



Empowering Women to Lead Conference Evaluation

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Central Regional Sustainable
Development Partnership

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EXTENSION



Empowering Women to Lead Conference Evaluation

January 2023 | By: Busisiwe Hands, Research Assistant

This document is a co-publication of the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), the Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, the Northeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, and the Nevis Women's Club.

Project funding was provided by the Jane C. Freeman Rural Policy Fellowship, the University of Minnesota Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and the Nevis Women's Club.

The Community Assistantship Program (CAP) is a cross-college, cross-campus University of Minnesota initiative coordinated by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) and the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (RSDP). The content of this report is the responsibility of the author and is not necessarily endorsed by CAP, CURA, RSDP or the University of Minnesota.

The Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships bring 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.

A member of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the Nevis Women's Club has served the rural community of Nevis for over 100 years. Today, the club, which has over 30 members, continues to extend its reach with a mission dedicated to enhancing communities and the lives of others through volunteer services.

This report is available for download at udc.umn.edu.

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Executive Summary

The Empowering Women to Lead Conference was held on September 16, 2022, at the Northern Lights Casino in Walker, Minnesota. It was hosted by the GFWC Nevis Women's Club in partnership with various sponsors from north-central Minnesota.

The main objectives of the conference were:

- To expose rural women to women leaders, role models and potential mentors
- To provide rural women with the opportunity to form new friendships and networks
- To support women in validating themselves while also being presented with new ideas on how to advance
- To serve as a catalyst for future women's services and development initiatives in rural Minnesota

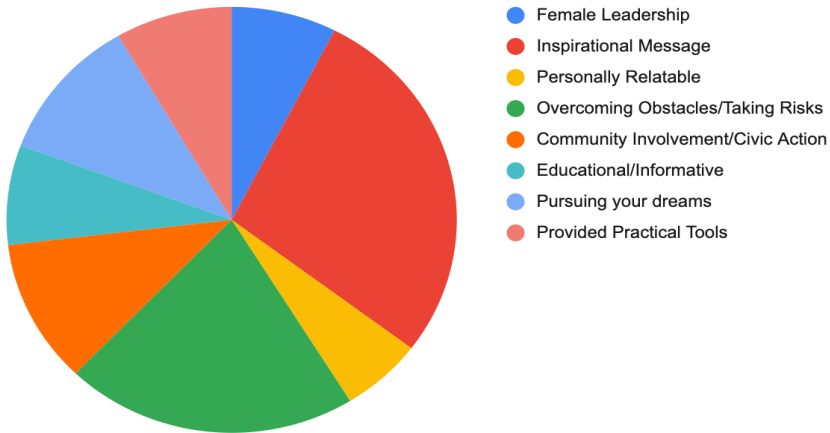
The conference planning committee, consisting of some members of the GFWC Nevis Women's Club, worked with a graduate student from the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs to design an evaluation survey to be completed by conference attendees.

Over 290 women were registered to attend the event and 169 completed the evaluation survey. In November and December, the Nevis Women's Club conducted three focus groups (two in-person and one virtually) as follow-ups to the evaluation.

Key findings

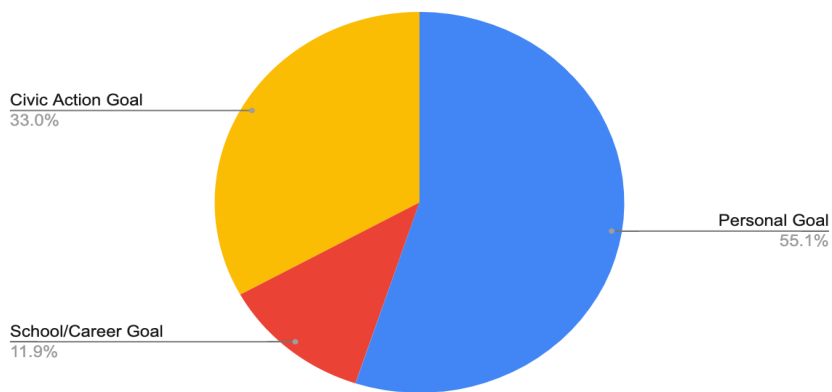
Respondents were inspired by speakers who shared an inspirational message, exemplified strong female leadership, overcame obstacles.

Most Impactful Themes



As a result of attending the conference, respondents said that they intend to pursue personal, career and civic goals.

As a result of attending the conference, do you intend to pursue any of the following? Select all that apply.



Survey evaluation respondents and focus participants suggested a variety of ways that networking opportunities could be created for rural women including support groups and the possibly having an annual women's conference.

Both the evaluation survey and focus groups revealed that rural women needed better access to resources, particularly mental health, affordable childcare, and personal and professional development resources.

Key recommendations

The findings from the evaluation highlighted a need to develop specific supportive services for rural women. They also showed that there is an opportunity to partner with younger women, Native American communities, and other communities of color in north-central Minnesota for the development of intersectional and culturally responsive women's development.

Object Description of Empowering Women to Lead Conference

Introduction

Rural communities experience geographic and information isolation, lack equal access to healthcare, have fewer safety nets for the poor and have few well-paid jobs with career pathways. The 2020 Status of Women and Girls in Minnesota report by the Women's Foundation of Minnesota and the University of Minnesota Humphrey School's Center on Women¹ Gender and Public Policy highlighted additional challenges faced by rural women such as:

- Over-representation in lower-paid, poor-benefit service jobs
- Lack of support for caregiving and decreased access to high-quality and affordable childcare
- Inequities across economic, health and education spectrums, particularly for black, indigenous and women of color.
- Low representation in leadership and public office positions

After a review of challenges and barriers faced by rural women in Minnesota, the GFWC Nevis Women's Club reviewed and updated its strategic plan in the fall of 2020 and decided to support the development of a women's conference. The conference sought to bring together rural women in Minnesota and to support and encourage them on their personal, career and civic journeys.

¹ (Center on Women, Gender and Public Policy (CWGPP) at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs, 2020)

Goals and Objectives

- To expose rural women to women leaders, role models and mentors
- To provide rural women with the opportunity to form new friendships and networks
- To support women in validating themselves while also being presented with new ideas on how to advance
- To serve as a foundation for future women's development in rural Minnesota

Setting

The conference was hosted at the Northern Lights Casino's event center in Walker, Minnesota on September 16, 2022.

Staff and Volunteers

The GFWC Nevis Women's Club selected six of its members to serve as the conference committee, while other members of the club served as volunteers for various tasks related to the planning, promotion, and execution of the conference.

A graduate research assistant from the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs was hired primarily to design an evaluation and analysis plan for the conference. The graduate assistant was also tasked with assisting the planning committee with marketing and communications.

Activities

The conference featured speeches from several women leaders, namely: Teresa Kittridge, founder, and president of 100 Rural Women, Mariah Prussia, owner of MPX Fitness and “Define the Fight” and Nevada Littlewolf who is the Executive Director of Our Children MN. The keynote address was delivered by polar explorer and author, Ann Bancroft.

After the keynote address, there was a panel discussion featuring women from the city of Nevis. Finally, Jodi Heilman, owner of brand and marketing consulting firm, Coach My Brand, facilitated an exercise in which conference attendees will be encouraged to create their own vision boards. Those attending the conference also learned about community resources as various community partners and businesses had exhibits set up.

The Empowering Women to Lead Conference was an opportunity for rural women to be inspired but also to make new connections. For this reason, there would be various opportunities for networking during the day and for an hour and a half after the final item on the agenda.

Budget

The overall budget for the conference, including the cost of hiring a graduate student to assist with marketing, the creation of a post-conference evaluation plan and analysis was approximately \$62,000.

Empowering Women to Lead Conference Logic Model

Inputs	Outputs	Conference activities	Outcomes	Medium-term	Long-term
Resources	Pre-conference activities	Conference activities	Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
Staff and/or volunteers	Secure conference speakers	Speeches	Conference reaches target of 300 attendees	Survey data analysis	Increased awareness of rural women's needs
-Conference Committee Members	Secure conference venue	-Teresa Kittridge "100 Rural Women"	At least 20% of attendees from underserved communities	Evaluation report	Evaluation and focus groups inform future programming related to rural women's needs
-Nevis Women's Club	Select panel members	-Nevada Littlewolf "Our Children MN"	Attract attendees from each county of the central region	Select conference attendees and partners engage in focus group research related to future of rural women's development	Increased funding for rural women's development
-Other volunteers	Plan and finalize of conference agenda Create conference website and promotional materials	-Mariah Prussia "Define the Fight"	Attract attendees from each Sovereign Native nation in the central region	Post-conference data shared with communities, funders, and state organizations	New partnerships are formed
Funding	Promote conference prior to date	Keynote address	Attendees leave with at least one personal, career or civic goal Attendees leave with increased understanding of challenges facing rural women		
-Nevis Women's Club funds		-Ann Bancroft Vision Board			
-Grants	- Email	Exercise	Women emotionally connect with speakers Attendees are inspired to think in terms of new possibilities		
-Donations	-Local community newspapers	-Jodi Heilman "Coach My Brand"			
Sponsors and Partnerships	-Partner websites and social media pages	Networking Exhibitions by community/social service organizations	Attendees identify solutions to personal challenges		
	- Nevis Women's Club Facebook page		Attendees network with other women and form new relationships		
	-Radio	Panel Discussion	At least 40 surveys completed		
	-Television				
	Develop evaluation plan				
	Develop post-conference communications plan				

Evaluation Design Matrix

Researchable Question	Relevant Component(s) in the Logic Model	Data		Analytic Method(s)	Limitations	Potential Findings	Planned Use
		Source and collection method	Sample				
<i>What question are you trying to answer?</i>	<i>Which portion of the program's logic model does this question focus on?</i>	<i>Where will the data come from and how will you collect it?</i>	<i>What portion of the universe does this data include and exclude?</i>	<i>How will each question be answered?</i>	<i>What are the limitations of the planned data source(s)/method(s) and analytic method(s)?</i>	<i>What will this analysis allow you to say?</i>	<i>How will this information inform action?</i>
<i>Which age range do you fit in? Under 18, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65 and over</i>	n/a	Conference survey (hard copy or electronic depending on respondent preference)	Convenience sample. Only attendees who choose to fill out the survey	Calculate number and percentage of respondents in each age group.		Findings will allow us to know the ages of the attendees reached.	Findings will inform NWC and other partners of target age groups to focus on for future services and rural women's development efforts.
<i>How would you describe yourself? Select all that apply -American -Indian or Alaska Native. -Asian.</i>	Short-term outcomes: 20% percent of attendees are from underserved communities	Conference survey (hard copy or electronic depending on respondent preference)	Convenience sample. Only attendees who choose to fill out the survey	Calculate number and percentage of respondents per race category. Selection of more than one category will be described as such in analysis	This will capture only those who responded in the survey, specifically those who choose to identify. Therefore, it might not be representative of all in attendance.	Findings will show represented groups	Findings will inform NWC of % of respondents that belong to underserved groups.

Researchable Question	Relevant Component(s) in the Logic Model	Data		Analytic Method(s)	Limitations	Potential Findings	Planned Use
		Source and collection method	Sample				
<p>-Black or African American.</p> <p>-Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.</p> <p>-White.</p> <p>-PNTA</p>							
<p>What county or sovereign Native nation do you live in?</p>	<p>Short-term outcomes: Attract attendees from each county across central region</p> <p>Attract attendees from each Sovereign nation in central region</p>	<p>Conference survey (hard copy or electronic depending on respondent preference)</p>	<p>Convenience sample. Only attendees who choose to fill out the survey</p>	<p>Identify represented counties and sovereign Native nations and calculate number and percentage of respondents from each.</p>	<p>Sample could feature outliers who are not in the service area</p>	<p>Findings will show which counties and Nations were represented at the conference.</p>	<p>Findings can be used to show partners and donors which parts of the region could benefit from services and rural women's development efforts</p>
<p>What was the most impactful part of today for you? Why?</p>	<p>Outputs: Conference activities Short term outcomes: Attendees emotionally connect with speakers Attendees inspired to think</p>	<p>Conference survey (hard copy or electronic depending on respondent preference)</p>	<p>Convenience sample. Only attendees who choose to fill out the survey</p>	<p>Manual coding of responses to identify themes in responses.</p>		<p>Findings will highlight which activities resonated with attendees and why.</p>	<p>Findings can be used to show that conference activities impacted attendees in a meaningful way.</p>

Researchable Question	Relevant Component(s) in the Logic Model	Data		Analytic Method(s)	Limitations	Potential Findings	Planned Use
		Source and collection method	Sample				
	in terms of new possibilities Attendees identify solutions to personal challenges						
As a result of attending today's conference, do you intend to pursue any of the following? I would like to work on a personal goal (wellbeing) I would like to continue/return to school or pursue a career goal I would like to become more involved in	Outputs: Conference activities Vision board exercise Exhibits by community/social service organizations Short-term outcomes: Attendees leave with at least one personal, career or civic goal Attendees are inspired to think in terms of new possibilities Attendees identify solutions to personal challenges	Conference survey (hard copy or electronic depending on respondent preference)	Convenience sample. Only attendees who choose to fill out the survey	Calculate number and percentage based on the three possible responses. Data to capture all responses as respondents might have more than one goal.	Data can only capture intent based on responses, not actual follow-through.	Findings will show that attendees were inspired to pursue personal, career or civic goals.	Data will be used to show NWC, partners and donors that conference achieved the goal of inspiring women.

Researchable Question	Relevant Component(s) in the Logic Model	Data		Analytic Method(s)	Limitations	Potential Findings	Planned Use
		Source and collection method	Sample				
my community							
Have you made any potential friendship or networking connections today that you want to follow up on?	Outputs: Conference activities Networking opportunities Short-term outcomes: Attendees network with other women and form new relationships	Conference survey (hard copy or electronic depending on respondent preference)	Convenience sample. Only attendees who choose to fill out the survey	Calculate percentage based on yes or no responses.	Close-ended question Data collection might not capture connections made after core conference activities, i.e., during the cocktail hour. Data can only capture intent based on responses, not actual follow-through	Findings will show whether or not attendees made new connections.	Data will be used to show whether networking activities at the conference were effective.
How do you think your community can better support and encourage rural women like yourself? (Examples: women's groups, access to resources,	Short-term outcomes: Attendees are inspired to think in terms of new possibilities Attendees leave with increased understanding of challenges facing rural women	Conference survey (hard copy or electronic depending on respondent preference)	Convenience sample. Only attendees who choose to fill out the survey	Manual coding of responses to identify themes in responses.	The range of responses might be too broad to allow for coding.	Findings will show what rural women's need are	Data can be used as a foundation for future programming and funding geared towards rural women.

Researchable Question	Relevant Component(s) in the Logic Model	Data		Analytic Method(s)	Limitations	Potential Findings	Planned Use
		Source and collection method	Sample				
life coaching, mentoring, etc.)							
Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience today?	Outputs: Conference activities Short-term outcomes	Conference survey (hard copy or electronic depending on respondent preference)	Convenience sample. Only attendees who choose to fill out the survey	Manual coding of responses to identify themes in responses. Providing a summary that captures all responses	The range of responses might be too broad, making theme identification and coding challenging. Most respondents might skip this question	Depending on what each respondent focuses on, findings could be broad.	Uses could vary depending on responses.

Evaluation Design

Scope

This evaluation was designed to assess the success of the Empowering Women to Lead Conference from the perspective of the attendees. Along with a goal of having 300 people attend the conference, the committee members decided on a goal of having at least 40 conference attendees complete the evaluation.

Research Questions and Design Matrix Implementation

The questions for the evaluation focused mainly on the activities and short-term outcomes portions of the logic model.

During correspondence with the conference committee the theme of “empowerment” emerged as a key desired conference take-away. Thus, evaluation questions would not only focus on the day’s activities, but also on how those who attended felt empowered to pursue future goals as a result of having attended the Empowering Women to Lead Conference. Furthermore, because one of the objectives of the conference was to lay the foundation for future rural women’s development initiatives, we included questions that focused on how attendees felt they could be better supported by their communities.

The design matrix on page 11 lists all researchable questions, shows potential findings and the planned uses of the expected findings.

Methodology

The selected data gathering method was a survey which attendees were encouraged to complete at the end of the day. The survey was made available both electronically and as a paper copy.

The paper copy was included in conference packets and a QR code was available for those who wanted to complete the electronic version of the survey.

As an incentive, the first 30 respondents were given a copy of the keynote speaker, Ann Bancroft's book. Those who completed the paper copy handed it in in exchange for their copy of the book, while those, who completed the electronic version needed to present their mobile devices showing they had completed the survey.

The survey was created on Google forms and drafts were shared with the committee for input and subsequent approval, however, editorial authority stayed between Busisiwe Hands, the graduate research assistant, and Molly Zins, Executive Director of the UMN Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership.

The survey was piloted prior to going live and changes and correction were made following feedback from those who participated in the pilot.

Limitations

An anticipated limitation of an event survey was that attendees would simply not be interested in completing it. After a long week and a long day with a packed agenda, people would possibly not be interested in completing a survey. Being aware of this, we designed a survey that would be effective, by providing useful data but also efficient, by being quick and easy to fill out. Piloting showed that the survey could be completed in 5 minutes. The planning committee chose to incentivize completion by offering Ann Bancroft's book to the first 30 respondents, increasing chances of getting a sample size of about 10% of the expected number of attendees.

Following the evaluation, we found that some respondents who had hard copies of the survey still chose not to respond to certain mandatory questions, which is something that the electronic version of the survey did not allow. Regardless of this limitation, due to having over 50% of registered attendees, the evaluation was successful in garnering useful findings.

Survey

Empowering Women to Lead Conference



The Nevis Women's Club thanks you for attending the Empowering Women to Lead Conference!

We'd love to get your feedback on the Empowering Women to Lead conference. Your input will help us learn more about how to better support future rural women's empowerment programs. Results of the survey will be shared with other stakeholders who have an interest in rural women's development.

The survey should take about 5 minutes to complete. Your responses are anonymous.

* Required

1) What is your age range? * *Mark only one oval.*

-
- Under 18
 - 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65 and over

2) How would you describe yourself? Select all that apply. **Check all that apply.*

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer not to answer

3) What county or sovereign Native nation do you live in? *

4a) What was the most impactful part of the day for you? * Mark only one oval.

- 1st Speaker: Teresa Kittridge (100 Rural Women)
- 2nd Speaker: Nevada Littlewolf (Our Children MN)
- 3rd Speaker: Mariah Prussia (MPX Fitness, Define the Fight)
- Keynote address: Ann Bancroft (Polar Explorer, Ann Bancroft Foundation)
- 4th Speaker and vision board facilitator: Jodi Heilman (Coach My Brand)
- Panel Discussion
- Exhibits/Information tables during breaks
- Networking
- Other: _____

4b) Why was this part of the conference most impactful for you? *

5) As a result of attending the conference, do you intend to pursue any of the following? * Select all that apply.

- I would like to work on a personal goal.
- I would like to continue/return to school or pursue a new career goal.
- I would like to become more involved in my community.
- None of the above
- Other:

6a) Have you made any potential friendship or networking connections at the conference that you want to follow up on? * Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

6b) How do you think networking connections for women in rural communities can be created in the future?

7) How do you think your community can better support and encourage rural women like yourself? * Select all that apply.

- Women's groups
- Mentoring
- Life Coaching
- Better access to community resources
- Other: _____

8a) Are there any changes you would make to the conference? *Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

8b) If yes, what changes would you make?

Survey Evaluation Results and Analysis

According to registration data, 292 people were registered to attend the Empowering Women to Lead conference. A total of 169 conference attendees chose to complete the post-conference evaluation. Of those 169 evaluations, 130 were hard copies, while 39 were completed online. Respondents scanned a QR code to access the electronic evaluation.

Demographic Questions

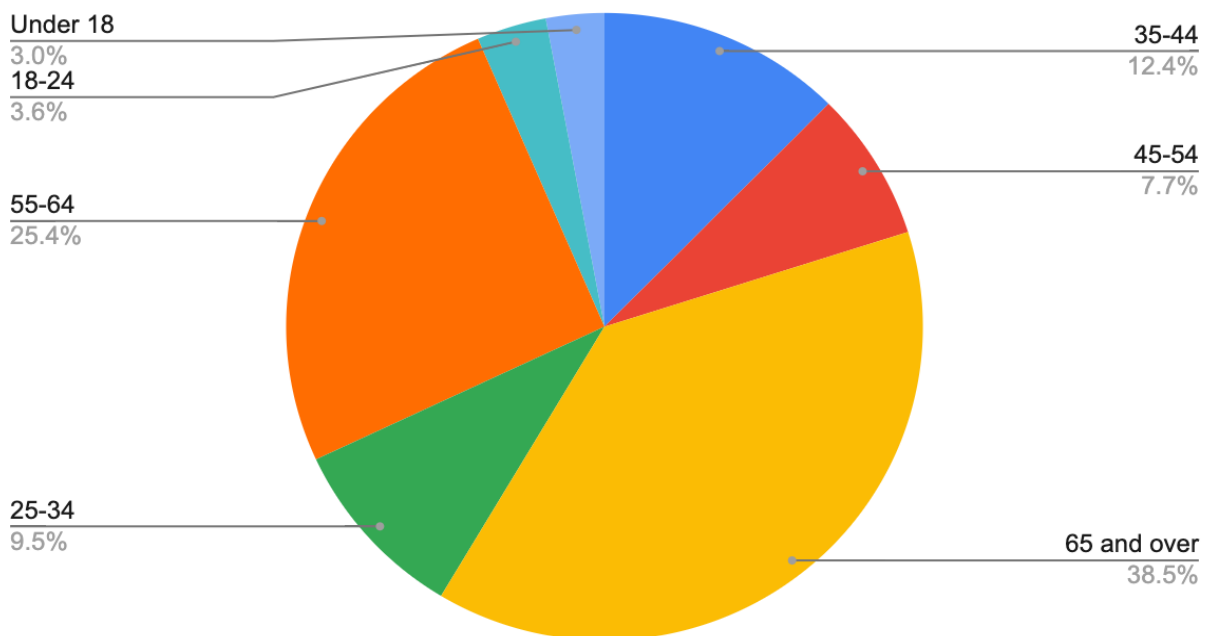
The first few questions of the survey were demographic questions. These questions were asked for the following reasons: first, to know what groups to target for future services and rural women's development efforts and second, to know what percentage of respondents belong to underserved communities. The Nevis Women's Club aimed to have at least 20% of conference attendees be from underrepresented and underserved communities.

The data showed that 84.6% of respondents were white, while 11.8% were American Indian or Alaskan Native. The rest of the respondents chose not to answer that question. Based on the sample data, the goal of having at least 20% of attendees be from underrepresented and underserved communities was not reached.

Multiple age groups were represented at the conference, although most attendees belonged in the older age ranges, with 38.5% being 65 years and older and 25.4% being in the 55-64 age range. Those aged 24 and under made up a total of 6.6% of respondents.

Hubbard County was the most represented at the conference, with 28.4% of respondents, followed by Cass County. Sovereign Native Regions, namely the White Earth Nation and the Leech Lake Reservation made up a total 8.3% of respondents.

What is your age range?



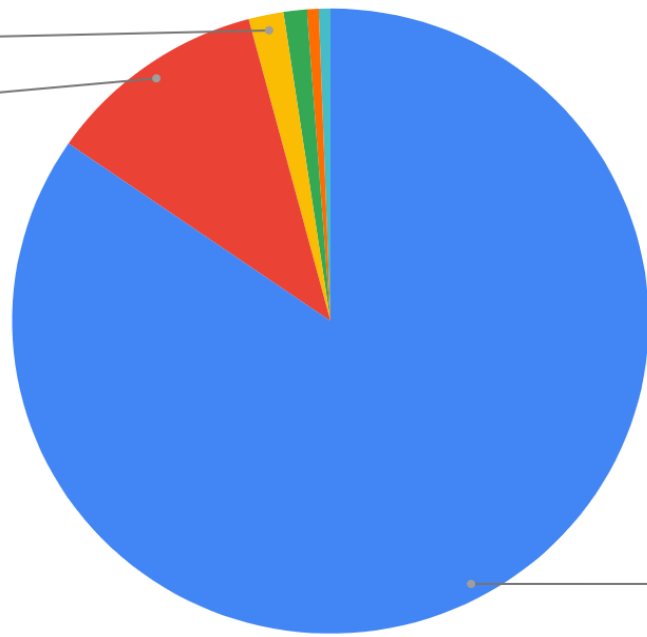
How would you describe yourself? Select all that apply.

Prefer not to answer

1.8%

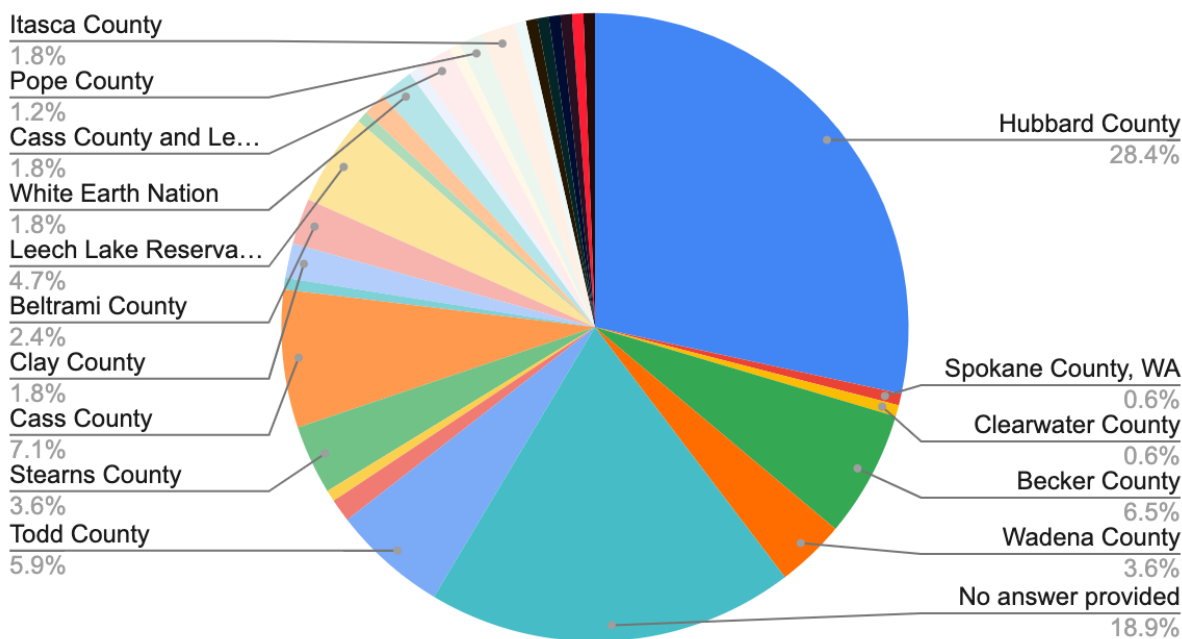
American Indian or A...

11.2%



White
84.6%

What county or sovereign Native nation do you live in?



Conference Outcomes Questions

As previously stated, the Empowering Women to Lead Conference was designed to encourage rural women on their personal and professional journeys by exposing them to women leaders and role models. Those attending the conference were to leave feeling empowered and impacted in a meaningful way.

The evaluation not only asked respondents to name specific speakers or activities that impacted them; it also asked them to provide more information about why those particular elements of the conference were most impactful. The latter data was manually coded to identify themes. The themes that were identified include:

- Overcoming obstacles or taking risks
 - Respondents whose answers matched this theme were mostly inspired by stories that encourage risk taking and beating the odds.
- Pursuing your dreams
 - Many respondents found the speakers who encouraged them to pursue their dreams most impactful.

“She lived her dream and what a challenging one it was. This was something most of us could not imagine doing.”

- Female Leadership
 - The theme of female leadership resonated with respondents. Those whose answers fit this theme were inspired by speakers who held leadership roles like Teresa Kittridge of 100 Rural Women, and leading polar explorer Ann Bancroft. Respondents who identified as Native-American were inspired by fellow Native, Nevada Littlewolf, the executive director of Our Children MN.

“It reminded me that there are opportunities for women to take on strong roles that are not simply disguised as subservient roles called "leadership."

“Nevada was most impactful to me because of the accomplishments and impacts she made being a Native American woman. As a fellow Native woman, I can only imagine the barriers she faced, knowing the everyday barriers we face all the time.”

- Educational and informative
 - Some respondents were mostly impacted by the speakers from whom they learned something new, be it about the state of education in the State of Minnesota or unique resources for rural women.

“I learned more about the problems of the indigenous people.”

“Opened my eyes to the education status of our state”

- Inspired Community Involvement/civic action
 - Many respondents found speakers engaged in civic action most impactful and were inspired to do something in their own communities as a result.

“As someone considering running for school board and making changes in my community, it was super motivational to hear her advice and I am looking forward to connecting with her for advice and mentorship.”

- Personally relatable
 - Some respondents found the stories which had parallels to their own lives most impactful.

“I could relate to her on a personal level through her experiences, background, mindset, etc.”

- Provided practical tools
 - Some respondents preferred being given practical tools for success. Respondents who preferred practical tools liked the breathing exercises by Mariah Prussia and the vision board exercise by Jodi Heilman.

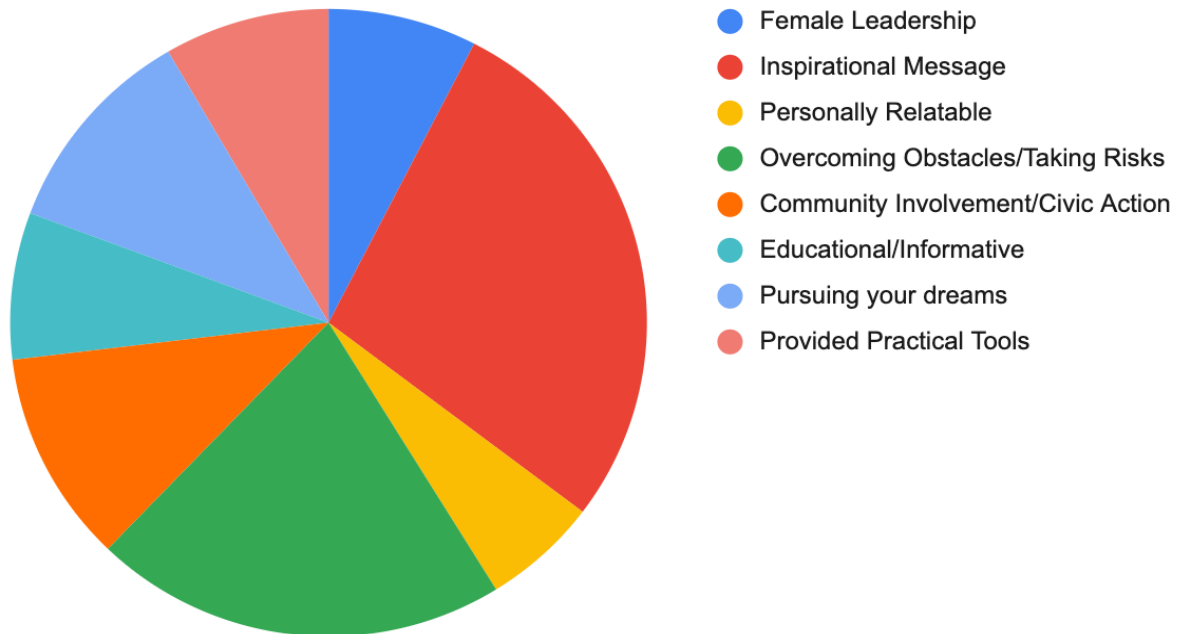
“It gave me practical ways to take action on my goals.”

“Vision board was a great concrete take-away!”

- Inspirational message
 - This was the most popular theme. While respondents did not necessarily elaborate, many selected the speaker that they felt had the most inspirational message as most impactful. Most respondents whose answers fit in this category selected Ann Bancroft for the 4th question, “What was the most impactful part of the day for you?”

“I think a strong woman who knows herself and her goals is the most inspiring thing. I want to get my life together.”

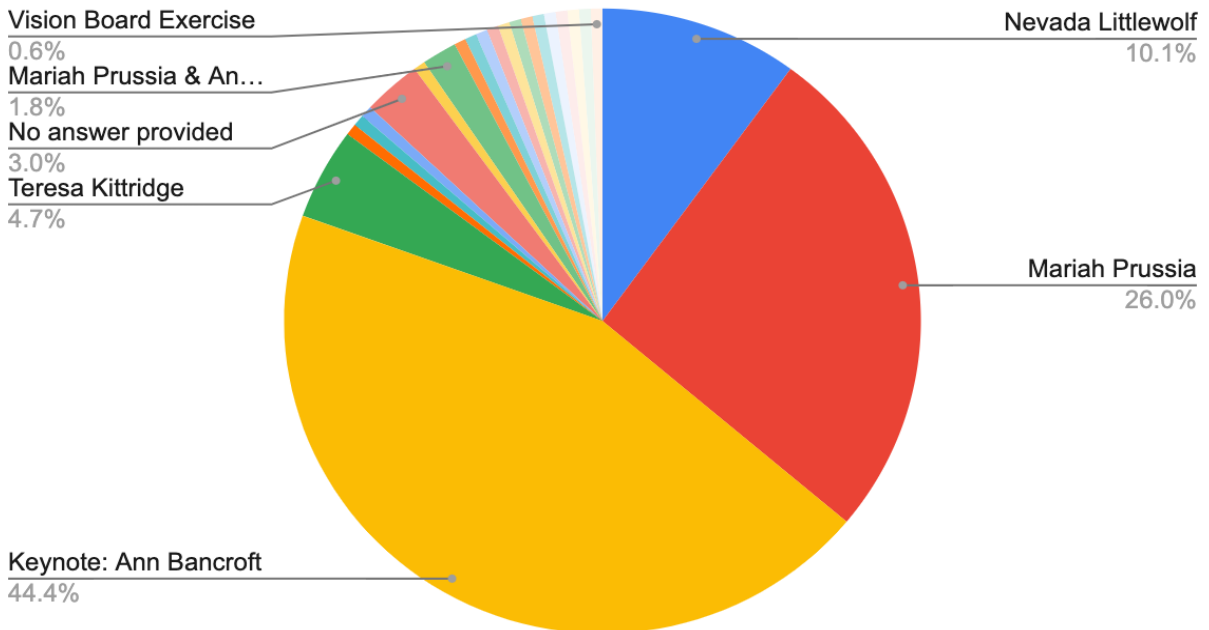
Most Impactful Themes



Question 4: What was the most impactful part of the day for you?

44.4% of respondents said that the keynote address delivered by Ann Bancroft was the most impactful part of the day for them. Mariah Prussia was selected by 26% of respondents, while Nevada Littlewolf was selected by 10.1% of respondents.

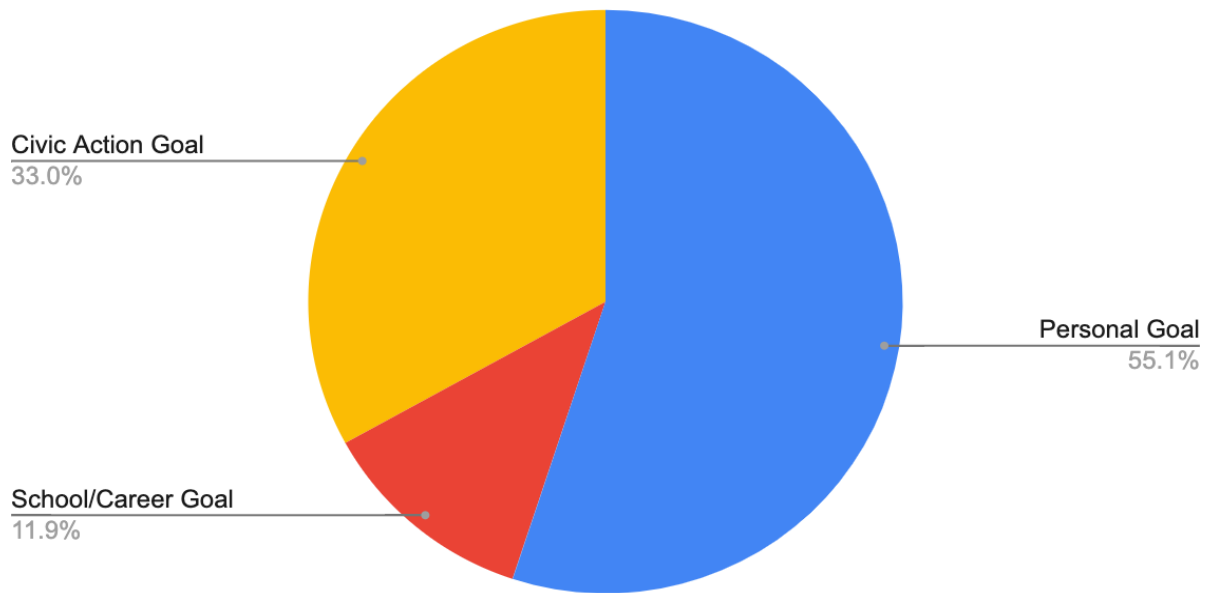
What was the most impactful part of the day for you?



Question 5: As a result of attending the conference, do you intend to pursue any of the following? Select all that apply.

Of the three options given, respondents could select all that applied to them. 63.8% of respondents selected a personal goal, 44.4% selected a goal related to civic action, while 16% of respondents selected a goal related to advancing in their career or continuing their education. The chart shows how each option fared overall:

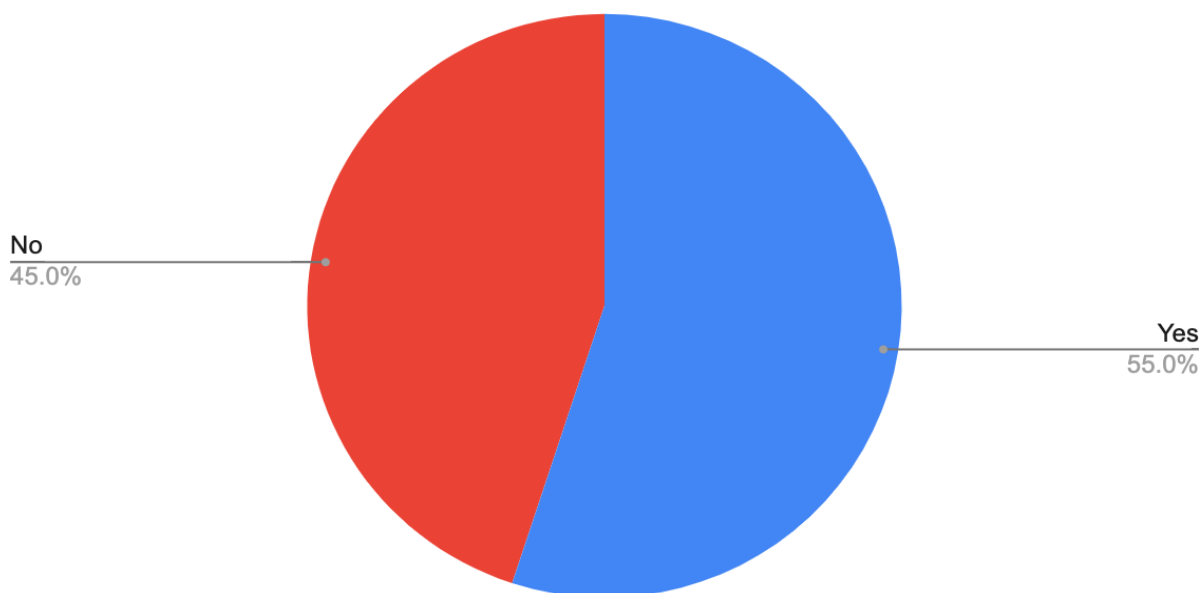
As a result of attending the conference, do you intend to pursue any of the following? Select all that apply.



Question 6a): Have you made any potential friendship or networking connections at the conference that you want to follow up on?

55% of respondents said that they had made connections at the conference that they intended to follow up on.

Have you made any potential friendship or networking connections at the conference that you want to follow up on?



Question 6b) How do you think networking connections for women in rural communities can be created in the future?

The responses for this question were manually coded to identify themes which led to the identification of eight different categories. They were:

- More conferences/annual women's conference
 - Many respondents felt that having more conferences for rural women would be an excellent way to help rural women to network and make connections. Some respondents expressed the desire to see the Empowering Women to Lead Conference held annually.

“Make this event an annual one.”

“Have more conferences like the one I attended today.”

- Virtual meetings and webinars
 - The Covid 19 pandemic has made virtual meetings a key method of engagement and connection. It is then fitting that virtual meetings and webinars were suggested as an opportunity for rural women to network.
- In-person seminars and workshops
 - Even though virtual meetings have become popular, people still want in-person connection. Respondents suggested seminars and workshops as a way for rural women to network.

“Meet and greets with business woman [sic], etc..”

- Community gatherings
 - Some respondents felt that local community gatherings and events not necessarily geared toward women could still provide an opportunity for women to network.
- Women’s groups and support groups
 - Almost 14% of respondents suggested the formation of women’s groups and support groups for rural women to connect.

“I like the idea of conferences and small group gatherings (or small virtual gatherings) where women can meet one another and have collaborative discussions would be great.”

- Social media groups
 - Some respondents suggested forming Facebook groups and inviting people to join and network that way.
- Periodic networking and resource sharing events
 - Some respondents suggested periodic, possibly monthly events specifically for women to come together to network and share information about various opportunities that others could take advantage of.

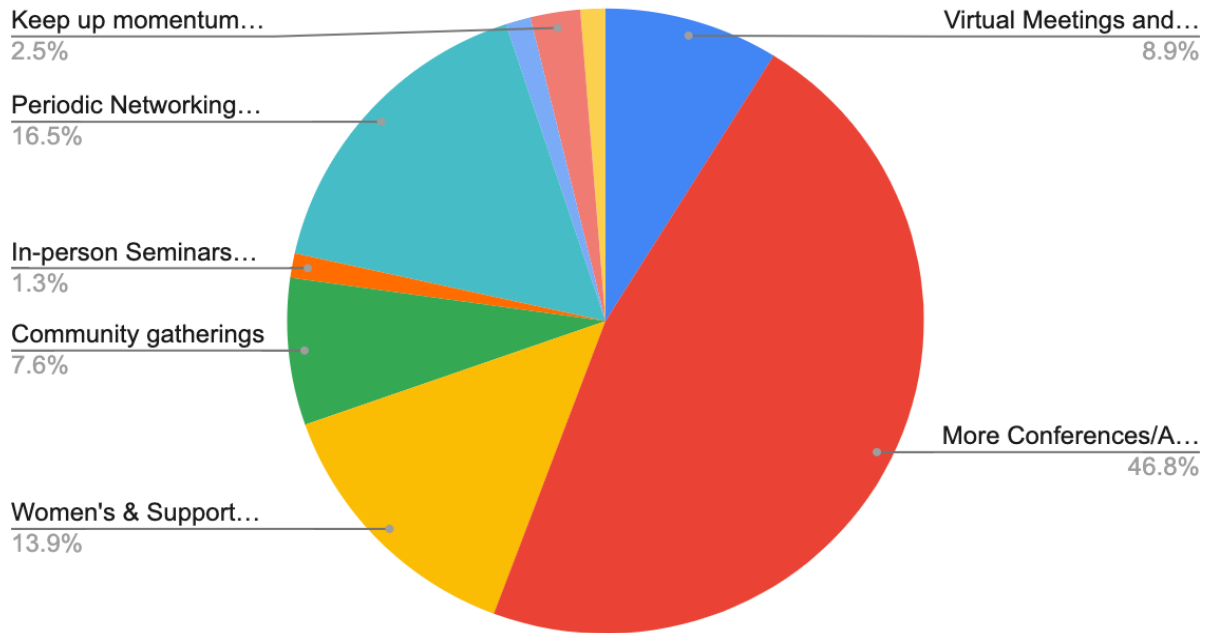
“Perhaps having monthly networking events”

“Creating more opportunities for people to meet. Making resources/opportunities easily available.”

- Keeping up the momentum from the Empowering Women to Lead Conference (a monthly newsletter, outreach, etc.).
 - There were some respondents who saw an opportunity in the conference committee or the Nevis Women’s Club keeping up the momentum by sharing news related to the conference, sending out a monthly newsletter or sharing information about development opportunities for rural women.

“Keep it up somehow - blog post, e-mail list, zoom later periodically”

Creating Networking Opportunities

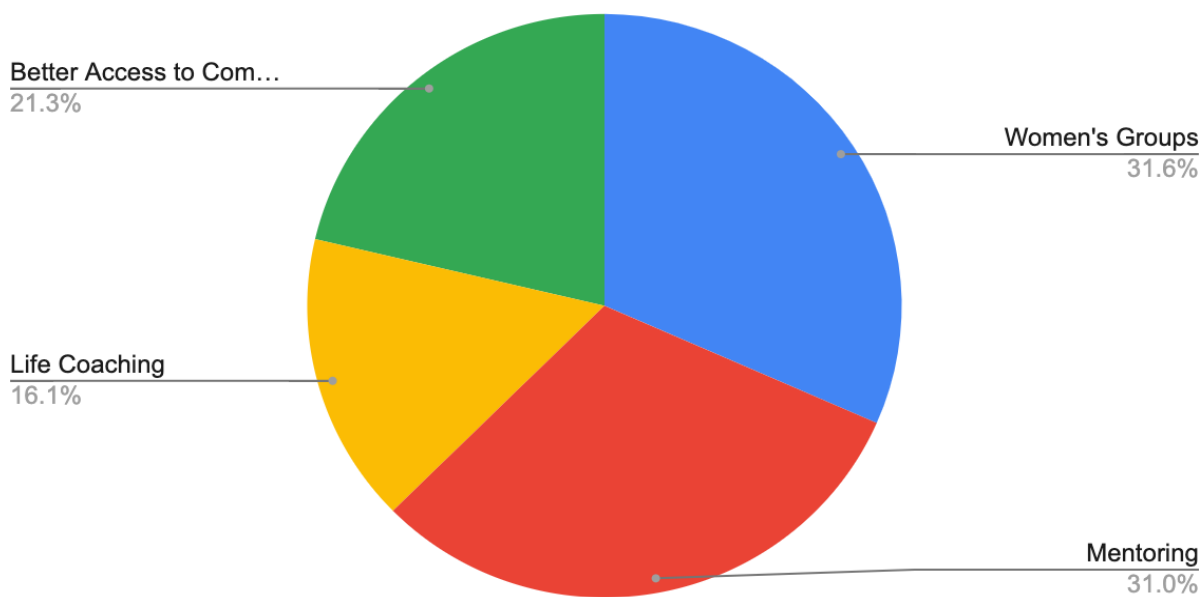


Question 7: How do you think your community can better support rural women like yourself?

Select all that apply.

Most respondents selected women's groups and mentoring as activities that they believed could provide women with support. Women's groups and mentoring made up 31.6% and 31% of overall responses respectively, while improved access to community resources and life coaching made up 21.3% and 16.1% of responses, respectively.

How do you think your community can better support and encourage rural women like yourself? Select all that apply



Question 8a: Are there any changes you would make to the conference?

67.5% of respondents said that they would not make any changes to the conference, while 32.5% said they would. Those who answered yes to this question were asked a follow up question.

Question 8b: If (you answered) yes, what changes would you make?

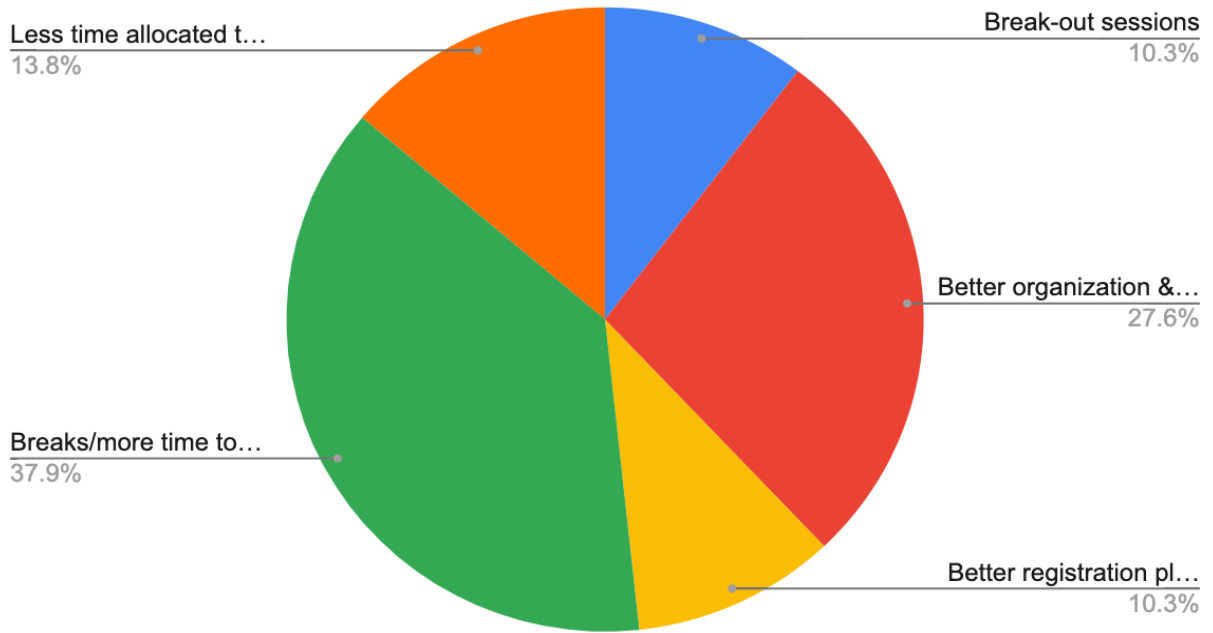
The answers to this question varied and therefore had to be manually coded to identify themes.

Five themes emerged from the responses. They were:

- Less time allocated to non-keynote speakers

- Respondents felt that less time should have been allocated to those who were not the keynote speakers, with one suggesting that they should have been given about 30 minutes each.
- Break-out sessions
 - A few respondents felt that having breakout or self-interest sessions in exchange for less speakers would have been helpful.
- Breaks/more time to socialize
 - Respondents said that they spend a lot of time sitting down listening to speakers and there weren't adequate breaks in-between speakers to socialize or visit the exhibits.
- Better registration platform
 - A few respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with the registration process as it was not user friendly.
- Better organization & time-management
 - There were some respondents who felt that some parts of the conference could have been better organized. They felt that some parts were a little informal and not well-structured. Regarding time, some respondents felt that it would have been better to start later in consideration of people traveling, while others suggested a shorter day.

Most Commonly Suggested Changes to Conference



Post-conference Focus Groups Analysis

Following the conference, the Nevis Women's Club wanted to have focus groups made of a few conference attendees. The purpose of the focus groups was to find out from rural women what future services and women's empowerment initiatives they felt were needed in their communities.

Data from the survey evaluation results was used to develop focus groups questions. The Nevis Women's Club met with three focus groups in November and December 2022. The first two focus groups were in-person, one in Park Rapids and the other in Cass Lake on November 1 & 2, respectively. The third was conducted virtually on December 8.

The focus groups were asked about the following:

- What kinds of events and opportunities they wanted to see for rural women in their communities
- What they thought an ideal women's group would look like
- What they thought the most needed services for women in their communities were
- How they thought more opportunities for rural women to network and connect could be created
- How their communities would benefit from having more women in leadership

Events and Opportunities for Rural Women:

Participants discussed workshops offered through Community Education as something that they have found to be beneficial not only for educational purposes but also as a way to connect with other women in the community.

“Workshops offered through community education are a great opportunity.”

“Have attended a few workshops through community ed good place to meet women in the community”

Participants felt that seminars and workshops for skills and leadership development, as well as volunteer opportunities for mentoring younger women would be effective ways for women to connect, learn and be empowered to lead. Others felt that women in community getting together and forming intergenerational coalitions would help to address some of the challenges faced by women in the community.

“Women can get together there is currently a group where grandmas can get together for support; but always middle of afternoon... [It] would be nice to get together and just share. Maybe it could help the younger generation, empower other women, and find out the needs of [sic] what they are going through.”

The Ideal Women's Group:

Across all three groups, participants said that the ideal women's group should be welcoming and diverse: multigenerational and multiethnic. Participants felt that people would have a rich experience learning from those of a different generation and/or those who did not grow up privileged.

“Diversity, cultures so many in the area we do not know about. [I am] a retired teacher and know there are many ethnic groups in the area... wonderful to have an amazing indigenous population.”

“Many generations of women so you can hear other peoples' stories.”

“Inclusive - because there are specific groups that might appeal to everyone no matter age, ethnicity, and not get to be tight group [sic] within themselves.”

The Most Needed Services for Rural Women:

Participants said that mental health services, affordable childcare, and support for working mothers, job training/skills development workshops were the most needed services for women in their communities.

“Mental health is a concern. Maybe offer classes like art therapy done by people that [sic] are kind, where people can express in a safe place.”

“Do women’s groups get behind policy changes?... I wrote to [Governor, Tim] Walz suggesting it [proposed \$1000 state stimulus checks] could go towards childcare expenses instead of individuals who will just donate the money.”

“You spend half of what you make on daycare.”

“Trainings, workshops, GED, Community College, online classes for those who do not complete [high school].

Networking and Connecting:

Like the survey responses, Facebook was discussed as a tool that could be used to connect women through groups on which events and opportunities could be shared. Virtual networking via Zoom was also thought to be a good tool as rural communities tend to be spread out. Overall, participants felt that there should be intentionality in creating in-person and virtual networks of support for women and ensuring that information about gatherings and other opportunities is easily accessible.

“Incredible powerful tool where you can use to get the word out...Centralized Facebook page and other social media and it is free.”

“[Having] more than one way to reach people and for people who do not drive... [There is] a variety of ways to reach everyone.”

Women in Leadership:

The participants felt that it was important to see women in leadership as it modeled what is possible. Particularly for Native women, it matters seeing someone who looks like them and has had similar experiences rising to a position of leadership.

“Role modeling if you don’t see women in leadership roles you would not think they could do that.”

“We should continue to support women, to encourage them, and let them know that they can do better than some men. [I] want young women to know careers should not be gender based.”

Recommendations

Demographics and Outreach

The data from the survey showed that most respondents were white and aged 65 and over. Considering that this conference was the first of its kind, this data shows that there is room for improvement if there are going to be more events like it in the future.

The demographic data does have implications for future outreach and programs for rural women. It provides an opportunity for organizations involved in rural women's issues to think about how to reach underrepresented and underserved communities and younger women.

Respondents who identified as Native-American were all either from the White Earth Nation or Leech Lake Reservation. These findings will be helpful in determining which regions would benefit from future rural women's development programs, however, they also indicate a need to establish contacts and connections with other Native communities.

Keeping up the momentum

Overall, respondents were pleased with the Empowering Women to Lead conference with many suggesting that it become an annual conference. The excitement about the conference is something that can be leveraged to stay connected to rural women, especially those from north-central Minnesota.

While it is still fresh in the minds of attendees, the Nevis Women's Club has an opportunity to keep sharing information about growth opportunities with those who attended the conference.

There also exists an opportunity to get attendees involved in work that supports the empowerment of rural women.

Based on suggestions from respondents, there are multiple groups and events that could be formed, suggesting that there could potentially be a strong network of rural women that is waiting to be mobilized.

Future Services

Conference attendees were inspired by strong female leadership. As the Nevis Women's Club, its partners and donors consider the future of rural women's development, it will be important to create opportunities for women to interact with those they'd consider role models and to be given opportunities to grow.

The data showed that rural women who attended the Empowering Women to Lead Conference desired mentorship and practical tools for growth. They also desired the creation of spaces where they could feel supported and have access to resources that contribute to their personal and professional growth.

For relevant government departments and non-profit organizations, the data from the survey and focus groups serves as an important basis for improving current services for women in rural communities and establishing future services and programs.

The focus groups revealed that in addition to professional development services, women needed affordable childcare, other resources for working mothers and mental health support services. Some of the needs that were highlighted, like childcare, are important policy issues. Thus, there is an opportunity to partner with organizations who are working to address these issues, at the local and state level, to amplify the voices of rural women.