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 empowerment 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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Adam Morfeld and Preeta Bansal

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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.

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

Growth and Innovation
Preeta Bansal, J.D.
Executive Director

Civic Nebraska is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.
COMMUNITY
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INNOVATION
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CIVIC NEBRASKA’S CORE VALUES
HIGHEST RESOLVE

COMMUNITY
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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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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.

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

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.

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.

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

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.

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

- Making meaningful upgrades to our elections infrastructure
- Countering conspiracy theories
- Preventing bad bills and initiatives

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.

I DARE SAY

Heather Engdahl, Director of Voting Rights

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.
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;
- 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.

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

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.

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.

5

3.9

20

8

9

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 eating, 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.

Brianna White, Site Director, Sherman Elementary CLC

I DARE SAY
In the capital city, our Collective Impact Lincoln citizenship. Togetherness and reflection on pathways to powerful, active communal spaces for friends and strangers to come together. We gathered regularly for Civic Saturdays – joyful, community events that bridge opposing viewpoints who investigate their differences. We screened films like PURPLE, a short film about Americans with various backgrounds and ZIP codes taking part in one-on-one conversations about issues facing the state. 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.

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 worked with thousands of fellow Nebraskans, face-to-face and virtually, to nurture the will and ability within communities to tackle mutual problems.

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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 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 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.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR CIVIC NEBRASKA
ON THE HORIZON

What’s Next for Civic Nebraska

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.
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On the Horizon

What’s Next for Civic Nebraska

Our Staff
Administration
Adam Morfeld, Executive Director & Founder
Alex Brechbill, Grant Writer
Bridgette Foerster, Finance & Operations Manager
Alyssa Hague, People & Culture Coordinator
Emily Priefert, Finance & Operations Coordinator
Nicole Seigfried, 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
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

- Youth Civic Leadership: $1,183,871.31
- Civic Health Programs: $515,030.71
- Voting Rights Initiatives: $434,282.89
- Administrative: $646,160.45
- Shared Program Costs: $323,802.55

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
Writers and editors: Steve Smith, Sarah Walker, Alex Brechbill
Photographers: Riek Bol, Gwyneth Roberts
Creating a more modern and robust democracy for all Nebraskans.

CivicNebraska.org

Donate online at CivicNebraska.org/donate

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