

The Ford Institute Leadership Program

The Ford Institute Leadership Program is a five year community leadership program that aims to build the capacity of existing and emerging rural leaders. Each year of FILP offers the community something different and engages a new cohort of local community members

- Year 1: Leadership Development
- Year 2: Effective Organizations
- Year 3: Leadership Development Cohort 2
- Year 4: Community Collaborations
- Year 5: Leadership Development Cohort 3

As part of our mission to build the capacity of local leaders a group of volunteers who completed the first year of Leadership Development helps facilitate, advocate, and coordinate the Leadership Development training for cohorts 2 and 3. This group forms the Community Ambassador team. Continue reading to learn more about The Ford Institute Leadership Program.

Leadership Development

The FILP Leadership Development training is an experiential learning program that gives existing and emerging rural leaders an opportunity to improve their leadership skills, network with and mentor other community members, and complete a small community improvement project over the course of one year.

As part of FILP Leadership Development, 20 to 30 community members attend 48 to 60 hours of RDI-delivered leadership training over four weekends and complete a community improvement project over the course of one year. For participants, FILP Leadership Development is as much about the experience of being in the room together as the subjects at hand. In our approach, we emphasize that most of the wisdom and expertise that's passed on through the program comes from the participants; it's our job to facilitate the transfer of knowledge. In order to achieve this, networking, mentoring, consensus, and group discussion are integral parts of the leadership training.

During the four weekends, the group selects and plans for the project they will complete outside of the 48 hours of training. This project gives participants the opportunity to practice what they have learned, do something for their community, and have a quick success. An RDI staff member maintains a close connection with the group during this process, returning for additional technical training, moral support, and to celebrate the completion of the project. After the project is completed, the group is given the choice to adjourn, or continue on to do more projects together.

During Weekend 1: Participants are introduced to each other, the program, and a new vocabulary. The group identifies their unique differences, and practices capitalizing on those differences to get more done happily. Participants are also introduced to our positive approach to community development. This frame allows participants to think about what they can do to make a positive impact, rather than focus on challenges, past failures, or conflict.

During Weekend 2: We present topics surrounding effective communication, conflict modes, and group decision making. Participants unite together to choose their community improvement project and analyze the impacts their project will have on their community.

During Weekend 3: Participants begin to plan for the implementation of their project. They practice holding effective meetings, are introduced to project planning and project management tools, make key decisions about their project and prepare for the work they will do together over the next year without RDI trainers present.

During Weekend 4: Participants are given guides to effectively market and fundraise for their project and work with volunteers. The emphasis of the weekend, however, is on the connections that they have made in the class, and the importance of those connections for getting things done in the future. Leadership Development participants invite key collaborators and stakeholders for their project to join them for a lunch to grow that network even further.

Community Ambassador Team

The Leadership Development program is delivered to three different cohorts of community leaders over five years. During the second and third years, community members who have previously completed the program volunteer to take on roles as advocates, coordinators, and facilitators for the FILP Leadership Development. This is an integral part of the overall goal of the program to build community leadership capacity. RDI supports these community members so that they can replicate all or part of the FILP Leadership Development experience for other emerging leaders in their community. As part of the Ford Community Ambassador team, ambassadors are given the same training that RDI staff receives to carry out the program, and they are invited to an annual summit to celebrate their work as volunteers and hone their skills even more.

Effective Organizations

Effective Organizations is designed for staff and boards of community organizations, nonprofits, institutions, membership groups, and local government. Like all of the programs under the Ford Institute Leadership Program, the curriculum is designed as a facilitated discussion. Experienced leaders are encouraged to mentor and coach those with less experience and to provide the history and stories that bring the curriculum and tools to life. Throughout the training, participants apply the tools RDI presents to their real life experience in organizations. They network with other organizational leaders, establishing ongoing support and communication with other leaders in their community.

The program focuses on the following four topics:

- + Vision, Mission and Strategic Planning
- + Organizational Leadership
- + Resource Development
- + Operational Management

Effective Organizations also includes two expert panels that field questions from the participants. The Fund Development Panel consists of funders from a variety of sources including foundations, banks, and organizations that offer grants and funding within the region in which the class is held. The Resource Management Panel consists of experts in resource management from a variety of backgrounds. Panelists have included CPAs, experts in QuickBooks, representatives from small business development centers, and bankers.

Community Collaborations

Community Collaborations represents the pinnacle of the Ford Institute Leadership Program, building from individual and organizational leadership to that of collaboration among effective organizations in the community. Community Collaborations helps participants understand collaboration and when to use it and to uncover community strengths and build on them using strategic collaborations. The program brings together community residents, community-based organizations, foundations, businesses, and government agencies. Each community collaboration training looks different depending on the existing financial, organizational, and other assets in the community, and depending on the groups who are represented in the room for the training.

During Community Collaboration, participants explore concepts and tools related to building collaborations. The participants are not expected to establish their own, new collaboration as a result of this class. The goal for the training, rather, is to create a framework that will allow community groups to collaborate in the future.

The first weekend of the program consists of standardized interactive curriculum that engages participants in understanding the stages and types of collaboration, encourages discussion about how collaboration can enhance community vitality, and identifies opportunities for collaboration in the participants' community. Also during the first weekend, a panel of representatives from existing collaborations in the community come to discuss their collaborations in detail to serve as examples and mentors to the participants.

The second weekend of Community Collaborations varies based on the needs, interests, and assets for collaborative ventures among the group. The participants work with RDI to select a course that will most benefit them and their goals. On the second day of the second weekend, RDI provides open-ended technical assistance as participants begin to implement the framework for their collaborative strategy. The collaboration strategies the groups choose vary. Past groups have chosen strategies such as a "nonprofit fair" where organizations were encouraged to bring materials that explain their mission and programs with the goal of reducing redundancy of services and promoting meaningful collaboration. Other groups' strategies have included the creation of a community calendar, workshops on collaborative decision making, and supporting new collaborations between specific organizations.