



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION

CENTER FOR COMMUNITY VITALITY



Ripple Effects of Leading Sibley Together

Findings from a Ripple Effects Mapping evaluation

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Ripple Effects of Leading Sibley Together

Leading Sibley Together is a county-wide leadership program that offers community members an opportunity to network, develop leadership skills, and gain an increased awareness and understanding of the assets of Sibley County. Program staff organized a Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) evaluation to document the impacts of the program to date. These core themes emerged from the process.

Strengthening the Sibley County economy

Because participants in the program spend time visiting and learning about communities throughout the county, they learn about businesses and recreational opportunities and begin to patronize them.

Connections through this program encouraged me to do more business in the county.

Facilitating networking and connecting

Relationships built through program have created a peer network that alumni call upon in their personal and professional lives.

I feel like LST makes you part of a larger community, it's like a really great club to belong to.

Challenges moving forward

Participants shared concerns about marketing the program, supporting it financially, and sustaining alumni engagement.

Getting a cohort each year is a challenge - connects with marketing. Once people go through the program, they understand its value.

Increasing teamwork and effectiveness of Sibley County staff

Many Sibley County employees have participated in the program, and this had led to an increasing pool of skilled facilitators and leaders in county government.

All the county employees that have gone through the program are stronger and tighter team members. They reminisce about experiences, have shared language, builds an effective team in our county.

Inspiring and strengthening commitment to community

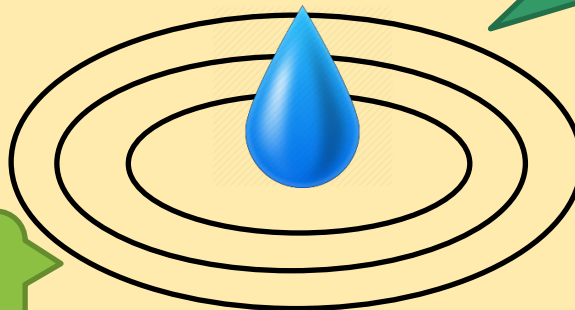
Many alumni credit LST for reinvigorating their sense of commitment to their communities and to volunteerism.

Learning about the program encouraged me to encourage other employees to attend, most of the employees who currently work under me have attended.

Gaining self-awareness and leadership skills

A key focus of the program is the teaching of leadership skills. Participants completed self-assessments such as Strengths Finder and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to learn more about their own leadership styles.

I feel I can take the skills learned and be a more effective business owner, employer, and community member. I can know how I react to situations better, and to open my thoughts to how others react and how a situation may be viewed.



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Background

To manage complex economic, environmental, and social challenges, rural community leaders need to equip themselves with new tools and resources for decision making and civic engagement. Leading Sibley Together (LST) is a county-wide leadership program that offers community members an opportunity to network, develop leadership skills, and gain an increased awareness and understanding of the assets of Sibley County. Participants gather one day each month in communities throughout the county. Each day includes leadership learning activities, meeting with community leaders, and site visits of businesses and organizations in that community. Each day ends with reflection and discussion around the day's events. The program is a nine-month commitment. To date, five annual cohorts totaling 104 Sibley County residents and employees have participated in the program.

LST is one of several “bridging leadership” programs offered by the Extension Center for Community Vitality at the University of Minnesota. Session evaluations along with pre-post program surveys have documented achievement of individual educational outcomes for the program. The author had conducted peer-reviewed community impact evaluations¹ to document the strengths of these types of bridging leadership programs, but no community impact evaluation had been completed specifically for Sibley County. This report presents the results of a Ripple Effects Mapping evaluation of the LST program focusing on community-level impacts.

Ripple Effects Mapping process and methodology

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is an evaluation method that engages program stakeholders to visually map the chain of effects resulting from a program or complex collaboration. The REM process combines elements of Appreciative Inquiry, mind mapping, group interviewing, and qualitative data analysis. More information about the process can be found at <https://publishing.lib.umn.edu/publication/a-field-guide-to-ripple-effects-mapping/>.

On May 25, 2022, a group of program alumni from several cohorts of the program met in Arlington, Minnesota to participate in a Ripple Effects Mapping session.

¹ Tuck, B, Chazdon, S., Rasmussen, C., & Bohn, H. (2020). Measuring the Economic Benefit of Extension Leadership Programs: McLeod for Tomorrow. *Journal of Extension*, 58(4), available at <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol58/iss4/23/>; Rasmussen, C., Armstrong, J., & Chazdon, S. (2011). Bridging Brown County: Captivating Social Capital as a Means to Community Change. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 10(1), available at https://journalofleadershiped.org/jole_articles/bridging-brown-county-captivating-social-capital-as-a-means-to-community-change/.



The lead author facilitated the REM session. At the beginning of the session, participants interviewed each other in pairs using the following three appreciative inquiry-based questions:

- What is a highlight, achievement, or success you had based on your involvement with Leading Sibley Together? What did this achievement lead to?
- What unexpected things have happened as a result of your involvement with the program?
- What connections with others – new and/or deepened – have you made as a result of the program? What have those connections led to?

After the interviews, participants reported out on what they had heard. The reporting out was captured using a mind mapping software program, which participants could view projected onto a screen. Participants also wrote their interview responses on the back of the session agenda and the evaluator collected these sheets at the end of the meeting to ensure that no interview data would be lost. The evaluator facilitated a discussion of core themes for the distinct types of reported program effects, asking follow-up questions to get more detail on the effects and how the program activities had influenced these effects. After the appreciative inquiry questions were mapped, the facilitator inquired about challenges encountered. These challenges were added to the map.

After the session, the author added all the items from the interview sheets and organized the mind map around themes emerging from the interview data. In addition, program alumni who were unable to attend the May 25 session were invited to respond to the three interview questions on their own. A total of seventeen program alumni participated in the process.

Themes from the ripple effects map

The following themes and subthemes emerged during the Ripple Effects Mapping process:

- Strengthening the Sibley County economy
- Increasing teamwork and effectiveness of Sibley County staff
- Facilitating networking and connecting
 - Among alumni
 - Connecting in the broader community
- Gaining self-awareness and leadership skills
- Inspiring and strengthening commitment to community
- Challenges moving forward



The following section provides narrative detail with relevant quotes for each theme. Images of each section of the Ripple Effects Map can be found in the Appendix.

Strengthening the Sibley County economy

Because participants in the program spend time visiting and learning about communities throughout the county, they learn about businesses and recreational opportunities and begin to patronize them.

Participants reported being excited to learn about events, such as the Eggstravaganza festival in Gaylord, and businesses such as the brewery in Gibbon. One participant stated that ***connections through this program encouraged me to do more business in the county.***

It was a highlight to learn about ethanol plants and how farmers have to stagger bringing their grain in.

Another participant noted that learning about area businesses helped her make job referrals for her clients. Similarly, a participant mentioned connecting with classmates on business matters since the program, noting that ***it's been great as we have a familiarity and relationship with each other.*** In addition to learning about specific businesses, alumni reported gaining a bigger picture of the Sibley County economy. A participant reported gaining ***a bigger appreciation for the county, the businesses, the community members, and the work that has occurred to strengthen the county overall.***

Increasing teamwork and effectiveness of Sibley County staff

Many Sibley County employees have participated in the program, and this had led to an increasing pool of skilled facilitators and leaders in county government. As a result of the program, one participant pursued a supervisory role. Others described the

Committee meetings in the county are stronger because of this program - clear agendas and stronger facilitation keeps things on topic.

benefit of having a network of program alumni working in the county as contacts and to brainstorm ideas on how to better the county. One participant commented that ***the county staff who are alumni are now closer to each other, sharing memories and increasing our teamwork.*** Another commented that ***all the county employees that have gone through the***

program are stronger and tighter team members. They reminisce about experiences, have shared language, and build an effective team in our county.

Facilitating networking and connecting

Relationships built through program have created a peer network that alumni call upon in their personal and professional lives. For example, one participant highlighted



that ***our whole class seemed to click together pretty well so I think we have made lifelong connections through LST.*** A participant credited the program for helping her meet people from the community she would not have otherwise met, including a connection to a realtor to help her stepson purchase a home. The program enabled alumni to know more people and have common ground for conversation.

Beyond the alumni network, participants reported broader community connections as a result of the program. One alum deepened connections with the Sibley East School. Another noted ***I feel like LST makes you part of a larger community, it's like a really great club to belong to.*** A participant commented that the program offered ***many highlights, new friendships, networks, and new places and businesses I didn't know about. All around a wonderful experience.***

My biggest success was meeting the new network of peers that I will be able to call on during community events and support.

Gaining self-awareness and leadership skills

A key focus of the program is the teaching of leadership skills. Participants completed self-assessments such as Strengths Finder and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to learn more about their own leadership styles. One participant noted that ***Strengths Finder helped him see not only his strengths but also the strengths of his co-workers.*** Another described a string exercise during which group members needed to learn about having a vision and creating a shared understanding. Through the exercise, team members were able to work together once they created a shared vision of what they were trying to do.

Participating in Leading Sibley was the perfect way for me to build my leadership skills, create relationships with community members and get to know more about Sibley County. I feel that the program gave me a better understanding of others and how to work better with them on a day-to-day basis.

A participant added that ***I feel I can take the skills learned and be a more effective business owner, employer, and community member. I can know how I react to situations better, and to open my thoughts to how others react and how a situation may be viewed. This overall helps to work together in an effective manner.***

Commenting on the progress made by classmates, a participant noted she was ***pleasantly surprised to see some individuals, whom I never would have guessed had interest or leadership abilities, complete the course, and carry those skills forward.***

I gained insight on how people think/act which allows me to understand them better. I also learned a lot about myself and how to better my leadership skills not only in my job but in life in general.

Inspiring and strengthening commitment to community

Many alumni credit LST for reinvigorating their sense of commitment to their communities. An alum who had moved away from Sibley County and then returned commented that initially he was not so willing to be engaged in community life until he went through the program. Another participant noted that being a part of the

Learning about the program encouraged me to encourage other employees to attend, most of the employees who currently work under me have attended.

program made her feel more invested in Sibley County, ***so much so that she remained involved the year after as a day chair organizer.***

A participant commented that it was unexpected to learn how passionate people are about their communities, ***when we went to each community,***

people were passionately talking about their businesses, their volunteers, etc.

As a result of the program, another alum became more involved as an election judge, as a deputy clerk on his township board, with the Lions Club and with local events such as Sauerkraut Days.

Challenges moving forward

Towards the end of the REM session, the facilitator asked participants to describe any challenges facing the program moving forward. Responses fell into three categories: 1) the need to better market the program, 2) the need for continued financial support, and 3) the need for continued participant engagement.

A concern about marketing of the program was that the name of the program may be intimidating for those who may not see themselves as leaders or potential leaders. Participants felt that more testimonials from alumni may be helpful for marketing the program.

Once people go through the program, they understand its value.



The program needs continuing support from the county, but participants noted that the program also can't rely on a single champion or funding source. Participants identified a need for more active involvement of steering committee members in program decision-making and fund raising.

Finally, participants identified the importance of continued engagement of alumni with the program. One participant commented that ***this network can really activate things and develop plans to take to county commissioners.***

Key Takeaways

This Ripple Effects Mapping evaluation of Leading Sibley Together documented that the program has contributed to Sibley County in significant ways, through training leaders, strengthening networks, connecting communities with each other, and motivating civic engagement.

This evaluation builds on previous evaluations of this type of county bridging leadership program that found that this type of program produces \$5.60 in net benefit for each dollar invested in the program² and that this type of program creates broader community benefit by strengthening both human and social capital, which leads to investment by participants in other community assets.³

In a time when people tend to be turning away from community life, the Leading Sibley Together program offers an antidote. The program creates a structure for strengthening skills and relationships among existing and potential leaders in the county.

² Tuck, B, Chazdon, S., Rasmussen, C., & Bohn, H. (2020). Measuring the Economic Benefit of Extension Leadership Programs: McLeod for Tomorrow. *Journal of Extension*, 58(4), available at <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol58/iss4/23/>

³ Rasmussen, C., Armstrong, J., & Chazdon, S. (2011). Bridging Brown County: Captivating Social Capital as a Means to Community Change. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 10(1), available at https://journalofleadershiped.org/jole_articles/bridging-brown-county-captivating-social-capital-as-a-means-to-community-change/; Emery, M., & Flora, C. (2006). Spiraling-up: Mapping community transformation with community capitals framework. *Community Development: Journal of the Community Development Society*, 37(1), 19-35.

Appendix: Sections of the Ripple Effects Map

Strengthening the Sibley County economy

Enjoyed learning about all the different businesses in the county. Comes back to patronize them. Excited to see growth in some of the businesses.

○ A-Town Tavern; Brewery in Gibbon; Eggstravaganza (Gaylord festival)

Surprised to learn how much Sibley County has to offer. Finding himself on this side of the county more often. As a business employee of a large employer in the county, more connected with county commissioner and county employees.

○ He's also very involved in many community organizations.

Connections through this program encouraged me to do more business in the county.

Beneficial to offer leadership training to people who work in small businesses.

My relationships with more people have led to more sales.

Getting to know other community providers led to more services for our clients.

There have been a few of my classmates who I have connected with on business matters since the program. It's been great as we have a familiarity and relationship with each other. I have had to ask for some assistance on various things and knowing these classmates and what they do gives me some resources.

Learning about area businesses which helped in making job referrals for my clients.

Excited to learn about new business start-ups in the county (i.e. brewery)

More frequent visits to business he learned about in the program.

It was a highlight to learn about ethanol plants and how farmers have to stagger bringing their grain in.

Great to learn about small businesses in different towns - such as the cooperative for crafts in Gibbon.

Highlight was learning all about the different businesses in Sibley County!

Highlight was learning how big some of the businesses are in the county. The mornings were also very educational.

Getting to know more than I thought I already knew about each city in our county.

I have a bigger appreciation for the county, the businesses, the community members and the work that has occurred to strengthen the county overall.

Unexpected thing that Annie took a job with the county. Through this program she learned about the position, she already knew co-workers.

By taking this class, she was able to find a job in Sibley County. We have many people who work for the county but live in other counties.

Took the class as an employee looking to get into a supervisory role, which he now is in. He wanted to become more of a leader.

Making new connections - also having a better connection with other alumni who work at the county.

Being able to make the classes flow better - all the way up to the COVID experience which meant limiting participants.

Strong employee participation over the years has resulted in many alumni bringing skills into their positions.

I got to know a great group of people in Sibley County that will continue to be a contact for me in the future to brainstorm ideas on how to better the county through my work in Sibley County Extension.

The county staff who are alumni are now closer to each other, sharing memories and increasing our teamwork.

Committee meetings in the county are stronger because of this program - clear agendas and stronger facilitation keeps things on topic.

All the county employees that have gone through the program are stronger and tighter team members. They reminisce about experiences, have shared language, builds an effective team in our county.

**Increasing
teamwork and
effectiveness of
Sibley County staff**



Facilitating networking and connecting

- Monthly class reunions for 2021-22 cohort - this was unexpected.
- Bought a new house because one of her cohort members was a realtor.
- Noticed that people rotated who they sit with every month in order to get to know more people. ○ This varied somewhat by group. Some has been closer-knit than others.
- I got to know partners from different towns within Sibley county and how they overcame their adversities. ○ This has help me with every day business encounters on how to face them and how to see it with different eyes and has made it easier to take care of it
- I met people from the community I would not have otherwise met and even used one as a realtor for my stepson to purchase his house.
- I have made so many new friends in the community and have strengthened relationships with business owners as well. I love this program and everyone should go through it
- Helped a fellow cohort member with connections to a job.
- My biggest success was meeting the new network of peers that I will be able to call on during community events and support.
- Among alumni ○ The people in the program are great and I think we will have a long lasting relationship moving forward.
- Knowing more faces when you are out and about in our community and having that common ground for conversation.
- Our whole class seemed to click together pretty well so I think we have made life long connections through LST.
- Just that common ground of going through the program together.
- Lots of new co-workers that I had a connection with in the program.
- I felt our class was very connected from the beginning and we all got along very well. I hope the connections we have will continue after Leading Sibley both socially and professionally.
- Lots of new friends. I still talk to many of my classmates today. One of of them has kids that go to the same daycare now.
- I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting all members of the LST program and hope the connections continue. I feel I now have a broader network of individuals to reach out to when needed.
- Connecting in the broader community ○ Knowing who to contact in different communities for different reasons. It's nice to have those contacts.
- Great to have contacts for various reasons across the communities.
- I feel more comfortable meeting the people in my territory.
- Learning about area businesses which helped in making job referrals for my clients.
- I feel like LST makes you part of a larger community, its like a really great club to belong to.
- Highlight: Getting to know what our community has to offer and meeting others who work in Sibley County.
- Many highlights, new friendships, networks, and new places and businesses I didn't know about. All around a wonderful experience.
- I know a lot more about Sibley County and met some great people.
- Deepened connections with the Sibley East School!
- Many connections that have either strengthened or became new. A new appreciation for employees that do so much in a variety of industries in our county.
- Lots of new business connections and knowledge of the businesses as well.
- I find it much easier to call or connect with someone from another community in Sibley county because of many connections I have from my cohort. Those connections save time and often misunderstandings because there is a level of comfort and trust when you know the person you are working with.

Learning more about yourself and the situations that you thought you could handle, but couldn't, or didn't think you could handle, but could. Was able to go into the milking parlor (Five Star dairy) - and she's not a farm person.

Vivid image of string exercise we did where we needed to learn about having a vision and creating a shared understanding. We all were able to work together once we had a vision of what we were trying to do.

After we started the classes, we started to learn about ourselves through the Myers-Briggs and the Strengths Finder. Learning how we think and why we do things they way we do them.

Strengths Finder helped him see not only his strengths but also the strengths of his co-workers.

Improved understanding and relationships with people from other generations. ○ Generational gap - program on this was so helpful in learning why people do what they do.

Ongoing relationship for nine months is impactful - ongoing development of skills and testing out of ideas, implementing things you learn.

You get to practice ideas for a whole month before moving to the next topic. ○ Curriculum and activities are very well thought-out.

Investment and commitment are part of the experience.

The leadership training was great. It was very eye-opening.

I have taken on a leadership position for the organization that I work for where I can put what I learned to use.

Participating in Leading Sibley was the perfect way for me to build my leadership skills, create relationships with community members and get to know more about Sibley County. I feel that the program gave me a better understanding of others and how to work better with them on a day-to-day basis.

Learned new skills & put them to good use.

I gained insight on how people think/act which allows me to understand them better. I also learned a lot about myself and how to better my leadership skills not only in my job but in life in general.

Realizing that not everyone can/should be a leader. Makes me feel better about myself.

I did learn a lot about myself thru Leading Sibley. I have always been one to not participate much in discussions or in front of anyone, but thru Leading Sibley I felt very comfortable and was able to participate.

I believe that I have been more effective as an elected member of the Winthrop City Council because of many skills I learned as part of LST.

Overall, I feel I can take the skills learned and be a more effective business owner, employer, and community member. I can know how I react to situations better, and to open my thoughts to how others react and how a situation may be viewed. This overall helps to work together in an effective manner.

I have been pleasantly surprised to see some individuals, whom I never would have guessed had interest or leadership abilities, complete the course and carry those skills forward.

Gaining self-awareness and leadership skills

This led to the program continuing on for more years. ○ Katie Trent volunteered to lead the program coordinators because the program was so important to her.

At first, was dragging her feet about this program (not big on committee in general). Once she started, she looked forward to it every month. Liked all the business visits. Her whole cohort has made plans to continue to get together.

Now more willing to be involved in things in the community. Grew up here, moved away, came back but wasn't really excited about helping out until this program. Renewed energy and interest in the community.

Being a part of the program made her feel more invested in Sibley County. Participating affected her patients and co-workers, so much so that she remained involved the year after as a day chair organizer.

Took on additional responsibilities with 4H - kids were always in 4H, but this role opened a new door for me.

Now tells people how passionate people are about their communities. She's not from this area - from an area where people were not so invested in their communities.

Learning how passionate people are about their community. When we went to each community, people were passionately talking about their businesses, their volunteers, etc.

Appreciated the program itself - hard to identify exactly what but he talks about the program and encourages people to attend. Something about the whole program moved him to get involved and be on the steering committee.

Youth basketball, community education, t-ball, ditch clean-up.

○ Program has inspired me to become a more active volunteer in the community.

Networking, meeting new people, knowing more about Sibley County. Created opportunities to become more involved where I live...Election Judge, Deputy Clerk on township board, volunteering at local events ie Sauerkraut days, joined Lions club & other clubs.

Learning about the program encouraged me to encourage other employees to attend, most of the employees who currently work under me have attended .

Just being mindful of the importance of community involvement.

It was fun to get together with the great group of participants and talk through ways in which we can all better Sibley County.

Now more willing to get involved - Gaylord festival as an example.

Just learning more about myself, and that I am willing to try and get more involved in my community.

Inspiring and strengthening commitment to community

There was talk about possibly changing the name of the program to make it less intimidating.

Hard to encompass what the program is into a name and short description.

○ Some people may not want a specific leadership program to the name might not be a draw.

○ Marketing for the program could be enhanced - testimonials.

Getting a cohort each year is a challenge - connects with marketing. Once people go through the program, they understand its value.

Program needs continuing support from the county - can't rely on a single champion for the program.

○ Need for continued support

Much of the work is put on Joleen. She has a full-time job otherwise, so more resources would be helpful.

Challenges moving forward

LST is part of my job and I do rely on the steering committee to help make decisions. I would like to see more "active" involvement in the steering committee.

Wish there was more alumni participation.

○ Need for continued engagement

This network can really activate things and develop plans to take to county commissioners.

○ When you get alumni together and start bringing ideas about the county to a meeting, the group could be doing this.