

CIVIC NEBRASKA ANNUAL REPORT

2025-26





*"If there is no struggle,
there is no progress."*

—Frederick Douglass



As we reflect on the past year at Civic Nebraska, we return to three familiar Rs: response, resilience, and renewal. In 2025, we saw these traits rise across our communities and among supporters like you who believe in a modern, robust democracy for all Nebraskans. Together, we protected Nebraska's split **Electoral College system** from partisan attempts to impose a winner-take-all process. In April, thousands spoke out to stop the effort, and we stand ready in 2026 should it return.

Your support also helped us produce and share the **Nebraska Civic Health Index**. The discussions that followed are already shaping our 2026 State of Civic Life Conference in Lincoln.

We were honored to co-lead the successful effort to **end source-of-income discrimination** in Lincoln housing. Voters overwhelmingly approved the resident-led measure in May, making the city the first in Nebraska to extend these key protections to renters.

This year also brought the joy of launching **Nebraska's Kid Governor®**. The election of fifth-grader **Charlie Couch** of Ralston and her cabinet has infused our youth civic leadership efforts with new energy and optimism.

The coming year will be pivotal. As leaders in the **Respect Nebraska Voters** coalition, we will work to safeguard Nebraskan-led ballot measures. We will educate and activate voters for the 2026 elections. And we will continue expanding our youth programs to meet this moment.

Thank you for being in this work with us. These extraordinary times demand resistance, resilience, and renewal – qualities essential to democratic progress. We are grateful to be your fellow travelers.

— Nancy Petitto, Executive Director



Civic Nebraska honors our colleague **Kris Hess**, who died on Nov. 15, 2025. Kris worked with warmth, clarity, and care, believed in strong communities, and embodied the values that guide us – dignity, connection, and service. Her loss is felt across our organization, and we carry forward the example she set, striving each day to match the compassion and purpose she brought to her work and to all of us.



RESPONSE: Voting Rights and Public Policy

In 2025, Civic Nebraska advanced voting rights statewide by defending essential democratic structures, expanding access to trustworthy information, and strengthening networks that protect Nebraskans' freedom to vote.

Defending 'The Split'

In April, we helped stop another attempt to dismantle Nebraska's unique split Electoral College system. Our district-based allocation better reflects One Person, One Vote. With hard-liners now pushing to force winner-take-all onto the 2026 ballot, we are again prepared to defend the split and safeguard Nebraskans' voices.

Educating and empowering voters

We led nonpartisan voter education and GOTV for Lincoln and Omaha's historic 2025 municipal elections, including launching Ballot Builder, a first-of-its-kind mobile tool that helps voters research candidates and issues and approach the ballot box with confidence.

Building collective strength

In August, more than 30 statewide partners joined us for Mapping our Vote, a daylong strategy session to share resources, identify threats, and coordinate protection of voting rights. In December, we launched The Apiary, a year-long fellowship for advocates, organizers, and community builders from across the state to strengthen democratic participation.

Protecting free and fair elections

Our team continued voter registration, assistance, and nonpartisan election observation in Lincoln and Omaha, ensuring residents had the information and support they needed to participate fully.



RESILIENCE: Civic Health Programs

Civic health is the everyday trust, connection, and action that strengthens communities.

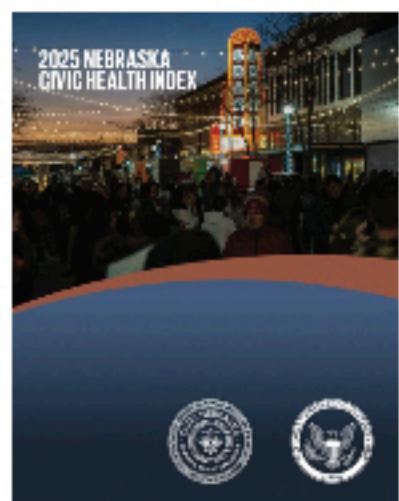
It shows up in how we engage with neighbors, participate in public life, and solve shared challenges. In 2025, Civic Nebraska advanced this work statewide through training, tools, and experiences that build Nebraskans' ability to connect, engage, and act.

Diving deep into democracy

We convened two cohorts of the **Idea of America Fellowship**, bringing Nebraskans together to read, reflect, and reckon with our shared democratic story. Cohorts in Northeast Nebraska and the Tri-Cities built trust, practiced candid dialogue, and explored what it means to lead and live in a diverse, self-governing nation.

Winning new rights for renters

In Lincoln, we co-led a successful citizen-driven campaign to secure **source-of-income housing protections**. After gathering more than 15,000 signatures, voters approved the measure by a two-to-one margin in May.



Respond, Persist, Renew

On May 19, Civic Nebraska will host the first State of Civic Health Conference to bring Nebraskans together around data and stronger civic life. We'll expand Capitol Experience Days and continue to build democratic spaces, such as the Idea of America Fellowship and Civic Saturdays. These efforts deepen connection, foster shared purpose, and renew the practices that keep communities resilient.

Showing students the statehouse

Our **Capitol Experience Day** program brought 1,533 young Nebraskans to the State Capitol, including 26 LPS classes and 11 community groups. Students met state leaders, learned the lawmaking process, and practiced everyday civic engagement.

Capturing a civic snapshot

We published **The 2025 Nebraska Civic Health Index** and shared its findings statewide through virtual gatherings led by partners from the Panhandle to Plattsburgh.



RENEWAL: Youth Civic Leadership

Young people learn democracy by practicing it – by leading, collaborating, and discovering their power to improve their communities. In 2025, our Youth Civic Leadership programs gave thousands of students the space and support to do just that.

Building new generations of leaders

This fall, we launched Nebraska's first Kid Governor® program, a civics curriculum and statewide election for fifth-graders. Students researched issues, built platforms, and cast hundreds of ballots. Charlie Couch of Ralston, running on a platform to support children and adults affected by cancer, won the inaugural election among seven outstanding finalists.

Expanding civic engagement

The New Americans Youth Leadership Academy (NAYLA) expanded beyond Lincoln High and Northeast High to Lincoln North Star, continuing its mission to empower new American students through civic engagement, leadership, storytelling, and service. Highlights included *Baskets for Sudan*, a student-led fundraiser featuring a basketball tournament, cultural activities, and community efforts that raised money for humanitarian relief – a vivid example of young leaders mobilizing their community.

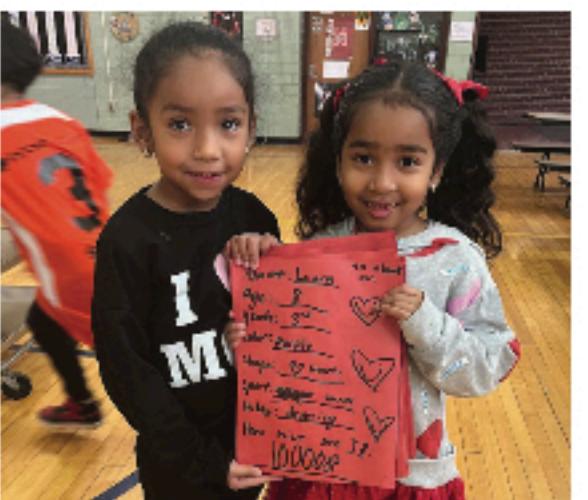
Enriching civics education

Our after-school programs at Lothrop, Sherman, and Lewis & Clark in Omaha served hundreds of students daily. Through hands-on projects, students built collaboration and critical-thinking skills, and each site began planning an intergenerational spring Senior Prom with UNO retirees.

These experiences helped young Nebraskans see themselves as leaders – today and for the long future of our state.

Respond, Persist, Renew

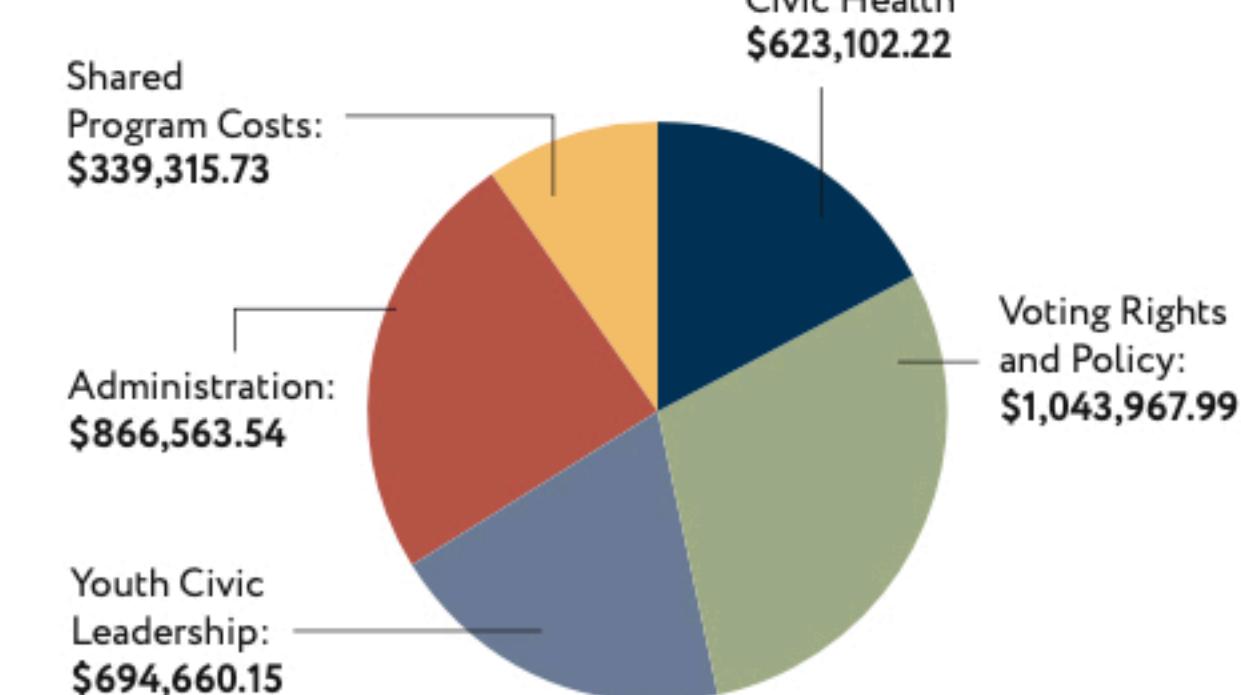
In 2026, we will support the first year of Kid Governor®; expand NAYLA's impact; and continue delivering civic learning through Omaha after-school programs. These experiences help young Nebraskans resist apathy, persist in leadership, and renew our democratic future.



SUPPORT DEMOCRACY IN A TAX-ADVANTAGED WAY

Financials

Funding allocations for Fiscal Year 2025



Planning your giving can help you maximize the impact of your contributions while taking advantage of tax benefits. Civic Nebraska is equipped to facilitate your generosity through donor-advised funds (DAFs), gifts of stock and other appreciated assets, and qualified charitable distributions (QCDs) from a retirement account, among other tax-advantaged tools.

We are also excited to share a new way to recognize the generosity of our supporters and build community among those who are leaving a legacy for our mission.

The **Democracy Trust** honors donors who extend their commitment to Civic Nebraska through intentional legacy gifts, such as provisions in a will or trust, a life insurance policy, or other beneficiary designations. By planning for the future of this work, these supporters help safeguard our democracy and ensure that future generations inherit a Nebraska that is more resilient, inclusive, and representative.

For more information on tax-smart giving options or the Democracy Trust, please contact Director of Development and Chartered Advisor in Philanthropy®, **Kyle Cartwright, CAP®**, at kyle@civicnebraska.org or visit civicnebraska.org/democracy-trust.





STAY INVOLVED



Register to vote – and help others to register.

With voting rights under pressure, protecting your eligibility is essential. Take a moment to register, or check your registration if you're already on the rolls. Revisit it regularly to ensure your status stays active and accurate. Then, encourage friends, family, and neighbors to register. Democracy is strongest when everyone takes part.



Volunteer with Civic Nebraska.

Civic Nebraska offers many ways to get involved, from observing elections to assisting with Capitol Experience Days or supporting community-based civic programs. Whether you have a few hours or a season to give, there's an entry point for you to make a meaningful impact. Deepen your engagement and help us build a stronger, more connected Nebraska for everyone.



Donate to strengthen Nebraska's democracy.

Support a modern and robust democracy with a donation to Civic Nebraska. 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.



Stay informed – and be ready to act.

Subscribe to Civic Nebraska newsletters for the news and updates about our policy initiatives, community efforts, and programs. Stay connected and engaged with the work that affects our state.

Creating a more modern and robust democracy for all Nebraskans.

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