



Lead For America's Demonstration Communities

Building America's Leadership Force for Community Revitalization

LEAD FOR AMERICA BACKGROUND

Lead For America's (LFA) mission is to ensure that our nation's most dynamic and diverse young leaders are tackling the toughest challenges in the communities they call home. Our core program is a paid, two-year Fellowship for young people ages 21-30 to serve their home communities and states through high-impact placements in local government, non-profits, and local businesses. After the Fellowship, we support alumni in running for office, starting a business or nonprofit, or otherwise advancing as civic leaders in their home communities. We have a particular focus on partnering with rural and urban communities where many young people leave and do not come back. We have placed more than 100 Fellows in their hometown communities and regions in 26 states nationwide, with nearly half of those Fellows serving in rural areas and small towns. We also have an education program for high school and college students with pilot programs in 8 communities/universities, and a policy initiative that has worked on crafting federal legislation supporting national service and civic youth leadership, including the recently introduced CORPS Act. We are currently developing the "Civic Leadership Standard," a certification process that codifies our support of local governments who want to adopt additional, locally-rooted policies and programs beyond our Fellowship and education programs that advance civic leadership.

DEMONSTRATION COMMUNITY CONCEPT

Through the programs mentioned above, LFA has worked with 95 communities nationwide in the last two years. And while we are already seeing the incredible impact that even a single Fellow can have on a community in their first two years, we also recognize that reaching a tipping point of impact—or building a palpable sense of momentum for the community—will almost always require more. LFA demonstration cities are community-wide initiatives designed to comprehensively cultivate civic health and civic leadership capacity.

We expect every Demonstration Community will include the following:

1. **Listening Tour.** Complete a comprehensive assessment of the challenges and opportunities facing the region or community. Identify key community needs, why those needs are not currently being met (i.e. insufficient resources, policy, laws, etc), and any barriers to specifically having outstanding civic leadership (i.e. brain drain, ineffective recruitment/retention strategies, etc).



2. **Bringing existing LFA initiatives to the community.** This includes establishing one or more LFA Fellowships, and having an educational offering for high school and college students.
3. **Multiplier Effect.** Help recruit additional outstanding professionals to the region, and support local talent retention efforts.
4. **National & Regional Models.** Bring proven national and regional models for fostering civic health and leadership to the community as appropriate (i.e. Community Renewal, Report For America, Children's Cabinet, etc).
5. **Community Projects.** Create or catalyze local initiatives that address gaps and challenges found in the listening tour process. This could include programs in the schools, initiatives to get young people of diverse backgrounds to run for office, recruiting teachers and doctors to the area, creating a Youth Commission, and more. This could also extend to policy changes and even advocacy at the state and federal levels, as appropriate or necessary.

We plan to start with a pilot cohort of 5 diverse demonstration communities by the fall of 2021, anchored by our efforts in Dodge City.

WHY DEMONSTRATION COMMUNITIES ARE CORE TO LFA MISSION

1. **Respond to what we've learned and seen.** To catalyze the change we hope to see nationwide, we know we will need more than just the Fellowship and education programs.
2. **Train & inspire existing LFA Fellows and Students.** When we train our LFA Fellows and Students to be civic leaders, we have to show them what is possible, and what it looks like to comprehensively build community.
3. **Establish a Model.** We believe that the Demonstration Cities will serve as models for the nation, and will naturally inspire other similar efforts, even if they are not tied to Lead For America specifically.
4. **Live the Mission.** Having our staff live in and around demonstration communities will mean that everyone, no matter their role in the organization, is able to live and breathe the mission every day. Particularly for our leadership team, we know that it will be essential for us to always remain proximate to the work, ethos, and model we are promoting.
5. **Anchor regional and state-wide initiatives.** Demonstration communities raise the bar for what it looks like (both in terms of commitment, and in terms of impact) to be a Lead For America partner. We believe that demonstration communities will be key to having our current and future state affiliates dream bigger when it comes to determining what is possible and what success will look like. For example, we hope our Demonstration Community in Dodge will anchor our state-wide affiliate, Lead For Kansas. Lead For Kansas statewide initiative would recruit, train, and place 15 or more of Kansas' most outstanding young leaders ages 21-30 in paid, high-impact civic leadership Fellowships (i.e. local government, nonprofit, or local business) each year. For reference, our Lead For North Carolina affiliate currently has 28 Fellows serving in 25



communities across the state. Our Lead For Minnesota affiliate currently has 25 Fellows serving 22 communities across the state. Our hope and plan is that each of those outstanding leaders will now be equipped to enlist their host community and hometown as a demonstration community, too.

DODGE CITY DEMONSTRATION COMMUNITY

The vision is to create a city-wide initiative that focuses on 1) attracting and retaining talent across all sectors in Dodge City and training that talent to be civic leaders; 2) building stronger neighborhoods through a community “friendship house” model and other programming, especially for low-income and immigrant communities; and 3) working with the local school system to develop a customized civic engagement and leadership curriculum that increases students’ involvement in the community and desire to stay/return after graduation. While the implementation of this could take many forms, our goal is to be able to establish our headquarters community as one of the first Lead For America demonstration communities and to be able to then bring that model to the rest of the state and country, with Dodge City being used as the model.

We are currently hiring both full-time and part-time staff in Western Kansas to lead our Demonstration Region and Community efforts here. These full-time staff members will be responsible for creating new programs and initiatives to manifest the LFA mission of building stronger communities.

The point of these roles is to give people creative license to think about the biggest challenges facing the region and community, and to be able to spend dedicated time launching the initiatives or programs that they think will best address those challenges. We also hope the staff hired locally will codify the learnings and best practices in a blueprint/guide for other communities around the country. These staff will also help LFA recruit staff to the region and serve as ambassadors when our Fellows come to Western Kansas for their annual summer training.

All Lead For America staff, including the national team, will dedicate at least 10% of their work time to serving the local community. And Dodge City will shape the “LFA Community” model and be held up as the model for communities nationwide.

WHY KANSAS AND DODGE CITY?

For the last several years, the organization has been headquartered in North Carolina, with a second office in Minnesota. But LFA has now relocated its headquarters Dodge City, Kansas, a diverse, immigrant, working-class, rural community. LFA’s CEO is from Kansas and LFA’s COO is from Oklahoma, and both have long hoped to be able to move the organization back to the center of the country. The organization’s founding inspiration came from our recognition that the common denominator for



addressing our communities' and nation's biggest challenges is having moral, dynamic, and representative leadership in every corner of this country. But while every community and state has immense talent, success for those not growing up in big cities or on the coasts often means leaving and not coming back. And far too many of our nation's most talented young leaders are clustering not just in a select few cities, but also an unsettlingly small number of industries—particularly finance, tech, and consulting. We ask each of our Fellows to invest deeply in their hometowns—often rural communities that others may overlook—and we want to ensure that the community we are rooted in reflects our mission and commitment, too. We believe that being headquartered in Kansas, and particularly a dynamic, rural region of the state like Southwest Kansas, will do exactly that.