic Nebraska will continue to have legal firepower in our ranks, but my background in social psychology lends well to directing our voting rights initiatives. We use so much data in our work: standardizing what we're collecting in the field, using it to inform our short- and long-term goals, and expanding beyond metrics to gather more qualitative data from voters. This is right up my alley; I have the skills and experience that is vital to informing our work.

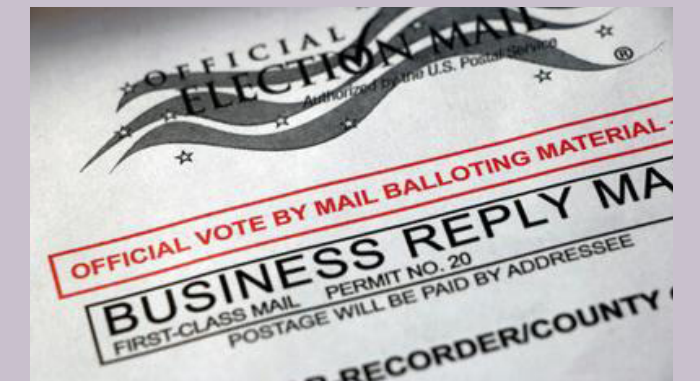
Democracy is a cultural and social creature; viewing voting rights through the lens of the social sciences allows us to dig deeper into our advocacy and outreach, go beyond legal issues, and unpack the impacts on our everyday lives within the context of everything else Nebraskans face. My goal is to help build a culture of civic engagement in which we establish voting as a norm with social justice, inclusion, and fair representation as driving values.

Beyond Election Day, Nebraskans will find us fighting for every Nebraskan's right to vote, especially following felony convictions, and advocating for policies that improve our accessibility to the ballot. You can also expect Civic Nebraska to show up for Nebraskans at the State Capitol, in our broad statewide coalitions, or in our towns, cities, and neighborhoods. That's exciting to me and to our team.

BY THE NUMBERS

414,869

The number of ballots cast in Nebraska's 2022 primary, the highest participation in a gubernatorial primary election in the history of the state.



45%

The percentage of Nebraskans who voted by mail in 2022, more than triple the amount who voted by mail in 2018.

205,000

Phone calls, texts, emails, and doors knocked by our Voting Rights Initiatives team to get out the vote throughout 2022.



200

Volunteer Election Protectors deployed by Civic Nebraska to observe polling sites across the state during the May and November 2022 elections.

54,500-70,000

The estimated number of Nebraskans who will be immediately disenfranchised if the Legislature enacts a strict voter ID measure in 2023.

YOUTH CIVIC LEADERSHIP RISING STARS



Our before- and after-school programs help build confident, informed, and independent-thinking young people.

Robust civic education challenges young Nebraskans to be active and informed citizens while giving them opportunities to make meaningful change. Equipped with civic knowledge, young people can join with others to serve and improve society, and even find leadership roles within their communities.

Civic Nebraska's **Youth Civic Leadership Programs** – a half-dozen before- and after-school programs in Lincoln and Omaha, outside-of-school middle-school civics clubs in Omaha, and student-led service learning in towns and cities across the state – expand students' horizons so they can critically and creatively engage with the world right now. In 2022, Youth Civic Leadership expanded its efforts, activities, and resources to embolden K-12 students to become responsible citizens. Those efforts include:

- **Writing, curating, and publishing** a series of free online civics lessons, actions, and assets for Nebraska educators of all grade levels;
- **Repackaging** our popular middle-school service-

learning, empowerment, and civic journalism clubs into a single program, Civic Circles, and rolling it out at a pair of Omaha middle schools;

- **Collaborating** with national partners such as civXNow and iCivics to help craft a state civics policy;
- **Continuing** and expanding our community outreach to guarantee seamless support for the students, families, and neighborhoods served by our school-based programs; and
- **Expanding** service-learning programs across Greater Nebraska through our Center of Excellence based out of our Grand Island headquarters.

“We The People” means our youngest citizens, too.

That's why Civic Nebraska starts early with civics enrichment and reinforcement: to help young people develop the building blocks of democratic citizenship such as critical thinking, civic leadership, and civil discourse. These skills have incredible transformative power for both individuals and their communities – and they are a launch pad for powerful, lifelong citizenship.

BY THE NUMBERS



5 Virtual sessions of Civic Buddies, in which Civic Nebraska middle-schoolers read and discussed children's books about citizenship, voting, and civic engagement to our elementary students via Zoom.



3.9 On a 4.0 scale, the average value parents gave Civic Nebraska's before- and after-school programs in 2022.



20

Varieties of crops in our Lincoln Northeast CLC's community garden, a project inspired by Northeast ELL students seeking an opportunity to promote cooperation and curiosity across cultures.



I DARE SAY

Brianna White, Site Director, Sherman Elementary CLC

My why? Oh, there are so many ways this testimony can go.

Each day I hear my heart say: Serve. Service. I am here because I have a passion to get people through – to help others, without expecting it in return. To instill values in our youth and encourage them to lead us to a brighter future.

I love getting in the (Sherman community) garden: I'm not worried about getting my dress dirty, however. Students learning how to gather the produce they grew, taking it home, and eating it with their family is what is on my mind. Letting them see how much we can accomplish when we work together. It's a good metaphor for democracy, too.

Seeing people smile: Happiness is medicine and making a person smile can turn their entire day around. To see their hearts get lighter and eyes get brighter, because you helped in some capacity.

And I live for lightbulb moments: Seeing a student light up when they do a math problem or read is so gratifying! Seeing an adult learn something new – something that blows their mind – is extremely elating, as well. Putting a little joy in someone's world, even when I'm not feeling my best, comes back around. It is eternally rewarding.

That's what I run off of: The spark of fulfillment for being there for others in ways we might not have known we needed on both ends.

MIGHTY TOGETHER



Democracy is prosocial. Every day, our Civic Health staff connects Nebraskans to solve shared problems.

Social connectedness. Confidence in institutions.

Community engagement. Political involvement. These are key civic muscles for every American, but if we don't use them we lose them. It's why Civic Nebraska's Civic Health Programs connect, train, and support people across the state to strengthen democracy. In 2022, Civic Nebraska collaborated with thousands of fellow Nebraskans, face-to-face and virtually, to nurture the will and ability within communities to tackle mutual problems.

That meant redoubling our pursuit of dialogue across political divides.

In March, we teamed up with Unify America to host the first-in-the-nation statewide Unify Challenge, where hundreds of Nebraskans of varying backgrounds and ZIP codes took part in one-on-one video conversations about issues facing the state. Throughout the year, we also mobilized Nebraskans at screenings of PURPLE, a short film about Americans with opposing viewpoints who investigate their differences. And we gathered regularly for Civic Saturdays – joyful, communal spaces for friends and strangers to come together and reflect on pathways to powerful, active citizenship.

In the capital city, our Collective Impact Lincoln

partnership completed a successful year of supporting Lincoln's core neighborhoods.

In addition to connecting and rallying neighbors on hyperlocal matters, Collective Impact Lincoln also led testimony at monthly "housing rights nights" at the local City Council. And in May, it published the Equitable Development Scorecard, a tool for communities and planners to evaluate publicly subsidized housing developments in terms of equity and affordability.

We dotted the state map in 2022, sharing civic health workshops, trainings, and resources in communities of all sizes.

Civic Nebraska facilitated community meetings, surveys, and the development of a community action plan in Big Springs (pop. 400), leading to new and young leaders emerging, a new community foundation fund board, and support for community resources like a new daycare and an improved online community hub.

Civic health is civic power. It grows with shared responsibility and ownership – a fearless truth that has stood the test of time. By empowering Nebraskans at the most local level, Civic Nebraska helps each community power up its own civic life by addressing their own unique challenges and opportunities.



I DARE SAY

Daniel Bennett, Rural Civic Health Program Manager

When was a time your community was at its best? I often open workshops with this question, and an inspiring list always follows: when the town turned out to build a wall of sandbags as flood waters rose, when they pooled money and meals to support a family who lost everything, or when they transformed an old, leaky opera house into a vibrant community center. These are mighty accomplishments, but they began with small actions: Inviting a new neighbor to dinner, organizing a neighborhood get together, or speaking in front of city council.

Civic Nebraska's civic health programs celebrate these small actions, because we know they are the seeds of future civic power. All the studies, planning, and money in the world can't power a movement in the community. Our civic health programs increase civic power by working with volunteer leaders to build their organizing skills. We hold space for dreaming and for tough conversations. We provide platforms for political opposites to find common ground. We provide data, information, and stories that spark learning. We provide experiences for young Nebraskans to learn about the institutions they will one day be called upon to lead.

In a time when many are tempted to look to external powers to fix their problems, Civic Nebraska's civic health programs remind us to look inside our communities and inside ourselves for the power we seek. This shift in attention leads us to small but essential actions. It's exciting to be a part of a team that takes this shift in attention to heart, because it's here, in the innerwork of our communities, that I find an abundance of opportunities for our towns and much promise for the future of our state.

BY THE NUMBERS



237 The number of youth and adults who participated in civic health presentations, workshops, or webinars across the state.

\$3,000

The amount in mini-grants Collective Impact Lincoln awarded to support 10 neighborhood revitalization projects in the city's six core neighborhoods, including community gardens and community engagement events.



367 Capitol Experience Day participants from 15 groups across the state, including students from Lincoln, Omaha, and rural Nebraska.

5 Civic Saturdays, with more than 200 participants, to connect around values and practices of being an active citizen and build relationships that create new civic traditions that are joyful and communal.



ON THE HORIZON



OUR YOUTH CIVIC LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS WILL

- Create new pathways to participation for K-12 students in their neighborhoods, communities, and state, both virtual and in-person.
- Expand our created and curated curriculum for educators across Nebraska to help halt the “civic slide” among our youth.
- Increase our number of service-oriented projects through the Service Learning Center of Excellence, based in Central Nebraska.

OUR CIVIC HEALTH PROGRAMS WILL

- Host dozens of Capitol Experience Days for youth and community members across our state, including a new program for Lincoln Public Schools ninth-graders.
- Build understanding of Nebraskans’ concerns and hopes for the news and media climate with the Crossing Divides project. These insights will inform future projects and support smart, healthy media consumption.

- Expand use of Collective Impact Lincoln’s Equitable Development Scorecard to encourage the principles and practices of equity and affordability in future project planning and development.
- Continue its advocacy for affordable and adequate housing policy change through source of income, inclusionary zoning, and proactive rental inspection.

OUR VOTING RIGHTS INITIATIVES WILL

- Fight to mitigate the imposition of voter ID on Nebraska voters by members of the Nebraska Legislature.
- Advocate at the statehouse for pro-voter policies including the expansion of vote-by-mail and the restoration of voting rights for Nebraskans who have served their debt to society.
- Counter unfounded conspiracy theories and other bad-faith efforts to undermine confidence in our democratic systems and elections.

OUR STAFF

Administration

- Adam Morfeld, Executive Director & Founder
- Alex Brechbill, Grant Writer
- Bridgette Foerster, Finance & Operations Manager
- Alyssa Hogue, People & Culture Coordinator
- Emily Priefert, Finance & Operations Coordinator
- Nicholette Seigfreid, Director of People & Culture
- Steve Smith, Director of Communications
- Heidi Uhing, Director of Public Policy
- Sarah Walker, Director of Development
- Julie Ward, Executive Administrator

Youth Civic Leadership

- Kent Day, Director of Youth Civic Leadership
- Michael Bandy, Youth Leadership Programs Manager & School Community Coordinator, Lincoln Northeast High CLC
- Shari Kimble, Youth Leadership Programs Manager
- Haroon Al Hayder, School Community Coordinator, Lincoln High CLC
- Equasha Smith, Site Director, Lothrop Elementary CLC
- Trey Sterner, School Community Coordinator, Campbell Elementary CLC
- Brianna White, Site Director, Sherman Elementary CLC
- Tracy White, Site Director, Lewis & Clark Middle CLC

Voting Rights Initiatives

- Heather Engdahl, Director of Voting Rights
- Mike Forsythe, Returning Citizen Program Manager
- Nathan Leach, Voting Rights Field Organizer
- Chueqa Yang, Voting Rights Field Organizer



Civic Health Programs

- Nancy Petitto, Director of Civic Health Programs
- Daniel Bennett, Rural Civic Health Program Manager
- Allie Christianson, Senior Community Organizer, Collective Impact Lincoln
- Jason Ezell, Community Organizer, Collective Impact Lincoln
- Audrey Nance, Capitol Experience Day Coordinator

And dozens of dedicated part-time employees in our schools, in our streets, and in our neighborhoods.

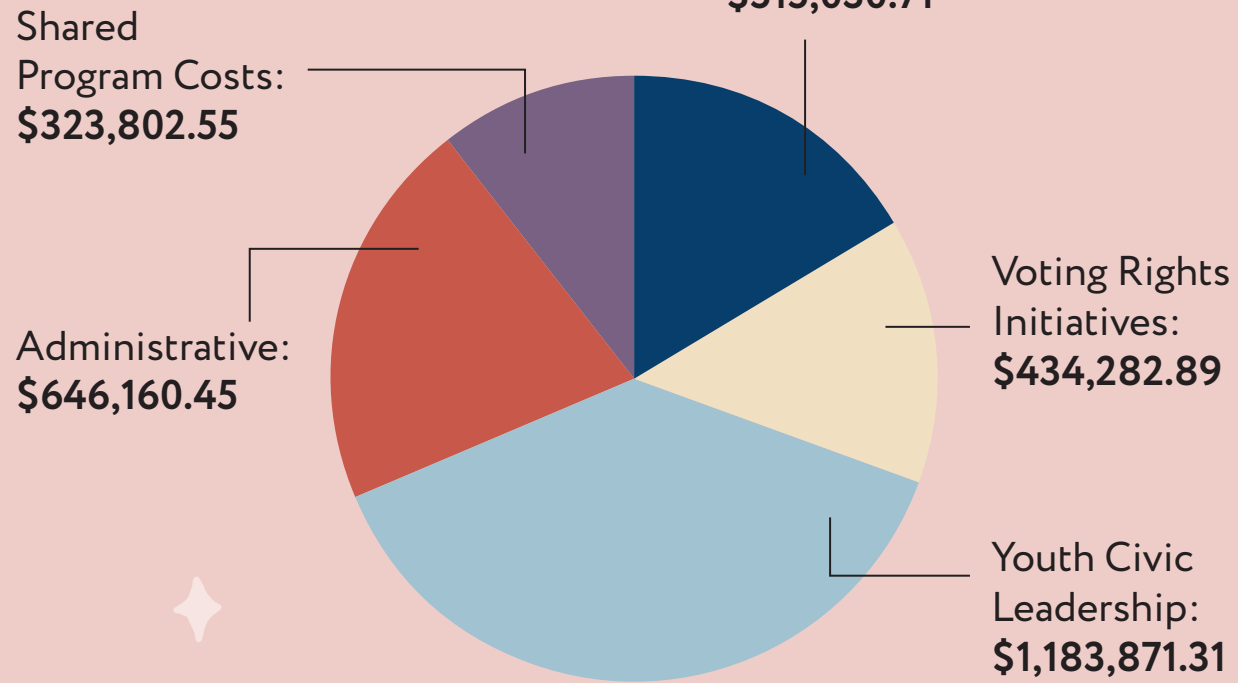


FINANCIALS

TOTAL BUDGET
\$3,103,147.91

IMPACTS

Funding allocations, Fiscal Year 2022



DEFENDING DEMOCRACY WITH PLANNED GIVING

Planned giving means long-term sustainability of our work. Any contribution, large or small, serves to protect democracy in our state for years to come. To learn more about planned giving with Civic Nebraska, contact Director of Development Sarah Walker at 402.904.5191 or sarah.walker@civicnebraska.org, or visit CivicNebraska.org/plannedgiving.

GET INVOLVED WITH CIVIC NEBRASKA

NOW DARE YOU



Civic Nebraska's strength and momentum comes from supporters like you. Your time, energy, and financial support have delivered civic education and service-learning opportunities to thousands of Nebraska students. You have strengthened civic life in communities across our state. And you have advanced the most precious of American rights - to vote. Our work to create a more modern and robust democracy for all Nebraskans wouldn't be possible without you.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Join us. Civic Nebraska has volunteer opportunities that fit many schedules, interests, and lifestyles. Call 402.904.5191 or email info@civicnebraska.org for other volunteer opportunities.

Share our story. The more people who know about our mission and our impact, the more supporters of a modern, robust democracy there will be in Nebraska. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn and share our work with your friends and family.

Donate. To build democracy, we count on our donors' generous support. We immediately put those funds to work in our communities. Support us online at CivicNebraska.org/donate.



2022-23 ANNUAL REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

Layout and graphic design: Katie Nieland
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Creating a more modern and robust democracy for
all Nebraskans.

CivicNebraska.org

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