



# EXTENSION IMPACT

## Innovating Local Government by Developing Leaders

Wisconsin's 72 counties, 604 cities and villages, and 1,250 towns are tasked with delivering services that support individuals, families, organizations, and businesses. In many cases, the demand for services is greater than the available resources requiring local governments to find innovative solutions to better serve their citizenry. In an effort to build toward innovative solutions, Extension partners with the Wisconsin Counties Association and Leadership Wisconsin Inc. in investigating and identifying leadership development gaps such as the need to specifically address leadership support and development in local government.

In response, Extension's Organizational & Leadership Development Program offers multi-month programs aimed at increasing leadership skills in the community and training designed to meet the unique needs of organizations that serve Wisconsin communities. For example, the Wisconsin Local Government Leadership Academy (LGLA) brings these two educational strategies together to improve the function or capacity of local governments. LGLA is a nine-month, cohort-based program and includes a blend of in-person workshops, virtual sessions, online self-study, and goal-setting to help local government leaders develop professionally while also contributing to the improved capacity of their local government. Sessions draw upon leadership skills and knowledge in the private, nonprofit and public sectors, but are always brought back to their value and application for leading in the local government context. As leaders apply skills learned, they create intra-agency improvements (e.g. improved staff morale, strategic decision-making, and clarity of purpose) that will ultimately improve the overall functioning of local governments as organizations, and thus their capacity to provide quality services to Wisconsin communities.

Participants cited improved relationships with and among staff, greater engagement of staff in problem-solving, clearer communication of goals, expanded networks, and increased awareness of resources that support their local government's goals. They also emphasized that LGLA provided them with strategies to build relationships critical to their leadership role. Immediately following LGLA, over one-third of participants reported completing at least one goal related to a professional challenge they were working to address during their academy experience. The most commonly reported goals were related to improved trust and organizational culture, more effective decision-making and procedures, and moving key initiatives forward. Interviews conducted six months after each program confirmed that graduates applied course content in ways that have had a positive impact on the functioning of their department and/or local government.

*Extension supports elected, appointed, and managerial leaders in improving the overall functioning of local governments.*

While COVID-19 resulted in a significant reduction in opportunities for participants to directly connect, nearly all participants said they had expanded their professional network as a result of their LGLA experience. Upon completion of the LGLA, some participants shared in evaluations that they had already begun to access their new connections for the benefit of their department and local government.

in 2021



30

local governments represented by leaders who participated in the Local Government Leadership Academy



1,200+

educational contacts focusing on increasing the capacity of organizations to meet community needs



The Organizational and Leadership Development program is part of Extension's Community Development Institute. Learn more by visiting [leadershipdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu](http://leadershipdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu).



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