

CIVIC NEBRASKA ANNUAL REPORT

2024-25





“Strong people don’t need strong leaders.”

This timeless wisdom, attributed to Ella Baker, resonates deeply as we reflect on the year behind us and look to the challenges ahead. Baker, a towering figure of the 20th-century civil rights movement, believed in the transformative power of collective strength. She understood that meaningful and lasting change is born from the ground up when ordinary people work together to build extraordinary movements.

At Civic Nebraska, we take this belief to heart and draw strength from people like you. In 2025, all of us are called to maintain and protect democracy in our great state – and beyond. Civic Nebraska is uniquely poised to harness and guide this collective power to meet the confrontations sure to come, because this has been our mission for nearly two decades.

This report highlights just a slice of our determination, resilience, and impact in 2024. It also casts plans for the coming year and beyond. We think you’ll agree that it’s a testament to the power of Nebraskans as they reach for a modern democracy that includes, represents, and uplifts everyone.

We suffer under no illusions about what lies ahead. But this we pledge: Civic Nebraska will rise to confront anti-democratic efforts in Nebraska wherever and whenever they appear. We do this with enthusiasm and confidence because of you. Time and again, your courage and commitment have reaffirmed Ella Baker’s call to action. Time and again, you and others like you have demonstrated that when the people lead, the leaders will follow.

The strength we need is already within us. As we reflect on 2024 one last time, let’s resolve to use that power wisely in the coming year.

– Your friends and neighbors at Civic Nebraska



EMPOWERING VOTERS



Voting Rights Initiatives & Public Policy

Voting is our most essential democratic right. With it, leaders can be held accountable, and our values are represented. But this right is never guaranteed. We strive to make elections fair, modern, and accessible, oppose harmful policies threatening voting rights, and advocate for measures to safeguard our democracy.

Preserving Nebraska traditions

We upheld the nonpartisan legislative framework by successfully opposing efforts to **weaken the filibuster**, allowing lawmakers to prioritize constituents over party politics. And when out-of-state operatives twice tried to strongarm Nebraska to adopt a **winner-take-all electoral vote system**, Civic Nebraska activated voters and engaged lawmakers to defeat the effort.



Expanding the franchise

Our advocacy for LB20 helped **restore voting rights to nearly 10,000 Nebraskans** with past felonies by eliminating a two-year waiting period to vote. After state officials refused to enforce the new law, Civic Nebraska sued – securing a historic Nebraska Supreme Court ruling mandating the law’s immediate implementation.

Navigating voter suppression

In the first elections with a new voter ID mandate, Civic Nebraska deployed **Election Protectors** to observe polling places and **helped nearly 1,000 voters** via our Election Protection Line. Our voter registration teams **added 10,000 new voters** to the rolls in Douglas County in time for the 2024 general election.

Educating, enlightening, and activating

Through events like the AI & Democracy Summit and National Voter Education Week, Civic Nebraska empowered voters, advanced access, and safeguarded democracy.

Protecting 2025

Our Voting Rights Initiatives and Public Policy teams stand ready to defend against **new attacks on Nebraska’s split electoral vote system**, attempts to add **new restrictions to voter ID**, and **reducing the ability and opportunity** for Nebraskans to cast their ballots freely and securely.



CULTIVATING CHANGE

Civic Health Programs

Civic Nebraska strengthens our state’s civic fabric through training and programs for towns, cities, neighborhoods, and citizens. We help people stay connected, informed, and engaged in their communities because stronger connections lead to better solutions for local issues.



Reducing Nebraska’s ‘news deserts’

The Nebraska Journalism Trust and Civic Nebraska revived the **Omaha Documenters initiative** to train and pay citizens to attend public meetings, take detailed notes, and publish them to create a public record of local government actions. Efforts are now underway to expand this civic journalism model statewide.

Creating new civic catalysts

The **Nebraska Civic Saturday Fellowship** launched with a four-day training for the inaugural “Cornhusker Cohort.” These fellows from diverse Nebraska communities joined a nationwide network to host inspiring civic gatherings that bring neighbors together to reflect on democracy.

Pushing for renter protections in Lincoln

Collective Impact Lincoln spearheaded the launch of a **petition initiative to ban source-of-income housing discrimination** in the city. The proposed renter protections would appear on the May 2025 ballot, empowering voters to shape equitable housing policies.

Assembling diverse perspectives

The inaugural **Idea of America Fellowship** brought aspiring rural leaders together to explore democratic principles and enhance their leadership skills. This bipartisan program prepares participants to serve Nebraska’s future better.

Protecting 2025

Our Civic Health Program will publish the **2025 Nebraska Civic Health Index**, a comprehensive, data-driven report on civic life across our state. Education efforts in **civil discourse, asset mapping, placemaking, and community involvement** will continue.





BUILDING YOUNG LEADERS

Youth Civic Leadership

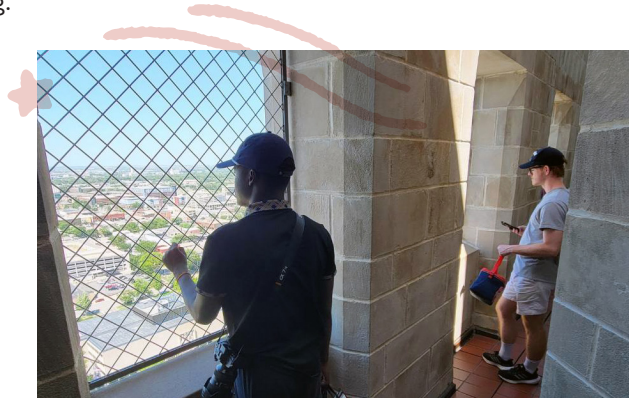
Introducing youth to civic engagement helps them develop critical thinking, leadership, and civil discourse skills. Engaged and informed citizens can assess situations and drive positive change. Students who critically analyze societal issues are better equipped to navigate and succeed in their environments.

Practicing elementary democracy

The **Campbell Elementary CLC student council**, voted into “office” by their peers, collaborates to make their after-school program the best it can be. Each elected leader, kindergarten through fifth grade, represents an elementary grade and gets hands-on experience with “lawmaking.”

Welcoming new Americans

The first class of **New American Young Leaders Academy** fellows graduated. During a nine-month fellowship, Lincoln Northeast and Lincoln High students learned about civic engagement, entrepreneurship, and community involvement. Lincoln Mayor **Leirion Gaylor Baird** proclaimed May 4 New American Youth Leadership Academy Day.



Broadening horizons

In June, Civic Nebraska hosted four high schoolers from California, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Texas through the **American Exchange Project**, a summer project to connect young people with others in parts of the country that are unlike their hometowns.



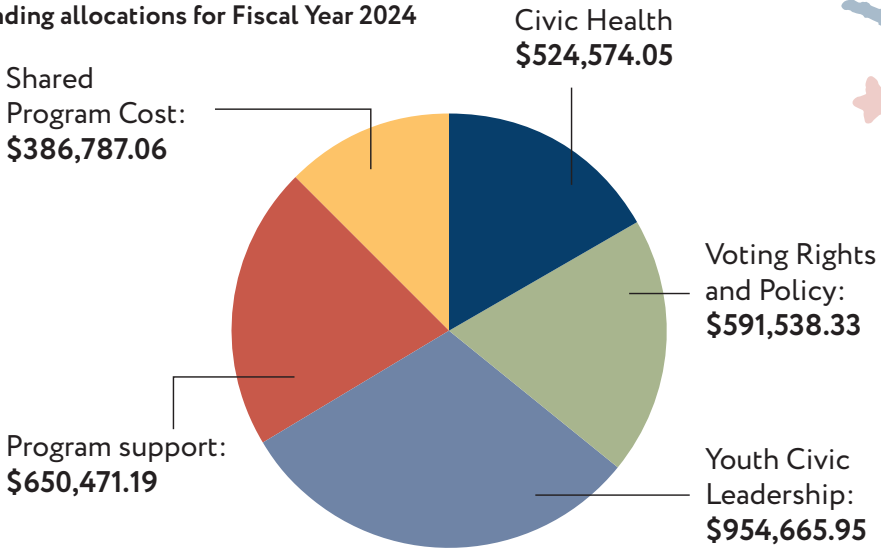
Protecting 2025

In addition to **enriching civics education** daily after school, Civic Nebraska will bring **Kid Governor** to Nebraska. The project immerses fifth-graders in an actual election for their state’s Kid Governor, a fellow fifth-grader to represent them during a one-year term of active leadership.

SUPPORT DEMOCRACY IN A TAX-ADVANTAGED WAY

Financials

Funding allocations for Fiscal Year 2024



Planning your giving can help you maximize the impact of your contributions while benefiting from tax advantages. Consider these options:

Gifts in wills and estate plans: Including Civic Nebraska in your will or estate plan is a meaningful way to leave a legacy for preserving a healthy democracy. A bequest or other planned gift ensures that your commitment to civic engagement and democratic values will continue to make a difference for future generations.

Donor-advised funds: A donor-advised fund, or DAF, allows you to make a charitable contribution, receive an immediate tax benefit, and recommend grants to Civic Nebraska over time. DAFs provide a flexible way to support our work in building a more modern and robust democracy.

Gifts of stock and appreciated assets: Donating appreciated securities, such as stocks, bonds, or mutual funds, is an excellent way to support Civic Nebraska while potentially avoiding capital gains taxes and receiving a charitable deduction.

Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs): If you're 70½ or older, you can make a tax-free donation directly from your retirement account to Civic Nebraska. A QCD allows you to reduce your taxable income while making a meaningful gift to support our mission.

For more information or to learn about these tax-smart giving options, please contact Director of Development Kyle Cartwright, CAP®, at kyle@civicnebraska.org.



STAY INVOLVED



Donate to democracy

Support a modern and robust democracy with your donation. Your contribution empowers our Voting Rights, Civic Health, and Youth Civic Leadership teams to engage Nebraskans of all ages, locations, and backgrounds in the democratic process. Your support is more vital now than ever.



Engage with civic health

Schedule a Capitol Experience Day for your group, consider filling a vital role as a paid citizen journalist through Documenters Nebraska, and get involved in our policy work around safe and affordable housing.



Stay informed

Subscribe to our newsletters for the latest news and updates on our policy initiatives and community efforts. Stay connected and engaged with the work that affects our state.



Vote and empower

Stay informed on crucial election dates and discover ways to amplify more voices at the polls. Join us in ensuring every vote counts in statewide and local elections.



Creating a more modern and robust democracy for all Nebraskans.

530 S. 13th St. Suite 100 | Lincoln, NE
68508 | 402-904-5191

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