

# ORGANIZATIONAL AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

2023 IMPACTS • UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON EXTENSION



27

PARTICIPANTS IN THE 2023 ELEVANDO WISCONSIN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

13

COUNTIES REPRESENTED IN ELEVANDO WISCONSIN

44

PERCENT OF PARTICIPANTS WITH SPANISH AS PREFERRED LANGUAGE

5

LATINE AND HISPANIC COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO SERVED ON CO-CREATION TEAM

11

COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO SERVED AS GUEST SPEAKERS

Extension's Organizational & Leadership Development Program works alongside community members to co-construct programs that center culture and language in leadership development. These programs increase leadership skills, expand networks, and foster a sense of belonging that leads to participants taking action in their personal and professional lives, as well as in their communities.

## Centering Culture & Language in Leadership Programs

In healthy communities, people experience belonging, feel empowered to participate, and have the opportunity, support, and resources to thrive. For some Wisconsin residents these opportunities remain limited. Native Americans and people of color live and work across rural Wisconsin but their presence in and contributions to rural communities are largely ignored, according to the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity. When black, indigenous, and other people of color are left out of decision-making and opportunities it can result in feeling as though they do not "belong" in the community.

People feel belonging when two conditions are met. First there needs to be "something" (e.g. cause, group, or place) greater than themselves that they value and need. Second, they need to feel as though that "something" values and needs them too. When belonging exists we establish attachment. Additionally, when an individual feels safe, valued, and socially connected they are more likely to stay in the community and become civically engaged.

Community leadership programs can be an effective strategy to foster a sense of belonging while developing the networks, knowledge, and skills to become civically engaged. In Wisconsin, Extension has delivered community leadership programs since the early 1980s. While we offer language access services and encourage individuals from diverse backgrounds to participate, these programs have historically struggled to serve people of color, immigrants, and individuals



whose first language is not English. Additionally, many of these leadership programs center around white-European ideals and avoid specific cultural issues. Thus, individuals from other cultures and backgrounds may not feel a sense of belonging when participating in these programs.

## Relevance in Leadership Development

Wisconsin Extension colleagues responded to these needs by working alongside indigenous and Latine community members to co-construct leadership programs that center culture and language. These new programs blend Extension's experience delivering leadership development, with community members' knowledge of the needs, leadership concepts, and cultural teachings that have relevance and meaning for them and other members of the indigenous and Latine communities.

The first of these programs, Tribes Lead!, is a multi-state and multinational effort. Program partners include Extension, Michigan State University, and a Wise Council. The Wise Council included members of several different Tribal Nations. Recognizing that cultural teachings and indigenous knowledge provide an interconnected pathway for systems of governance, combating social and economic inequities, and addressing critical issues, the partners shaped a unique leadership development program. Participants in Tribes Lead! explored cultural teachings and indigenous methodologies with the goal of preparing to make positive changes in their community. Tribes Lead! was initially delivered in the summer of 2022 and had 20 participants.

The second program is Elevando Wisconsin. This bilingual leadership program was co-constructed with Latine leaders. The program aims to foster leadership skills and expand participants' networks. The eight-session curriculum includes content on practicing equity and inclusion and keeping cultures alive. Every session is delivered in Spanish and English simultaneously and includes participant exploration and discussion of the day's topics. Elevando Wisconsin has been delivered four times since the Fall of 2021, reaching 86 individuals. The majority of participants identify as Latino/a, Latine, Latinx, or Hispanic. Elevando Wisconsin was delivered twice in 2023, reaching 27 individuals from 13 Wisconsin counties. In 2023, approximately 44% of participants indicated Spanish as their preferred language. Five members of the Latine and Hispanic community served on the co-construction team, and 11 community members served as guest speakers/instructors.

## Fostering Belonging

Programs like Tribes Lead! and Elevando Wisconsin are designed to center culture and language in leadership development to foster belonging that leads to civic participation and support culturally responsive and sustaining leadership. To understand outcomes, Extension conducted a comprehensive evaluation of Elevando Wisconsin. The evaluation examined effective co-construction models, best practices, and implementation of culturally relevant leadership programming; evaluated the cultural relevance and impact of Elevando Wisconsin; and assessed program implementation and identified opportunities for improvement. The evaluation team conducted a literature review, interviewed nine alumni and five members of the co-construction team, and conducted qualitative data analysis.

In the evaluation sample, 100% of alumni spoke about growth in their interpersonal skills (e.g. networking), and 91.7% spoke about growth in their personal skills (e.g. valuing diversity) because of participating in Elevando Wisconsin. One alumnus said, "I learned how to know myself so I can be able to know and understand others. ... I also had the joy of strengthen my networks of connections to continue promoting education." These findings are consistent with evaluations of Extension's other leadership development programs.

The evaluation also showed evidence that Elevando Wisconsin is fostering belonging; 75% of interviewed alumni spoke about feeling respected and welcomed, 50% explicitly appreciated the presence of an interpreter, and 25% highlighted socio-cultural diversity among participants. Additionally, 100% of the co-construction team members interviewed emphasized the importance of creating multicultural and bilingual spaces with the aim of serving the Latine community. One alumna shared that Elevando Wisconsin "introduced me to influential people who are familiar with various resources to assist the Hispanic community." She added: "I learned how to overcome challenges associated with belonging to a community with diverse cultures and languages. ... Elevando Wisconsin showed me a different perspective on being Latino and living in the United States."

Ongoing evaluation of Elevando Wisconsin indicates that the program continues to contribute to increased leadership skills, expanded networks, and a sense of belonging that leads to participants taking action in their personal and professional lives, as well as in their communities. Elevando Wisconsin and Tribes Lead! serve as examples of how Extension can partner with community members to design leadership programs that center culture and language in order to ensure every member of the community experiences a sense of belonging, feels empowered to participate, and has the opportunity, support, and resources to thrive.



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