



RECLAIMING WWE



2021~2022
ANNUAL REPORT



THE WHY OF OUR WORK

Our state and country are at a crossroads: One path, fixated on the *me*, inevitably benefits the powerful and well-connected. But the other path leads to *we* – a reinvigoration of community, mutual responsibility, faith in our democratic institutions, and limitless civic power. We must all act to strengthen the common good and defend democracy. Every day in so many ways, CIVIC NEBRASKA connects and protects Nebraskans on the journey to RECLAIM WE.

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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.

Dear friends,

At some point, we are all introduced to the civic idea of “we” – how collectively, all of us make up our democracy, and therefore all of us are responsible for it. *We* the people; *we* hold these truths to be self-evident – it all comes down to a few simple facts: When we show up, lead by example, hold ourselves and others accountable, and put trust in our fellow citizens, there’s nothing we can’t accomplish.

When we’re at our best, that’s the American we.

In recent times, particularly during the pandemic, we’ve seen what happens when we “otherize” our fellow Americans – people who maybe don’t look, vote, pray, or live like us. Combined with the hyper-individualism of the age, it may feel as if this cultural current is too daunting to change.

We’re here to tell you that it’s not.

Every day, Civic Nebraska is in our streets, our schools, and the halls of government to proclaim: **“We” means all of us.** We are all co-creators of our interconnected, interdependent, networked reality – and so what we all do matters. Every single one of our actions, big and small and all taken together, creates our shared democratic future.

This mindset has been essential in the past year. We navigated an entire school calendar amid a deadly pandemic; we innovated to build connections across our state so our communities could tackle common challenges; and we assisted and protected voters across the political spectrum as they cast ballots in the largest general election in modern history. In the pages of this 2021-22 Annual Report, you’ll also read about how:

■ Our **Youth Civic Leadership** team – already major community-builders and guides for young people on the road to powerful democratic citizenship – took on an even more important role during the pandemic. Our Community Learning Centers connected hard-hit families with food, assistance, resources, and even free personal protective equipment, all while making sure children had a safe, healthy, fun environment in which to learn.

■ Our **Civic Health Program** published the Nebraska Civic Health Index, a five-year checkup on our state’s social connectedness, community involvement, faith in institutions and political participation. Then, they gathered key civic catalysts across the state to chart a path for strengthening Nebraska’s civic life over the next five years.

■ Our **Voting Rights Initiatives** staff educated and mobilized tens of thousands of new Nebraska voters during the record-smashing 2020 election. Team Voting Rights also trained and deployed hundreds of volunteer poll-watchers to ensure a smooth Election Day. Six months later, we did it all again to protect



municipal elections in the state’s two largest cities. In the meantime, we got to work in opposition to harmful voter restriction efforts.

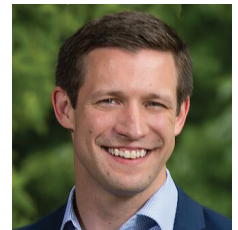
Because of support from people like you, Civic Nebraska can be stronger than ever in 2021-22. We’ve placed our faith in the time-honored idea that a modern and robust democracy takes all of us owning issues together, holding ourselves mutually accountable, putting sincere trust in one another, and acting for the common good.

These things are old and powerful. They are in our national DNA, and they have been with us since the Founding. Together, they create the American we, and they’re waiting for us – all of us – to reclaim them.

Shall we?

Adam Morfeld, J.D.

Executive Director and Founder



Preeta Bansal, J.D.

Chairperson of the Board of Directors



See our 2021-22 digital annual report at CivicNebraska.org.

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

REFORMING | REPAIRING | RETURNING

RECOMMITTING

To truly RECLAIM WE in a new era focusing on the common good, we must tend to our democracy as an organic, interdependent, interconnected domain. Here are a few examples of how Civic Nebraska, along with everyday Nebraskans, is doing just that.



engaging in democracy

RABBLE MILL, Lincoln

Before the 2020 election, Rabble Media and Civic Nebraska partnered in a project called NE Young Voters. Through youth-focused messaging, the project educated 18- to 24-year-old Nebraskans about voting and encouraged them to participate in the election. The youth vote helped power record participation in Nebraska in November.



speaking up, standing out

JA KEEN FOX, Omaha

Following the May 30, 2020, killing of James Scurlock in Omaha amid a nationwide mobilization against police violence, Ja Keen organized and sustained protests, trained community organizers, facilitated cross-community conversations, and consistently used his growing platform to affect change. It made him more than a few adversaries, but his persistence is an example of breaking the spell of the status quo.



reading and writing

DAMION SAYERS, Omaha

Damion owns and operates a neighborhood barbershop and is an advocate for childhood literacy. He and others created the North Omaha Barbershop Books project, in which owners stock up on children's books so that when families come in for a cut, kids can open one up to read – or even take one home.



acting locally

RANDY BRETZ, Lincoln

Each evening at 8 during the pandemic's early days, Randy stepped onto his front porch and applauded for his city's healthcare workers. Soon his neighbors joined him in the nightly ritual – and before long, it became a powerful method for casual neighbors to become responsible, caring friends.



showing up

LINDSAY LIMBACH, Lincoln

Lindsay, a specialist for Lincoln Community Learning Centers, was a community leader during the pandemic. She partnered with Little Free Pantries to install a micro food pantry on her front lawn so neighbors and children could access food during a time of uncertainty. After having just recently moved into her neighborhood, Lindsay was selected to be on the board of her neighborhood association. A testimony of optimism, she's proud to be there for her neighbors.



lifting all voices

GABRIELLA PARSONS, Lincoln

Working with the Tenant Assistance Project and History Nebraska, the filmmaker created the half-hour documentary *Behind On Rent*, which put a heartbreaking, inspiring, and resilient human face to the eviction crisis in Nebraska during the pandemic. By the end of 2021, it had been viewed more than 160,000 times on YouTube, swept up national honors, and had drawn local and state lawmakers' attention.



forging connections

ERICA KOBZA, Fremont

In 2020, Erica co-founded Together 4 Fremont, a group of local educators who value anti-racism, inclusivity, equity, and access – and who educate, advocate, and act around those values. T4F launched Feeding Fremont, which helped children who couldn't access free food because of unreliable transportation. Kobza and partners connected volunteer drivers with food-insecure families and served thousands of local children.



claiming & spreading civic power

VALERIA RODRIGUEZ, Scottsbluff

Valeria founded Empowering Families, which builds a more welcoming community through education, civic participation and empowerment. Valeria's work focuses on areas of Scottsbluff with a majority-minority population rich in cultural diversity but lagging in some measures of engagement. Through relationship-building, Valeria has helped push COVID-19 vaccination drives, get-out-the-vote canvassing, and a host of other community connection points.



getting political

VIRTUAL CAPITOL EXPERIENCE

Because our popular Capitol Experience Day field trips for the state’s middle- and high-schoolers were sidelined by COVID, we brought the Nebraska State Capitol to them instead. We packaged a virtual tour of the State Capitol, video appearances with state senators, judges and the executive branch, and resources for students and teachers to open the doors to our state’s unique government from border to border.



participating with purpose

CIVIC SATURDAY

In a time of deep anxiety, disconnectedness, and polarization, Civic Nebraska convened space for people to come together in civic community to reflect on and rededicate ourselves to the values and practices of being a contributing member in civic life. Civic Saturdays connect us around the values and practices of being an active citizen, reckon with and reflect on our nation’s creed, and build relationships that create new civic traditions that are joyful and communal.



hope & conviction

CIVIC U.

When the world went dark, Civic Nebraska’s digital platforms lit up. CIVIC U. launched live, virtual at-home activities, read-alouds and connection circles, in-home academic enrichment, and up-to-date information about civic engagement, the census, and voting rights. Today, the “U” continues to serve students and adults statewide.



spreading civic faith

SUMMER OF CIVIC RENEWAL

In June and July 2021, our Grand Island HQ buzzed with optimism. Our Civic Health and Voting Rights Initiatives teams combined to empower our central Nebraska Voting Rights Advocates in their efforts to build and maintain civic wellness – social connectedness, political involvement, community engagement, and faith in institutions – in their respective towns and cities.



arguing like Americans

THE CIVILITY EFFECT

In late winter 2021, Civic Nebraska partnered with a team of students at Nebraska U. to educate and motivate the state’s communications professionals on the importance of civil discourse in the public sphere. The result was *The Civility Effect*, a campaign that earned the students national honors and provided Nebraska PR pros and others valuable tools to keep the conversation going.



learning together

FORMING A MORE PERFECT UNION

In the 2021-22 school year, Civic Nebraska launched *Forming A More Perfect Union*, a nonpartisan before- and after-school K-12 curriculum that reinforces and enriches civic learning. It’s our mission to cultivate the next generation of civic leaders and lifelong learners.



citizens, not consumers

SPEAK UP FOR HOUSING RIGHTS

Thousands of Nebraskans faced eviction and housing insecurity during the pandemic, a crisis that continues today. With a dozen other civic, educational, and art organizations, Civic Nebraska launched *Speak Up For Housing Rights*, a campaign centered in Lincoln but whose effects have been felt statewide. *Speak Up*’s communitarian message continues today – get involved at SpeakUpLNK.org.



active citizen readers

RECLAIMING WE: THE BOOK

We all agree democracy needs strengthening – but how? In April, as vaccines were going into arms and pandemic restrictions were lifted, we published our first book addressing that very question. *Reclaiming WE: Twenty Everyday Acts to Strengthen the Common Good and Defend Democracy* lays out simple ways to fortify our shared civic life in America. Get it at bitly.com/ReclaimWe

REINFORCING | REIGNITING | REINVIGORATING

RESTRENGTHENING



Our Voting Rights Initiatives team hits the streets to defend the rights of all Nebraskans.

VOTING RIGHTS INITIATIVES IN 2021-22

The fight for voting rights is never done. This fact was no more evident than in 2021. After Civic Nebraska once again helped stave off voter-restriction bills at the statehouse, politicians started a petition drive to revise the state constitution. If successful, the revision would burden voters with the same strictures that have failed to gain traction in the Nebraska Legislature.

We went to work immediately, activating our statewide partner network and volunteer Voting Rights Advocates in opposition of the signature-gathering effort, which aims to place a constitutional amendment on state ballots in 2022. And we continue to organize, plan, and educate our fellow Nebraskans on the very real costs, complications, and consequences of the proposed amendment – all while working for real election reforms to make voting easier without sacrificing election integrity.

The voter restriction push comes in the wake of record-breaking participation in recent elections. Nebraskans voted in overwhelming numbers in 2020, thanks in part to Civic Nebraska’s work. We helped Nebraskans

register to vote; to request, secure, and cast an all-time high number of early mail-in ballots; to fully understand the offices and issues on our November ballots; and to make plans to vote. The following spring also saw voter surges in Omaha’s and Lincoln’s hotly contested municipal elections.

The coming year is pivotal for voting rights in Nebraska. Time will tell how history will remember this time, and our commitment to basic American ideals and values. Our pledge to you: We will fight as hard as we must for as long as it takes, and we will do everything in our power to keep our state from descending into a dark era of mass disenfranchisement.

Because there is no “we” without the right to vote freely. Our right to vote is a necessary one that holds our leaders to account. It is an active one that builds our values and dreams into our institutions. Voting is the right upon which all other rights are possible – it’s both the process toward and the goal of a modern, robust democracy. Our fight for voting rights is never done, and Civic Nebraska is there to lead this battle.



Civic Nebraska and partners like the South of Downtown CDO helped thousands of new voters register in 2020 and 2021.

IN THE COMING YEAR, OUR VOTING RIGHTS INITIATIVES PROGRAM WILL:

- Work to pass election reforms at the statehouse, including the elimination of an arbitrary two-year waiting period for those who have served their debt to society
- Ensure that Nebraska voters understand the costs, complications, and consequences of revising the Nebraska Constitution simply to add new voter restrictions
- Work nonstop to assist even more Nebraska voters in registering to vote – and then educate them on how to follow through by casting their ballots – in 2022
- Train and deploy hundreds of nonpartisan Election Protectors for the May 2022 primary and November 2022 general elections, and report our findings to the public.



RECOUNTING 'WE' VOTING RIGHTS INITIATIVES BY THE NUMBERS



539,330

Early ballots cast in Nebraska's 2020 general election, or 56% of all ballots cast. That's more than double the state's previous all-time high. Civic Nebraska worked relentlessly to educate voters on how to vote early, whether by mail or in-person.

71.9%

Nebraska's self-response rate for the 2020 U.S. Census, which easily outpaced the U.S. average and ranked fourth nationally. We led the statewide **Nebraska Counts** coalition to ensure an accurate, complete count in Nebraska.



322,340

Voter contacts made by Civic Nebraska staff and volunteers to get out the vote for the 2020 and 2021 elections. That's 85,594 phone calls, 236,143 text messages, and 603 doors knocked.

0 Cases of voter impersonation reported in Nebraska in 2020 or 2021. Yet, politicians launched a ballot initiative campaign to add new restrictions on Nebraska voters. We vow to fight and defeat this harmful scheme.

REJOICING | REFLECTING | REAFFIRMING REVITALIZING



Whether in-person or online, we fortify Nebraska's civic connections.

CIVIC HEALTH PROGRAMS IN 2021-22

The power of “we” flows through every aspect of our Civic Health Program, and 2021 was an ideal year to spread this faith. In January, Civic Nebraska declared it the Year of Civic Health – 12 months of intensive focus on building our state’s civic, social, and political strength. We started by publishing the *Nebraska Civic Health Index*, an in-depth, data-driven analysis of our state’s social connectedness, community engagement, political involvement, and faith in institutions. Then, shared its findings across diverse groups and partners to chart a path forward. By year’s end, we had assembled a powerful network of civic catalysts in towns and cities across Nebraska, ready to take meaningful action.

Working together to solve shared challenges means we must be able to talk with one another – no small task in a time of deep anxiety, disconnectedness, and political polarization. In February, Civic Nebraska partnered with a Nebraska U. student group to form *The Civility Effect*, a campaign to encourage civil discourse in the public sphere. We also regularly convened *Civic*

Saturdays, a civic analog to a faith gathering where people came together in civic community to reflect on and rededicate themselves to the values and practices of being a contributing member of civic life.

A modern and robust democracy requires strong social connections, so Civic Nebraska deepened our neighborhood-building work in our largest cities and smallest towns in 2021. Our urban and rural civic health initiatives connected Nebraskans to advocacy, training, and resources so they could lead meaningful, positive change in their neighborhoods and communities. Running through a good portion of our hyperlocal work was activation and advocacy for housing affordability.

Democracy works best when we have the will and ability within our communities, no matter how big or how small, to tackle mutual problems. Through our civic health work, Civic Nebraska is helping Nebraskans reclaim “we” – house by house, block by block, and community by community.

RECOUNTING 'WE' CIVIC HEALTH BY THE NUMBERS



\$10,000

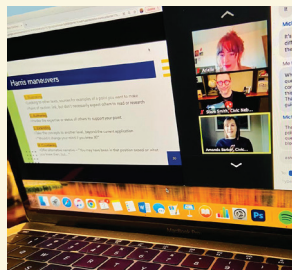
The amount in civic health mini-grants Collective Impact Lincoln awarded to support 12 neighborhood revitalization projects in the city's six core neighborhoods, including public art projects and community engagement events.

7 Civic Saturday gatherings we held in 2020-21, with a total of nearly 350 participants who connected around values and practices of being an active citizen and creating new civic traditions that are joyful and communal.



221

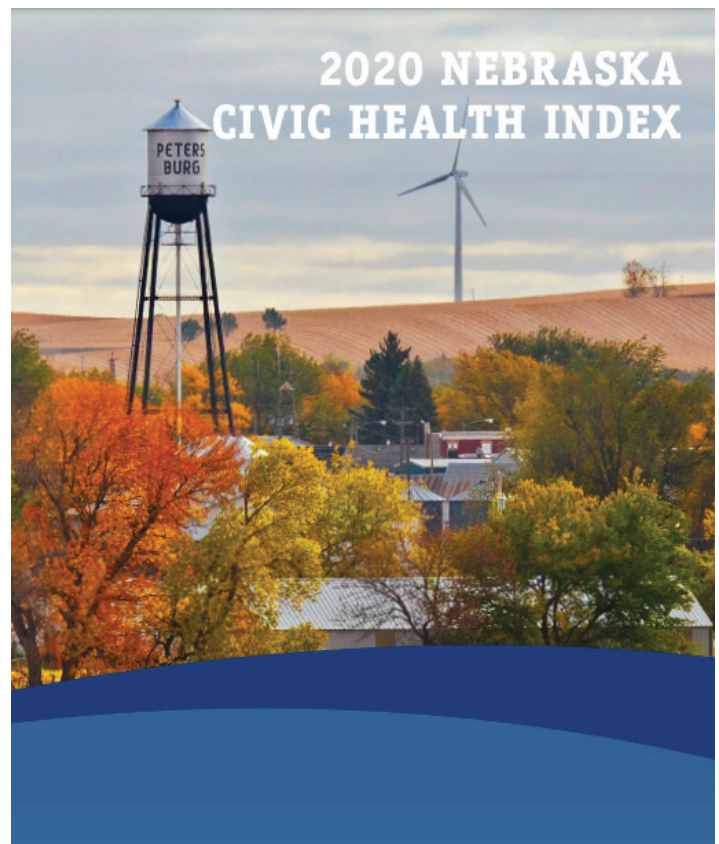
The number of youth and adults who participated in civic health presentations virtually in counties across the state in 2021.



5 Virtual Community Builder Workshops across Nebraska on topics such as neighborhood safety, how to engage in the legislative process, and social connectivity's role in civic engagement.

IN 2022, OUR CIVIC HEALTH PROGRAM WILL:

- Continue virtual and in-person conversations and actions across the state based on the findings of the *Nebraska Civic Health Index*
- Host even more workshops, training, and gatherings for civic catalysts in the form of Community Builder Workshops, Civic Health Webinars, and Civic Saturdays
- Reaffirm neighborhood priorities and engage advocates and city leaders on housing policy reform – including an Equitable Development Scorecard for Lincoln, to be used in project planning and development
- Launch the *Truth in Media Project*, an initiative to inform, educate, and instill best practices regarding media consumption in the Information Age



See the new Civic Health Index at bit.ly/CivHealth2020.

RECONVENING | REIMAGINING | REFOCUSING **REDEEMING**



See a video featuring our innovative Youth Civic Leadership programs at <https://bit.ly/ReclaimWeYCLvid>.

Navigating our world is easier with the skills embedded in our outside-of-school programs.

YOUTH CIVIC LEADERSHIP IN 2021-22

Critical thinking. Shared problem-solving. Civil discourse. Understanding local systems. Acting for positive change. These are the building blocks of powerful, responsible citizenship. Civic Nebraska introduces these concepts to students early on – and this year, amid a continued pandemic, turned to our community-based, student-centered Youth Civic Leadership programs to meet a critical need.

Not only did we meet the moment, but we rose to new heights in community engagement and empowerment in 2021.

As COVID-19 persisted, our Youth Civic Leadership programs became even greater neighborhood hubs. Beyond providing daily outside-of-school enrichment and education, they extended into their communities to provide resources, support, and assistance to families. With a host of partners, we distributed more than 1,000 free PPE kits in late 2020 and early 2021. We provided community improvement mini-grants for students

and families to reinforce civic engagement. And by gathering, facilitating, and organizing, we helped expand the state’s network of Little Free Pantries.

In the virtual space, we strengthened our innovative CIVIC U. virtual learning hub and launched the *Service Learning Center for Excellence* resource for Nebraska instructors. And in fall 2021, we built *Forming A More Perfect Union*, an interactive K-12 civics enrichment curriculum. In addition to being embedded in Civic Nebraska’s before- and after-school programs, *Forming a More Perfect Union* is used for free by educators and after-school providers across our state.

“We the People” means our youngest citizens, too. Students who think critically about, and make meaning of, societal issues are better able to navigate their individual environments and succeed in them. Our Youth Civic Leadership programs empower young people to critically and creatively engage with the world – and work to improve it.

RECOUNTING 'WE' YOUTH CIVIC LEADERSHIP BY THE NUMBERS

20

Short films featured during the inaugural Lincoln

CommUNITY Student Film Festival, which originated in our high-school Community Learning Centers in Lincoln and was eventually featured at Lincoln Arts Fest in June.



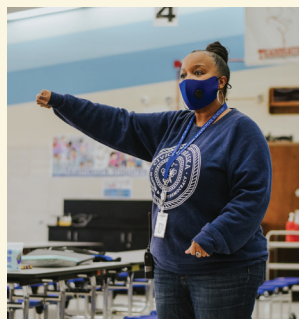
21

Schools across the state that are touched by Civic Nebraska's programs. These include our Community Learning Centers, engaging clubs, and service-learning programs in all grades in urban and rural Nebraska.

94

Dedicated full- and part-time staff that make up our

Youth Civic Leadership program, up from just two staff members in 2014. This team delivers high-quality programming every day, before and after school.



1

Every single student, every single family, every single team member contributes to the success of the Youth Civic Leadership mission: One organization dedicated to creating a robust Nebraska democracy that is supported by good citizens.

IN THE COMING YEAR, OUR YOUTH CIVIC LEADERSHIP PROGRAM WILL:

- Implement mission-aligned programming, continuing to build on the foundation of *Forming a More Perfect Union* to erect a powerful framework for adding civics and citizenship to all of our programs
- Expand service-learning programs in Greater Nebraska to help students learn to value their hometowns and invest in making them better places to live and work
- Continue to create environments where children learn and families are confident that they are safe and healthy in efficient, sustainable out-of-school-time programs

FINANCIALS

Funding Allocations, Fiscal Year 2020-21

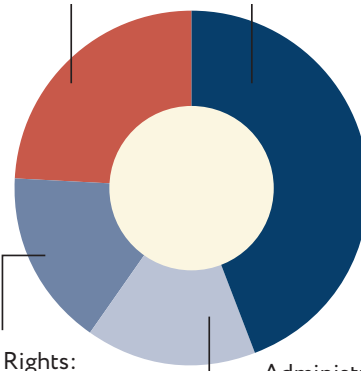
Civic Health Programs:
\$535,865.92

Youth Civic Leadership:
\$1,508,707.18

Voting Rights:
\$543,882.96

Administrative and Program Support:
\$821,271.74

TOTAL:
\$3,409,727.80



GET INVOLVED

Join. We have volunteer opportunities for any schedule, interest, or lifestyle. Call **402.904.5191** or email **info@civicnebraska.org** to learn more.

Share. Follow us on social media and circulate our stories among your social networks.

Donate. We count on donors like you to fulfill our mission. Support our work at **bitly.com/CivNebGive**.

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Creating a more modern and robust democracy for
all Nebraskans.

CivicNebraska.org

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