

2021 | By: Kathryn Stower, Research Assistant



100 in 100:

A Learning Tour of 100 Rural Women

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The Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership brings together local talent and resources with University of Minnesota knowledge to drive sustainability in agriculture and food systems, tourism and resilient communities, natural resources and clean energy. The Partnerships are part of University of Minnesota Extension.

100 Rural Women serves and supports rural women by identifying, connecting and creating relationships, models of networking, leadership, mentorship and civic engagement.

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Project Summary

100 in 100: A Learning Tour of 100 Rural Women

Supervisor: *Teresa Kittridge, Executive Director of 100 Rural Women*

Research Assistant: *Kathryn Stower*

PROJECT GOALS

- Pilot the program in five communities in rapid succession
- Connect women in Northwest Minnesota through authentic engagement
- Ignite action in community leadership, civic engagement, and entrepreneurship
- Engage a culturally, racially, economically, and sector diverse group of women to assure that all women voices are heard
- Research gaps in opportunities and barriers to women's leadership in rural areas, particularly Northwestern Minnesota

TASKS & TOOLS

Phase I: Pilot Launch & Literature Review

- Conducted a literature review to identify barriers to rural women's leadership
- Researched existing networks, methods and initiatives that support rural women
- Identified one or two local community/area champion for each of the four Convenings

Phase II: Pilot Survey

- Explored the use of social network mapping
- Developed a research methodology to identify barriers for women in rural areas
- Designed engagement strategies for pre-meeting outreach and recruiting a diverse group of women

Phase III: Pilot Convenings (focus groups)

- Developed a meeting approach/ program model
- Worked with undergraduate intern from University of Minnesota- Crookston

Phase IV: Pilot Wrap-Up and Preparing to Scale Up

- Developed engagement strategies for post- meeting outreach
- Made recommendations on changes to program model for future programming

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The top five leadership barriers identified by women in our survey were:

1. Time
2. Social Norms
3. Recognition
4. Inclusion
5. Caregiving

Opportunities to better support and guide women in leadership roles includes:

1. Establishing mentors for new leaders
2. Providing more emotional support and encouragement
3. Recognizing and identifying leadership qualities
4. Modeling leadership practices
5. Sharing leadership roles
6. Providing safe spaces to practice leadership skills

RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations:

- Build women's confidence and proficiency in leadership skills.
 - Establishing mentorships can help women develop necessary leadership skills and mindsets.
 - Caution: Explore different models of mentorship that are less burdensome for women leaders/ mentors (i.e. multiple mentorships, peer mentorships).
- It is not enough to only address women's individual mindsets, because there are real, systemic barriers that must also be addressed in rural communities.
 - Other top leadership barriers identified by women in the pilot were related to social norms around promotion, standards, recognition, and inclusion.

Recommendations for establishing women's networks in Minnesota:

- Provide childcare, meals, and any other time-savers that might allow greater access for women to participate.
 - The #1 barrier identified by women is time and caregiving responsibilities.
 - Virtual events are more equitable and accessible for some women.
- Create spaces for women to *practice* leadership.
 - Involving participants in leading future 100 in 100 Convenings would provide this kind of learning space.
- Design women-specific leadership development programs that better fit women's typical leadership style.
 - As one Convening participant said: Women leaders are connectors who show "Web-like thinking."
 - Leverage existing models such as network weaving or collaborative leadership.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

- Added survey development and administration to get feedback from a broader audience across NW Minnesota. The survey data also helped inform the program design for the Convenings.
- Reduced the number of Convenings from five to four based on limited time.
- Made every virtual Convening open to any woman from NW Minnesota, although each was designated for one specific city/ area.
- After exploring social network mapping, we dropped this element after the first Convening.
- There were fewer women of color than we had hoped in Convenings and survey respondents.
- The final "toolbox" included materials used in the pilot project Convenings. These will be adapted for the statewide roll-out of the Convenings in the summer of 2021.
- 100 Rural Women received funding from multiple organizations based on our successful pilot project in NW Minnesota.