

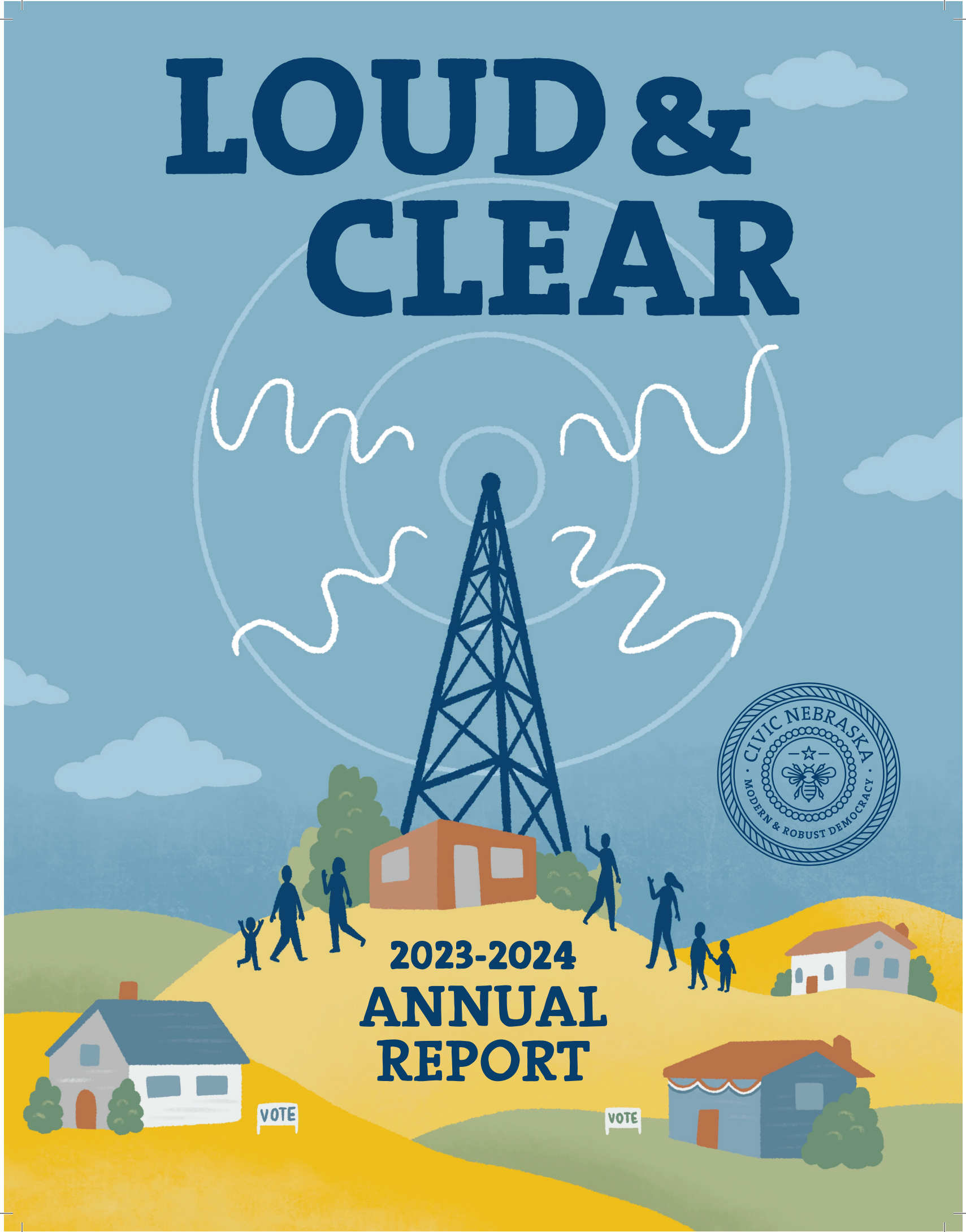
# LOUD & CLEAR



## 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

VOTE

VOTE







## THE WHY OF OUR WORK

**Democracy must be loud.** As the will of the people, it cannot endure in silence. **Democracy must also be clear.** It compels us to hold ourselves and others accountable, especially in times of disruption and clamor. Nebraskans count on Civic Nebraska to guide them on the path to a more modern, robust democracy, and we take on this duty by empowering connection, building understanding, and cultivating advocacy. Civic Nebraska is a potent signal amid the noise.

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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 friend,

**The world is going through great disruption.** As the 2020s unfold, traditional institutions are being upended, once-sturdy systems are being strained, and trust is on the decline. On top of it all, an unprecedented amount of noise surrounds our daily lives and threatens to unravel our shared reality – and our democracy.

Disruption, though, isn't inherently bad. It's how we react to it and engage with it that matters in the end. And if our history is any guide, this current era of turbulence will eventually give rise to a period of change and positive progress, a time that is more efficient, equitable, and durable than what came before it.

Every day in so many ways, Civic Nebraska makes sure this future is realized.

Since our founding in 2008, we have become a trusted guide toward a more inclusive and representative democracy, even during near-constant tumult, crisis, and change. On our streets, in our schools, and in our government institutions, we have lifted up Nebraskans to connect, organize, and advocate. We've employed groundbreaking tools and ways of thinking so that the "new normal" includes everyone. And when our democracy is threatened, we don't hesitate to act. We do this loudly and proudly as a powerful signal of hope and empowerment to all who strive for a better future.

In the pages of our 2023-24 Annual Report, you'll learn about:

- Our **Voting Rights Initiatives** and **Public Policy** teams advocating relentlessly at the statehouse this year to pull a harmful voter ID bill away from the fringes, where it would have disenfranchised untold thousands of Nebraska voters;
- Our **Youth Civic Leadership** programs' innovative approach in connecting students to civic power and providing them the skills and agency to create change in their communities; and
- Our **Civic Health Programs**' intensive, personalized, on-the-ground coaching in towns, cities, and neighborhoods across the state, providing ways to set aside political fighting and reclaim the power of the common good.



Yes, America is noisy. But because of support from people like you, Civic Nebraska cuts through the clutter to remind everyone who we all are, where we all came from, and what we can still be as a people. As this signal continues to spread, more and more of us have gone from unheard to heard, from misunderstood to understood, and from unequal to equal. With your help, we're coming in – loud and clear.

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



Adam Morfeld, J.D.  
Executive Director



[CivicNebraska.org/loudclear](https://CivicNebraska.org/loudclear)

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



# FIGHTING FORWARD

Good people doing good in their community are a “force multiplier” for change. To build civic power for all, we must take individual action. Here are 20 everyday acts that strengthen the common good.



## RECLAIM 'WE'

We don't have to agree on everything, but we must accept that we are all co-creators of our shared democratic reality.



## READ

Reading is an act of engaged democratic citizenship, building empathy and character, expanding knowledge, and encouraging critical thought.



## DO SMALL ACTS

Small acts build and sustain democracy. They compound and spread like ripples. And they fortify our civic fabric.



## GET OUTSIDE YOUR BUBBLE

Our civil society is not judged by how neatly we agree. It is judged by how we can disagree so passionately and so personally and yet still carry out our American experiment.



## CONNECT

When we direct our social capital toward a common goal, we create the means for meaningful change.



## ARGUE LIKE AN AMERICAN

Democracy is forged in discourse and advanced by honest dialogue and in the exchange of ideas. Our nation was founded on an argument and it's our job to continue it.



## SPEAK OUT

Do not just “go along” to be polite. Challenging the status quo protects everyone against oppression.



## SUPPLANT THE MEDIA SLANT

Be wary of the information that is coming to you. Diversify your news diet and be cautious of information that appears too good – or awful – to be true.



## BE POLITICAL

We are all in the political arena. Ignoring politics is in fact a political act, in that we concede our right to others to affect our world.



## REJECT UNTRUTH

Without the creation, understanding, and sharing of facts, democracy dies. Oppose public lying in all its forms.





### CLAIM AND SPREAD CIVIC POWER

Power isn't just reserved for elites. Learn how power is distributed and wielded in your community, and build from there.



### BE A CITIZEN, NOT A CONSUMER

Our democracy is not a business. It is not transactional. It is built on mutual trust and action that require much more than our narrow self-interests.



### FOCUS YOUR TIME, TALENT, AND TREASURE

Find organizations and movements that provide opportunities for people to do things together that we could not do alone.



### RAISE ALL VOICES

Amplify and share the stories of others, particularly those of us who have been historically silenced. Read, share, and champion them.



### ENVISION A MORE PERFECT UNION

Keep picturing what's possible. If you can imagine what a safe, prosperous, and healthy America for all looks like, then it is achievable.



### SPREAD THE FAITH

Democracy only works if we believe in it. If we lose faith in that notion and succumb to the cynicism of bad-faith actors, our institutions and systems disintegrate.



### BE PATRIOTIC

Loving our country requires perseverance and devotion to our founding creed of liberty and equality. Our country: When right, to be kept right; when wrong, to be put right.



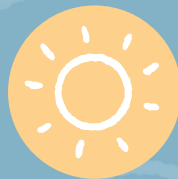
### SHOW UP

Ask yourself what you are prepared to do, out in the open, to defend and protect democratic ideals. Be present for our democracy when called.



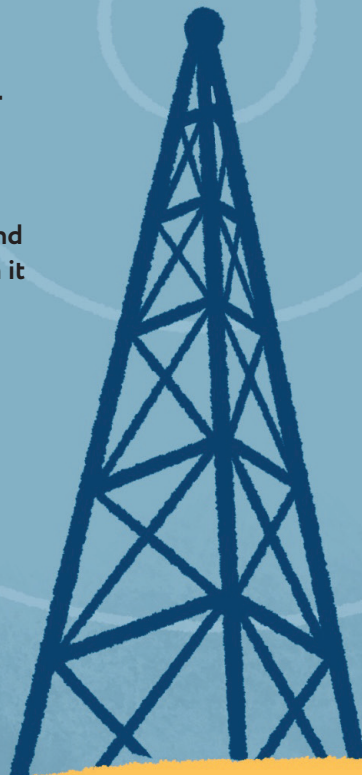
### FIGHT FOR VOTING RIGHTS

Without the vote, there is no method to hold our leaders accountable and no way for our values and vision to be represented. This right is never guaranteed, so it must be defended to the fullest.



### BALANCE HOPE AND CONVICTION

Reaching a shared vision will take time, toil, and effort. Together, little by little and step by step, these forces of progress move us all toward a better place.



# HIGH FIDELITY



A familiar sight: Our team helping register new Nebraska voters and emphasizing the importance of voting.

## **As voters, we are vested with awesome power.**

But if we don't use it, we lose it. The right to vote is never guaranteed, which is why Civic Nebraska amplifies, champions, and relentlessly defends it. Our Voting Rights Initiatives team is in the streets, neighborhoods, and the halls of power to grow the electorate, support pro-voter policies, and protect ballot access for every Nebraskan.

In 2023, those efforts included:

■ **Following November 2022's mandate directing the Nebraska Legislature to impose new identification requirements on all voters**, Civic Nebraska got to work to ensure no one was disenfranchised. The result was LB514, far and away the most accommodating of the proposals offered by state senators. In 2024, Civic Nebraska will focus on educating voters about the new law's effects.

■ **We brought national voting-rights leader Desmond Meade to Nebraska to advocate for LB20**, a bill to end our state's arbitrary two-year waiting period for those

formerly convicted of a felony to vote. LB20 easily moved out of committee to the statehouse floor, where it will be considered in 2024. We're committed to getting LB20 across the finish line and signed into law.

■ **Our nonpartisan voting-rights advocates canvassed Lincoln leading up to the city's municipal and mayoral elections**, providing voters information about registering as well as the various methods of casting a ballot. All told, the team made nearly 5,000 phone calls, knocked almost 1,000 doors, and sent more than 21,000 texts.

**Voting is not just a solitary act.** It's a collective affirmation of our rights and responsibilities. And when we all participate, voting reaches well beyond Election Day by fortifying to the foundations of our democracy. Every day and in every way, our voting rights initiatives ensure that this foundation is solid for generations to come.





## ON THE MIC

*Heidi Uhing, Director of Public Policy*

**Civic Nebraska has long opposed bringing voter ID requirements to Nebraska.** But when voters approved a ballot measure making it inevitable that the Legislature would enact voter ID in 2023, Civic Nebraska led a pro-voter coalition that worked with the Government Committee and election officials to ensure that any new law would be as inclusive as possible.

**As a result, the new law accepts a broad array of IDs;** provides state IDs free of charge; and protects vote-by-mail; and includes a \$1 million public awareness campaign. Civic Nebraska organizers are already in the field conducting extensive voter education work to prepare for 2024, the first election to be administered under the new requirements.

**Civic Nebraska will stand firm at the statehouse to protect free and fair elections.** For more information about and answers to frequently asked questions on Nebraska voters' new ID requirements, scan the QR code below or visit [CivicNebraska.org/voting-rights/id](https://CivicNebraska.org/voting-rights/id).



## BY THE NUMBERS



# 9,307

Calls to Nebraska voters to educate and encourage action on restoring former felons' voting rights

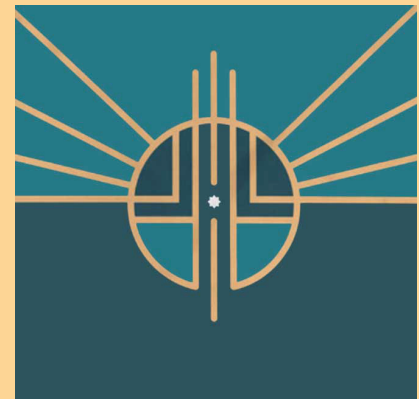


# 563

Nebraskans who pledged their support, contacted their state senators, and/or testified at the Capitol in support of voting rights restoration

# 913

Lincoln voters engaged at their doors in get-out-the-vote conversations ahead of the spring municipal elections, in addition to **21,385** election reminder text messages sent to Lincoln voters ahead of the spring municipal elections



# NETWORKING



Democracy is a prosocial affair. Civic Nebraska empowers citizens to connect, collaborate, and build together.

**Civic health is a community’s level of civic engagement, participation, and collaboration.** We strengthen our civic life – and our democratic way of life – when we all get involved in making decisions, holding leaders accountable, and working together to tackle shared challenges. In other words: We all do better when we all do better.

**Activating for stronger civic health begins with being heard, understood, and valued.** This is a central tenet of Civic Nebraska’s Civic Health Program: We form connections, host space, and identify assets – and by doing so, we tap into new power within our communities.

In the past year, we’ve fortified Nebraska’s civic fabric with:

■ **Civil discourse and media literacy.** Our Civic Health Program spearheaded *Crossing Divides*, a statewide effort of a national project to examine root concerns on distrust of institutions and sources of information. The one-on-one interviews with Nebraskans saw new strategies emerge, as well as support for initiatives to heal conflict and make meaningful, positive change. Meanwhile, our team regularly worked with the

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Nebraska to host civil discourse courses for members, and held screenings of the short film *PURPLE* to bridge Nebraskans’ ideological gaps.

■ **Lifting up neighborhoods.** Collective Impact Lincoln – a partnership with Nebraska Appleseed that strengthens the capital city’s core neighborhoods – took its advocacy work to the next level, launching a housing affordability campaign to rein in source-of-income discrimination. This ongoing campaign, known as *Turned Away*, aims to protect working families and renters while bringing the Star City a step closer to true housing equity.

■ **Rural initiatives.** From Scottsbluff to Falls City, from South Sioux City to McCook, Civic Nebraska evaluated, trained, and promoted relationship-building within our state’s communities to enhance social capital and trust, and brought diverse groups together to address local, regional, and statewide challenges.

Civic health creates strong communities. That’s why we bring Nebraskans together to foster a culture of engagement, participation, and collective responsibility.



## BY THE NUMBERS



Lincolnites we've trained through the Collective Impact Lincoln initiative to advocate, engage within their communities, and become neighborhood leaders

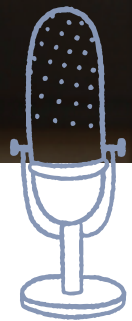


**1,057** Capitol Experience Day participants from youth (836), college (111), and adult (110) groups across the state, including Lincoln, Omaha, and Greater Nebraska



**1,033** Youth and adults who participated in **36** civic health presentations or workshops in **14** cities and **10** counties across the state

**4** Civic Saturdays with more than **160** participants, who connected around values and practices of being an active citizen and built relationships and created new civic traditions that are joyful and communal



## ON THE MIC

*Daniel Bennett, Rural Civic Health Program Manager*

**In 2022, statewide voter turnout was about 55 percent.** With Civic Nebraska's interactive TROVE platform, it's possible to see where turnout was nearly 75 percent and where it was below 30 percent – and begin to answer the question: Why the difference?

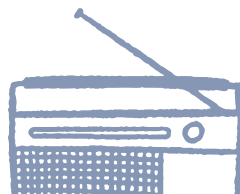
**Nebraskans can delve into voter participation rates for their city, town, or neighborhood with TROVE.** Our interactive Tool to Reflect Overall Voter Engagement shows voter turnout from the November 2022 general election down to the ZIP Code and neighborhood levels. In addition, TROVE compares voter participation against demographic characteristics of census tracts to analyze which may correlate to higher or lower voter turnout.

**You can choose any of three ways to view Nebraska's 2022 voter turnout.** It's broken down by census tract, ZIP code, or county. You also can enter an address to examine turnout exactly where you, or others, live. TROVE also tracks economic and social demographic data like median income, poverty, and race.

To use TROVE, scan the QR code or visit [CivicNebraska.org/trove](https://CivicNebraska.org/trove).



# TUNED IN



Our six before- and after-school programs emphasize civic engagement, empathy, and making a difference in our communities.

Informed and active young citizens transmit a powerful signal: Fresh perspectives, holding leaders accountable, and creating a more inclusive society sustain and expand our democracy. Civic Nebraska invests in youth civic education and engagement across the state as a moral imperative and a strategic necessity. And we do it well.

Our six school-based Community Learning Centers – before- and after-school programs with civic education embedded into students’ daily activities – empower the next generation of leaders to find their voice and learn how to make an impact in their communities. Combining traditional outside-of-school spaces with pro-democracy programming provides students multiple entry points to participate with purpose. In the past year:

■ **Students at three Community Learning Centers established community gardens** to beautify their schools and neighborhoods, provide healthy food alternatives to families in local food deserts, and promote cross-cultural understanding.

■ **Our Omaha-based CLCs collaborated weekly on *Civic Buddies***, in which middle-schoolers at Lewis & Clark Middle School read civics- and citizenship-related childrens’ books to their counterparts at Sherman and Lothrop elementaries via Zoom. Thanks to generous sponsors, the younger children could keep their books to enjoy over and over.

■ **We tied the prosocial aspects of democracy to academic success** by equipping young people with the tools to navigate our socially, emotionally, and political complex world. We integrated those tools into each student’s academic journey, resulting in well-rounded, responsible, empathetic youth who create meaningful change.

**Youth civic leadership is imperative to democracy.** That’s why we start early, empowering Nebraska youth to lead the positive progress they seek in their world, and normalizing civic engagement at an early age.





## ON THE MIC

*Michael Bandy, director of Youth Civic Leadership*

**There is such power in student voice.** The various clubs, programs, and other opportunities we offer are always stronger when students either come up with the idea or have a strong voice in imagining what the outcomes will be.

**This is a powerful responsibility, and the benefits are endless.** Our school-based Community Learning Centers co-create the future with young people and show them how to shape a better world by getting involved. Students get to explore new ideas outside of the traditional classroom, and this is what a more modern and robust democracy is all about.

**Our community is not just made up of the students we serve.** Schools are hubs of thriving communities – families, neighbors, local businesses and nonprofits, and so many others. We are always looking to engage the community beyond students after school. Our CLCs host community cafes, convene family and culture nights, and lead our School Neighborhood Advisory Committees, among many other things.

**We focus on bringing people together and creating space for collaboration.** It's our job to provide a safe place for students to go after school for quality programs that enrich their educational experience.

**Students were uniquely affected by the pandemic.**

We're finding new, creative, and nimble ways to adapt and meet students where they are at. It's challenging work, but so very satisfying.



## BY THE NUMBERS

# 2,018



Individual students served during the 2022-23 academic year via our school-based Community Learning Centers in Lincoln and Omaha



# 558

Students who spent 30 or more hours in our before- and after-school programs in 2022-23

# 83

Percent of our students and families that receive free or reduced school lunches – 100% in Omaha and 65% in Lincoln



# 122

Civics-based enrichment units completed by students in our six CLCs in the 2022-23 academic year



## SALUTE: KENT DAY

**Civic Nebraska started as encore for Kent Day. It became a lot more.**

After 30 years in the classroom, our founding director of youth civic leadership – who retired March 1, 2023 – was my first full-time hire in 2012. Kent created, then built up our Youth Civic Leadership program, which now serves hundreds of students around Nebraska. Under Kent's guidance, Civic Nebraska's before- and after-school programs grew steadily, scored highly in student, teacher, and parent satisfaction, and encouraged students in our Community Learning Centers to become community leaders. We salute Kent for all that he's done for Civic Nebraska and the families we serve. Kent's kindness, creativity, and dedication continues to be felt – something we hope never ends.

– Adam Morfeld

## WHAT'S NEXT FOR CIVIC NEBRASKA

# THE NEXT WAVE



### IN 2024, OUR VOTING RIGHTS INITIATIVES WILL ...

- Lead the push at the State Capitol to end Nebraska's **arbitrary two-year waiting period** for voters who have fully paid their debts to society following felony convictions.
- Educate and assist Nebraska voters in navigating the state's new **voter ID** law.
- Recruit, train, and deploy dozens of Election Protectors to conduct **nonpartisan election observation** at polling places around the state.
- Knock thousands of doors to **register voters for the 2024 primary and general elections**, and ensure there are as few barriers to the ballot as possible.

### OUR CIVIC HEALTH PROGRAMS WILL ...

- Distribute funds in partnership with the Community Builder Coalition through the **Strong Neighborhoods Grants** program to support neighborhood projects and professional development opportunities for neighbors.
- Share education and resident leadership skill-building/

skill-sharing through a **Renter's Rights** guide and **Democracy Cohorts** in rural Nebraska.

- Expand **Capitol Experience Days** with Nebraska youth and community groups who have irregular access to our State Capitol and government.
- Develop a **civic health self-assessment tool** for individuals and groups to identify their current level of civic health, plus resources for areas of improvement.



### OUR YOUTH CIVIC LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS WILL ...

- Solidify relationships with the communities each of our school-based **Community Learning Centers** serves through family events, collaboration, skill-sharing, and other initiatives.
- Use the 2024 elections as real-time ways to **study and understand the issues** before us, the voting process, and the roles and habits of active, responsible citizens.
- Increase **civics-aligned programming opportunities** so students master the skills to navigate – and thrive in – their worlds.



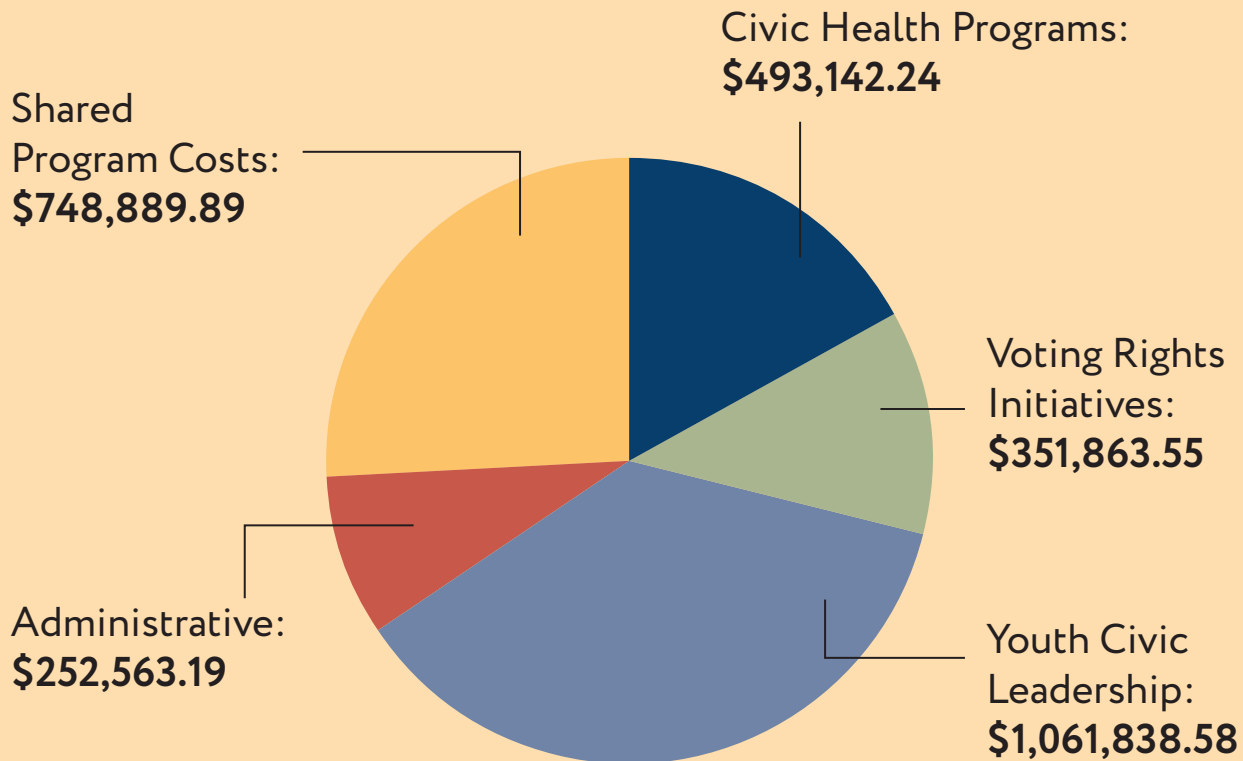
# FINANCIALS

## IMPACTS

Funding allocations, Fiscal Year 2023

## TOTAL BUDGET

\$3,217,409.15



### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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GET INVOLVED WITH CIVIC NEBRASKA

# BOOST THE SIGNAL



Civic Nebraska's message and mission is spread by supporters like you. Your time, energy, and financial support have powered the frequency and strength of our Youth Civic Leadership, Civic Health Programs, and Voting Rights Initiatives. Our work of creating a more modern and robust democracy for all Nebraskans isn't possible without your continued support.

## DONATE

Your support goes directly back into our communities as we build young civic leaders, strengthen connections, and protect voting rights. [CivicNebraska.org/donate](https://CivicNebraska.org/donate)

## GET INVOLVED

Whether it's observing elections, preparing and delivering testimony before governing bodies, or helping guide Capitol Experience Days at the statehouse, Civic Nebraska has a host of volunteer opportunities for you. [info@civicnebraska.org](mailto:info@civicnebraska.org)

## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

We regularly post, discuss, and share on several social platforms.

**Facebook:** /civicnebraska

**Instagram & Threads:** @civicnebraska

**YouTube:** @civicnebraska

**X (Twitter):** @CivicNE

**LinkedIn:** /company/civicnebraska

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## OUR STAFF

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Kyle Cartwright, *director of development*

Steve Smith, *director of communications*

Heidi Uhing, *director of public policy*

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Jann Rouzee, *voting rights organizer*

Creighton Hoefer, *advocacy manager*

### CIVIC HEALTH PROGRAMS

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Audrey Nance, *Capitol Experience Day coordinator*

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Lena Wimes, *program director*

Brianna White, *site director, Sherman Elementary CLC*

Equasha Smith, *site director, Lothrop Magnet Elementary CLC*

Tracy White, *site director, Trailblazers Afterschool Academy*

Haroon Al Hayder, *school community coordinator, Lincoln High CLC*

Kwame Gyamfi, *school community coordinator, Lincoln Northeast High CLC*



Logan Niedzielski, *school community coordinator, Campbell Elementary CLC*

**... and more than 70 dedicated part-time employees serving Nebraskans statewide.**

### 2022-23 ANNUAL REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

**Layout and graphic design:** Katie Nieland

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**Photographer:** Riek Bol



**Creating a more modern and robust democracy for  
*all* Nebraskans.**

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**[CivicNebraska.org/donate](https://CivicNebraska.org/donate)**

