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Washoe County Leadership Academy Evaluation 2023-2024

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Introduction

Leadership development programs are frequently cited as one of the main drivers in building a community's capacity (Chaskin et al., 2001; Emery et al., 2007; Kirk and Shutte, 2004; Lamm et al., 2017). From late 2021 through early 2022, Washoe County reinitiated a leadership development program, titled the Washoe County Leadership Academy (WCLA). This program targeted Washoe County residents who are not currently in leadership positions.

The academy's goals are both educational and motivational. More specifically, these include:

- 1) to educate residents on the services provided by Washoe County services and departments;
- 2) to develop residents' skills and capacity to improve their potential to take on leadership roles within the county or the larger community.

The academy's pilot year (2021-2022) was evaluated to assess program effectiveness, program value to attendees, skills gained by participants, participant recommendations for program improvement, participants' willingness to be more involved in the community and demographic data. A detailed review of information regarding participant recruitment, program need and assessment methodology is available in Rebori, 2023 (SP-23-05).

After completion of the academy's second full year, another program evaluation was conducted. This evaluation occurred on April 19, 2024, the last session of the Washoe County Leadership Academy. This report provides program evaluation results, as well as suggestions for improvement for future programs. These results are important for the Washoe County Manager's Office, Washoe County commissioners, and other Nevada counties that may be interested in launching a leadership program and subsequent evaluation of their program.

Methods

The survey was conducted in Qualtrics with a QR Code provided to participants for

access via their phones. Time was allotted in the last session (April 19, 2024) for participants to access the survey on their phones and complete their responses. The survey consisted of 17 questions and took approximately 10 minutes for an individual to complete. Question 1 served as an introduction to the survey, informing participants that all responses are anonymous, and that their participation in the survey is completely voluntary. Additionally, participants were informed that they could skip any question and end the survey at any time. Twenty-two program participants attended the final session and all 22 voluntarily completed the survey.

A unique method was developed and applied to assess participants' perception regarding program effectiveness and value (Reborel *in press*). The metrics used for effectiveness are based on participants' objectives for deciding to participate in the program. These objectives are gathered on the first day of the program and a thematic analysis of the responses is conducted to create five unique themes. The metric used for assessing program value are based on the five-skill building topics taught within the program (i.e., leadership styles and goal setting, public issues, civility, managing conflict and collaboration). Participants provide their rating on a nine-point Likert scale on the program effectiveness in meeting their objectives, as well as rating the value for each skill topic taught on the same nine-point Likert scale. An overall average score (based on the nine-point scale) is then calculated for effectiveness and value. Using the nine-point scale for assessing both "effectiveness" and "value" of the program was critical to convert and plot the responses onto an Excel perception map template (www.perceptualmaps.com).

The following responses, beginning with Question 2, are provided below. Questions with open ended comments are included verbatim from participants' responses.

Results

Q2 - Leadership skills rated BEFORE the Program.

Participants were asked to rate their knowledge and skills on the following training topics **before** participating in the program. The rating choices were *Poor*, *Fair*, *Good* or *Great*. Two participants rated themselves *Great* on the skills 1) Leadership styles/Goal setting and 2) Public Issues. Three participants rated themselves *Great* on the skill 3) Collaboration. Four participants rated themselves *Great* on the skill 4) Managing Conflict and five participants rated themselves as *Great* on the skill 5) Civility (Table 1). Results regarding assessed leadership skills rated before the program are displayed as a chart in Figure 1 with the frequency count outlined in Table 1. Total response among participants for Q2 was 22.

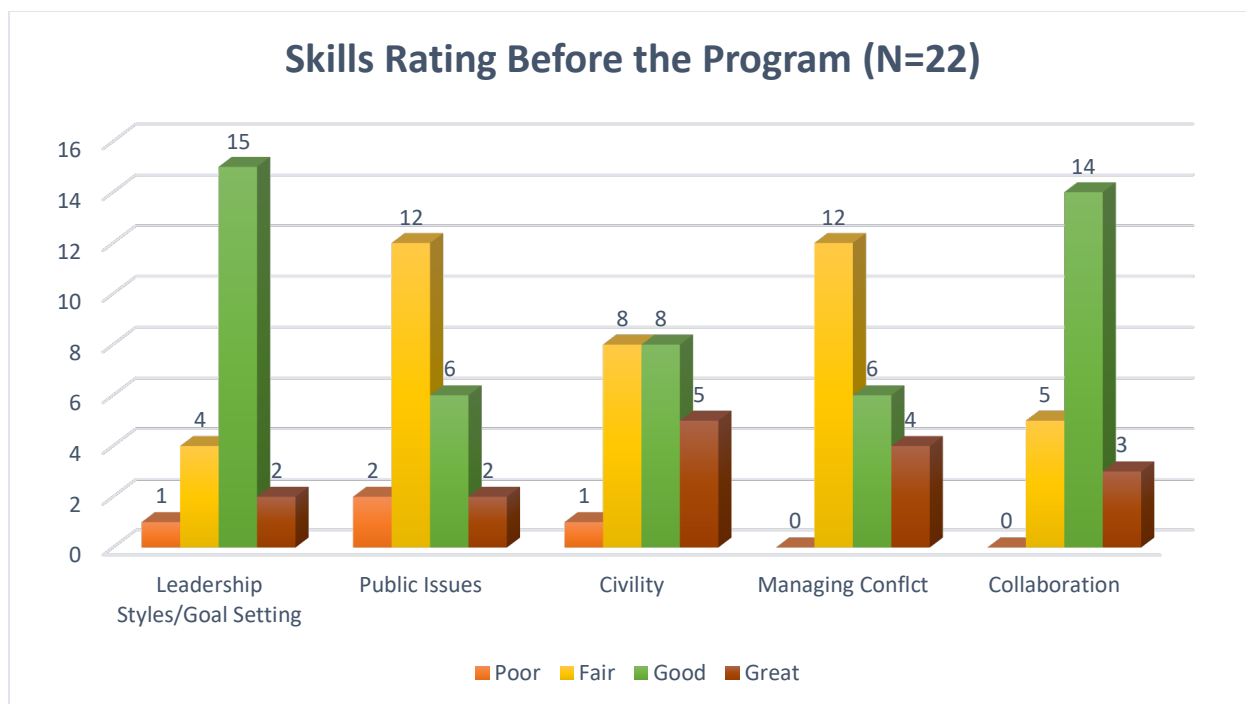


Figure 1. Q2. Participant's rating of skills prior to taking WCLA.

Table 1. Q2. Counts regarding knowledge and skills rated **before** the WCLA Program.

Skills Rated Before Program	Poor	Fair	Good	Great	Score	N=
Leadership Styles/Goal Setting	1	4	15	2	62	22
Public Issues	2	12	6	2	52	22
Civility	1	8	8	5	61	22
Managing Conflict	0	12	6	4	58	22
Collaboration	0	5	14	3	64	22

Q3 - Leadership topics rated **AFTER** the Program.

Participants were asked to rate their knowledge and skills on the skills training topics **after** the program. The rating choices again were *Poor*, *Fair*, *Good* and *Great*. A noticeable increase in the number of *Great* responses are evident. All skill topics have a frequency count of *Great* ranging from 10 to 15 responses. Also, the responses indicating *Fair* drop significantly after the program, with only one response of *Fair* provided in each skill topic after the program. Results are shown in Figure 2 and Table 2.

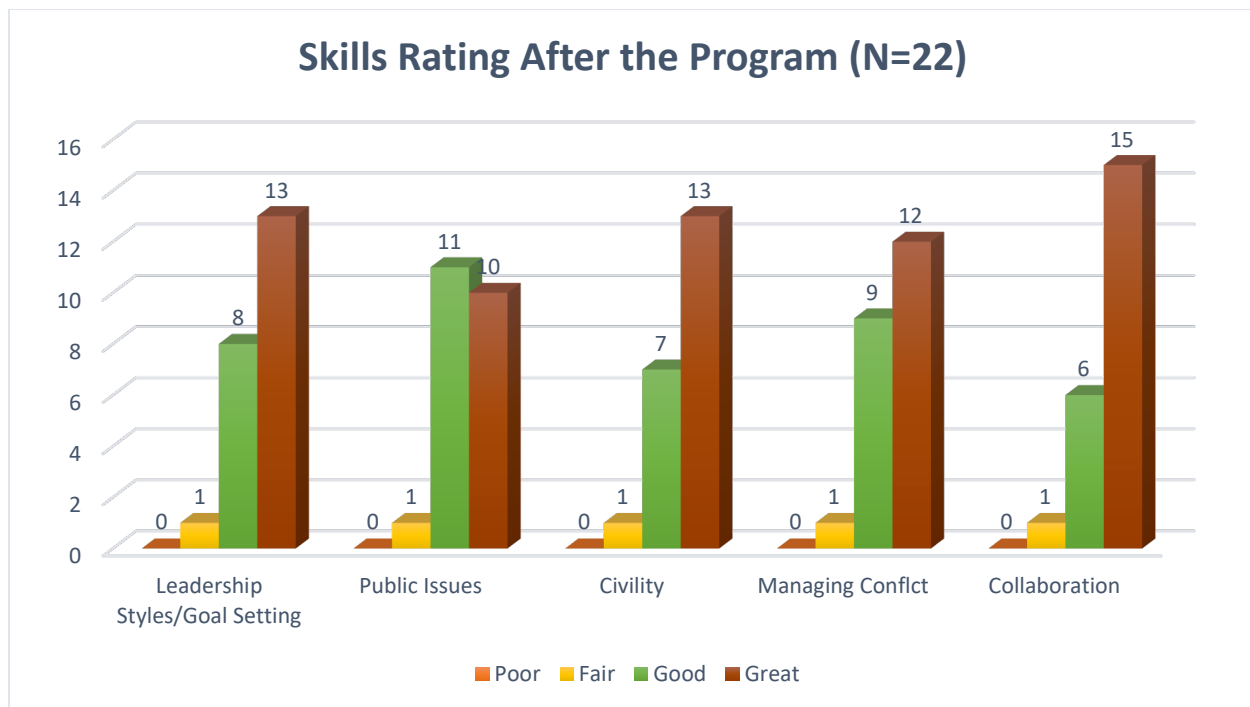


Figure 2. Participants' ratings of skills after WCLA.

Table 2. Q3. Counts regarding knowledge and skills rated **after** the WCLA Program.

Skills Rated After the Program	Poor	Fair	Good	Great	Score	N=
Leadership Styles/Goal Setting	0	1	8	13	78	22
Public Issues	0	1	11	10	75	22
Civility	0	1	7	13	75	22
Managing Conflict	0	1	9	12	77	22
Collaboration	0	1	6	15	80	22

A simple visual comparison of Figure 1 and Figure 2 indicates that participants self-reported gains for the five skills taught were substantial. Many who identified *Poor* or *Fair* skills (Figure 1, orange and brown bars) before taking the WCLA program reported *Good* to *Great* skill sets upon completion. To further explore the possible gains, a two-sample t-test was conducted between the Sum scores for Question 2 and Question 3. Results indicate participants' overall reported knowledge and skills significantly increased ($p < .001$) from pre-program assessment ($M = 59.4$, $SD = 4.67$) to post-program assessment ($M = 77.0$, $SD = 2.12$; $t = -11.2$, $p < .001$, $df = 4$). The percent of knowledge gained from before the program to after the program are further outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Percent of self-reported knowledge and skills gain from before the program to after the program.

Topic	Before Program Score	After Program Score	Percent Gain
Leadership Styles and Goal Setting	62	78	26%
Public Issues	52	75	44%
Civility	61	75	23%
Managing Conflict	58	77	33%
Collaboration	64	80	25%

All skill training topics had statistically significant gains ($p < .001$) from before the program to after the program through an independent samples t-test. The two largest gains were on the topics Public Issues (44% gain) and Managing Conflict (33% gain) (Table 3). The skills topics were specifically either requested by Washoe County Manager's Office when developing the program, or suggested by the Extension Community Development Specialist as critical training topics needed for an effective leadership development program as well as how to build confidence among individuals as a leader (Pigg et al., 2015).

Q4 - Overall, how well did the WCLA program meet your expectations?

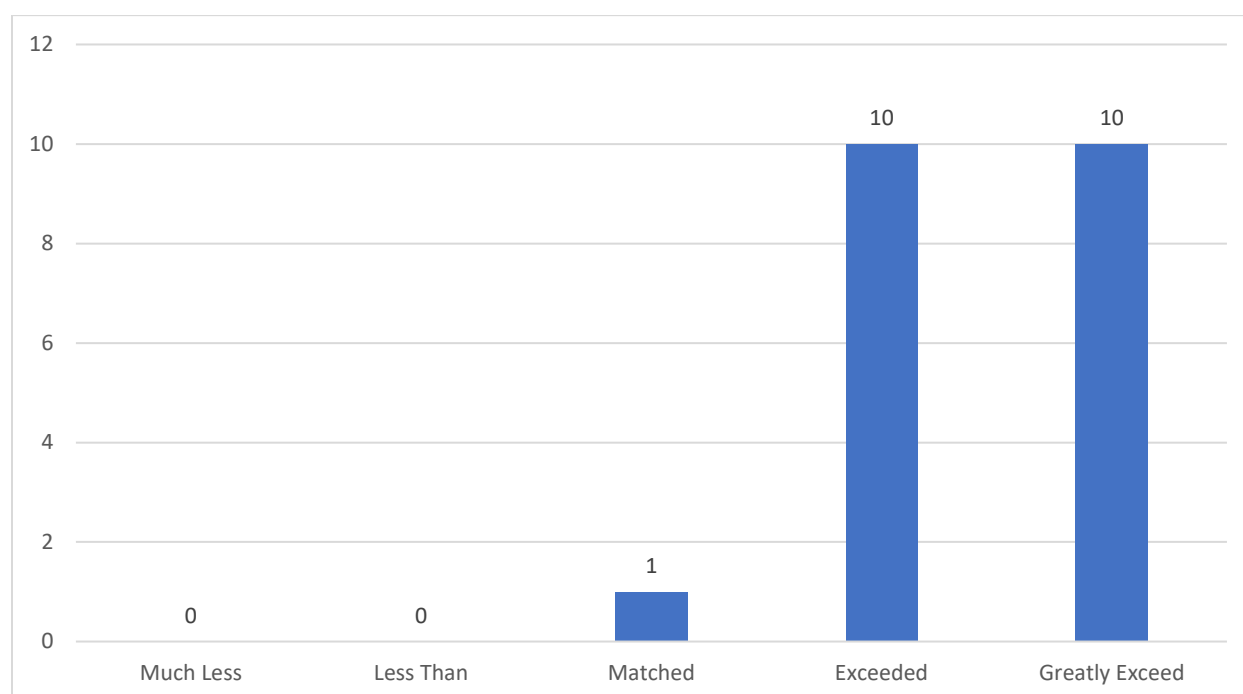


Figure 3. Participants' ratings of program expectations.

When asked how well the program met participants' expectations, 48% (n=10) rated the program exceeded expectations and another 48% (n=10) rated the program greatly

exceeded expectations (Figure 3). Overall, 96% of participants rated the WCLA program either exceeded or greatly exceeded their expectations.

Q5 - How effective has the program been at meeting your objectives for participating in the program?

Table 4. Average measure of effectiveness for each objective.

	Not to Somewhat Effective (1-3)	Moderately Effective (4-6)	Highly to Extremely Effective (7-9)	N	Avg. Score
Understanding County Services and Programs	1	0	21	22	8.1
Forming Networks and Building Relationships	1	3	18	22	7.5
Developing Personal Leadership Skills, (Communication/Knowledge)	0	2	20	22	7.8
Finding Ways to become more involved in Community	0	0	22	22	8.6
Gaining Confidence as a Leader	0	2	20	22	7.8
Overall Average Score	---	---	---	---	7.96

The overall average score for effectiveness of the program is 7.96 on a nine-point scale.

Participants rated on a nine-point scale how effective the program was at meeting their own objectives for participation. An average was calculated for each objective and included in the right column. It is noteworthy that the objective “*Finding ways to become more involved in the community*” received the highest score and hence highest rating of effectiveness. This is important, as one of the key objectives of the program is for participants to learn about ways to become more involved and take on leadership roles in the county or in the community.

Q6 - How valuable would you rate the program skill sessions?

Table 5. Average measure of value for the program skill sessions.

	Not to Somewhat Valuable (1-3)	Moderately to Valuable (4-6)	Highly to Extremely Valuable (7-9)	N	Avg. Score
Leadership Styles/Goal Setting	0	2	20	22	7.9
Public Issues	0	1	20	22	8.1
Civility	0	0	23	22	8.3
Managing Conflict	0	0	22	22	8.4
Collaboration	0	1	20	21	8.5
Overall Average Score	---	---	---	---	8.2

The metric used to measure value of the program was based on the five-skill topics provided in the WCLA Program. Participants rated the value for each skill topic on a nine-point scale regarding how valuable the training topics were. An average was calculated for each topic and included in the right column (Table 5).

The overall average score for value of the program is 8.2 on a nine-point scale.

In total, the average response for program effectiveness (7.96) and the average response for program value (8.2) indicates the **program was both highly effective and highly valuable from the perception of the participants**. Measuring participants' perception of a program is important because it assures that the objectives are viewed as valuable to participants; it is a valuable use of their time. Another important reason for measuring participants' perception includes the role participants play as being the best recruiters and promoters of a program if they find it effective and valuable. Measuring the perception of participants is also important for Washoe County, as they fund the program and are more likely to continue supporting the program if participants find it effective and valuable.

Using the nine-point scale for assessing both effectiveness and value of the program was critical to convert and plot the responses onto an Excel perception map template (www.perceptualmaps.com). Using data from Question 5 (effectiveness) and Question 6 (value), and controlling for responses per Washoe County Commission district (Question 12), allowed for calculation of a measure of effectiveness and value per Washoe County district and plotting the result on a perception map (Figure 4).

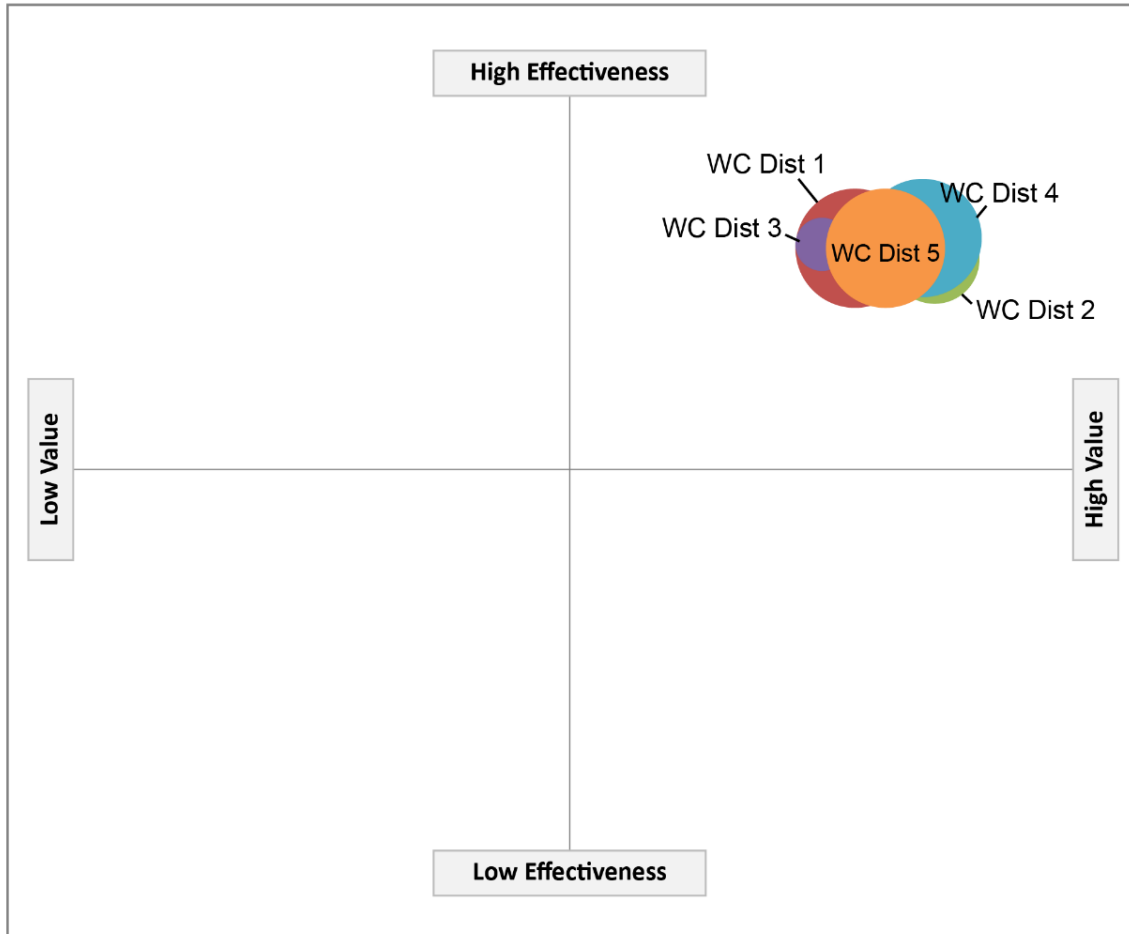


Figure 4. Perception map indicating the effectiveness and value of the program as rated by participants in each Washoe County district.

Figure 4 visually represents participants' perceptions of the program across all five Washoe County Commission districts. All participants rated the program within the top-right quadrant, reflecting a perception that the program is both highly effective and highly valuable (Figure 4). As a simple matrix, the perception map used for plotting the program has two dimensions, effectiveness and value, measured as high-low, from 1=low to 9=high, across both dimensions. Perception maps are commonly used in the marketing and economics disciplines to reflect consumers' perception of brands (Lee et al., 2015; Gigauri, 2019). Since one's perception is subjective, data gathered to plot a perception map should be rooted in a metric-based format, such as an evaluation survey or questionnaire, to ensure the data used to plot the perception map is unbiased and based on specific defined metrics of interest (Lee et al., 2015). Using data from the program evaluation to plot participants' perception of the program follows this protocol and provides a visual representation of the effectiveness and value of the program (Figure 4).

The data used to plot the perception map accurately on the Excel perception map template (www.perceptualmaps.com) are outlined in Table 6. The bubble size representing each Washoe County Commission district needs to be coded either small (1), medium (3), or large (5). The size of the district bubble reflects the number of respondents within the Washoe County district who completed the evaluation (Table 6). The greater number of respondents, the larger the bubble size.

Table 6. Average effectiveness and value score per each Washoe County Commission district.

WC District	Avg. Effect Score	Avg. Value Score	Bubble Size (1,3,5)	Total Response N=22
WC District 1	7.96	7.82	5	6
WC District 2	7.82	8.62	3	4
WC District 3	8.00	7.50	1	1
WC District 4	8.08	8.50	5	5
WC District 5	7.94	8.14	5	6

Q7 - Do you feel your level of involvement in the community will increase as a result of your participation in the program?

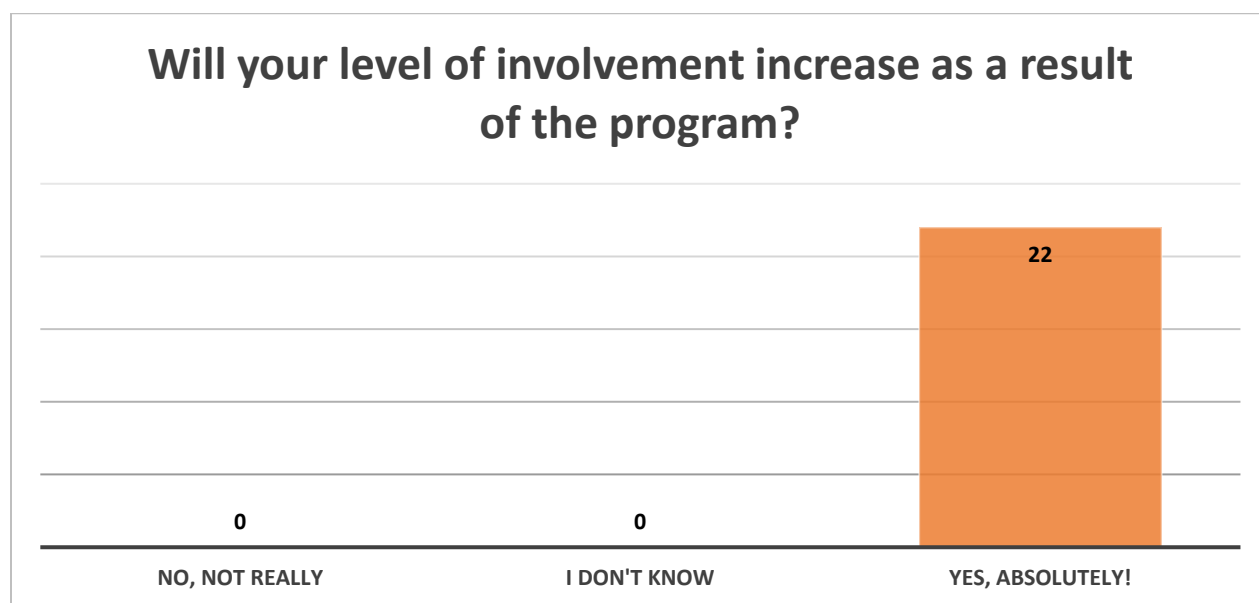


Figure 5. Level of involvement in the community resulting from participation in the program.

One of the desired outcomes from any leadership program is to increase the skill level and involvement of participants within the community (Pigg et al., 2015). Overwhelmingly 100% of program participants in the 2023-2024 program rated their level of involvement will increase as a result of their participation in the program (Figure 5).

Q8 - What did you like the most about the program?

- So hard to choose, field trips to so many amazing places and the knowledge shared about them is the best if I had to choose
- Networking, seeing how County compares to State
- Lots of access to otherwise inaccessible areas and team
- The dedication of county employees to provide support to general public.
- Understanding the broad landscape of local government and am inspired to get involved.
- Getting to see how the county operates and how the employees care about doing their jobs well.
- I enjoyed the tour of Jan Evans, the art walk/ parks, and the 911 center.
- Learning more about how each part of Washoe County works from a ground-level view
- The behind the scenes experiences gave insight to how and why things are done in the county.
- Outstanding staff and leaders
- Getting to know the team and collaborating with them

Q9 - What did you like the least about the program?

- Personally that there just never seemed to be enough time for 90% of the places and topics.
- I think I missed the opportunity to understand the hierarchy of government more thoroughly.
- Nothing to offer here. I took something from whole project.
- Nothing that I can think of. Really enjoyed the entire program
- Class project--seemed like the people who wouldn't commit to helping execute the plan were dominating planning sessions. Could have used more guidance, maybe more narrowly defined options to choose from in the beginning
- Nothing
- I felt that it was too short
- Learning about our Country
- Not having some dedicated time each session to talk about the class project
- When class participants would bring personal issues to Washoe county staff that were there to give general presentations. I also didn't like how some class participants sort of aggressively handled the foster family staff
- I only wish we could have spent more time at the library.
- Project time was at minimum during the sessions. It would help to have a dedicated time
- That it's over!

Q10 - What is one thing you would change about the program, or do you have any suggestions to improve the program?

- I think my best suggestion would be that I did not really know what I was getting into. Happy for all of it but I might have had a different mindset coming in and possibly gained more. Not sure if I am just a dumb dumb and everyone else knew what this was about. I had no idea about the leadership learning I would gain. Just terrific!
- I think a brief lecture on government organization and structure at the beginning of the class would have been very helpful. While visiting all these different departments, I find myself a little lost on just exactly where this fits within the county structure. I found myself thinking "so who is your boss?".
- Add more scheduled project time
- Nothing but I would like to see a different program in which moderated public dialog. Is facilitated. Our citizenry could benefit from some civil dialogs.
- Earlier start on class project.
- No changes i can think of
- Pacing and information overload. I know theres alot of information but perhaps there are other ways to consider distributing it to the group. For example, provide some sort of technical plan of the locations and include relevabt {relavant} information thats accessible at the first class and all the way through. People will gravitate to theur {their} chosen Reas {reason} and delve deeper into that info. On site this may lead to more meaningful dialogue and insight.
- Maybe institute a hierarchical system for the group project. Done through voting or something similar. It's difficult for 30+ leaders, who are often type A, to coalesce. It worked eventually, but more structure would have helped drive involvement, rather than some of us waiting for things to get decided over months.
- The project needs to have a county rep and a department rep to make sure there aren't delays in information and support throughout.
- Group the leadership topics into a single day
- Teams as a collaboration tool was glitchy.
- Nothing. It's been an amazing opportunity

Demographics

Q11 - What is your gender?

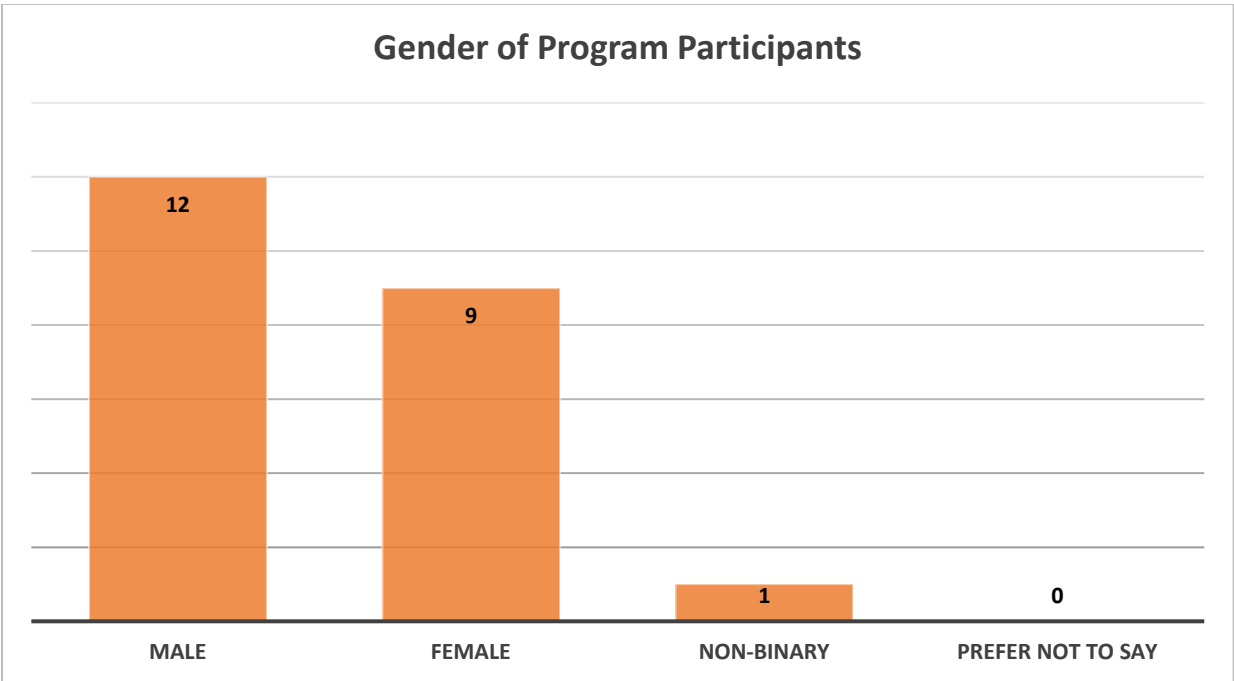


Figure 6. Gender count of program participants.

Twelve participants (55%) identify as male, and 9 (41%) identify as female. One respondent (5%) identifies as nonbinary (N=22).

Q12 - What Washoe County Commission district do you live in?

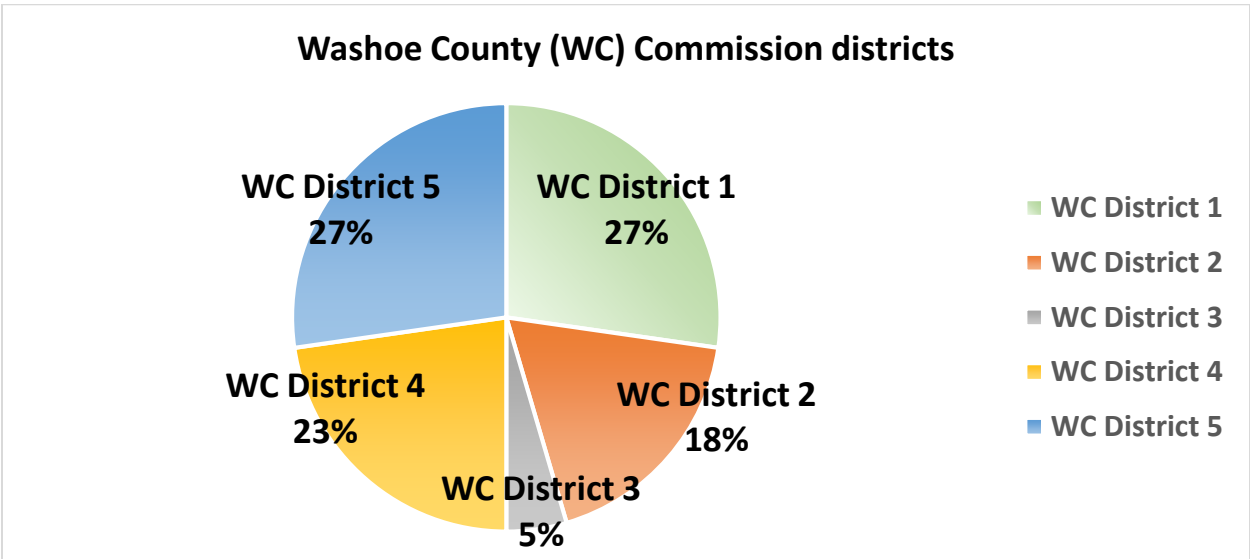


Figure 7. Percent of participants in each Washoe County Commission district.

All Washoe County districts were represented in the program. A few participants from district 3 dropped out of the program, with only one individual in district 3 finishing the program (Figure 7).

Q13 - Do you usually vote in elections?

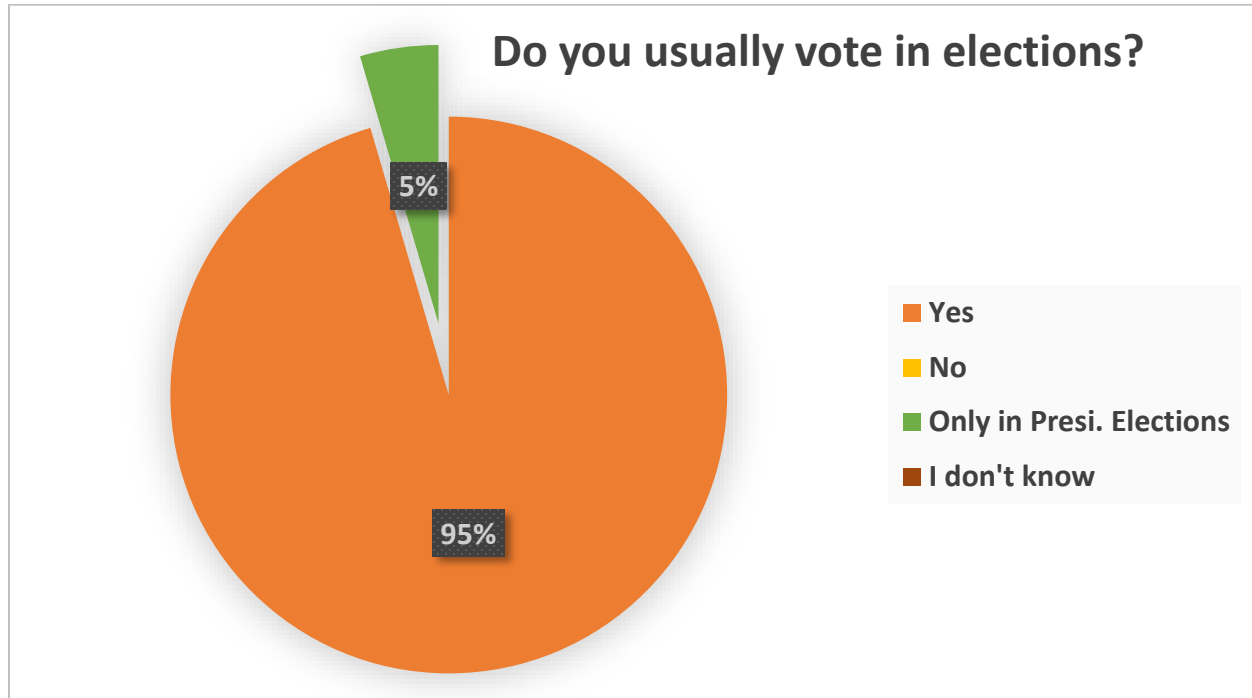


Figure 8. Percent of program participants who usually vote in elections.

Voting is typically one of the easiest forms of democratic acts to measure. Those who are regular voters tend to be more engaged in the democratic process, are informed of issues, and participate more in their community. Program participants are civically engaged, with 21 (95% of) participants indicating they usually vote in elections. One person (5%) indicates only voting in presidential elections (Figure 8). Program participants have a significantly higher voter turnout than the general population in Washoe County, which had a 64% voter turnout rate in 2022. In 2020, during a Presidential Election year, Washoe County had a voter turnout rate of 82.53% (Nevada Secretary of State Office 2022/2020 Records).

Q14 - What is your age?

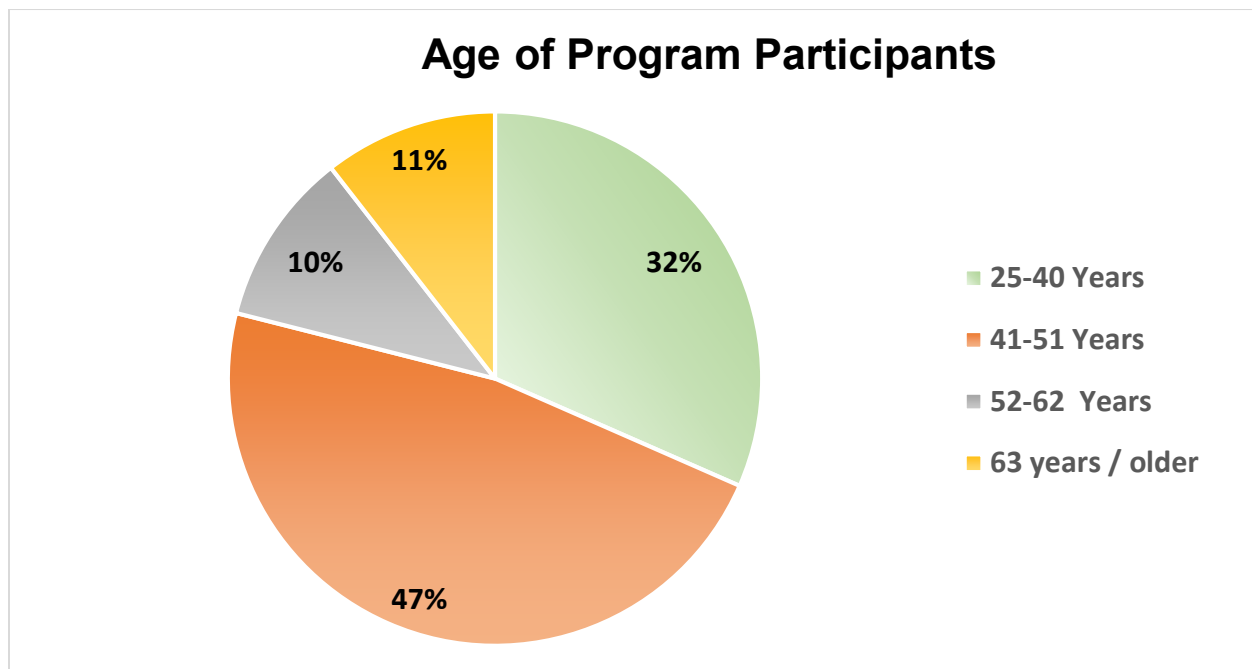


Figure 9. Percent of program participants by age.

Roughly one third of program participants (32%) were between the ages of 25 and 40 years, and (47%) of participants were between the ages of 41 and 51 years (Figure 9). One of the goals of community leadership programs is to build the capacity and confidence for leadership among younger adults (Pigg, 2015) to intentionally take on leadership roles and responsibilities. Typically, older adults, age 52 years+, tend to volunteer and engage in their community because they have more available time and tend to have knowledge and experience. Younger and middle-aged adults tend to have less time, as they are still raising children. Including a diverse age group into the program cohort helps to foster the development of a wide range of experience, different ideas, and develop more leaders in the future.

Q15 - What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

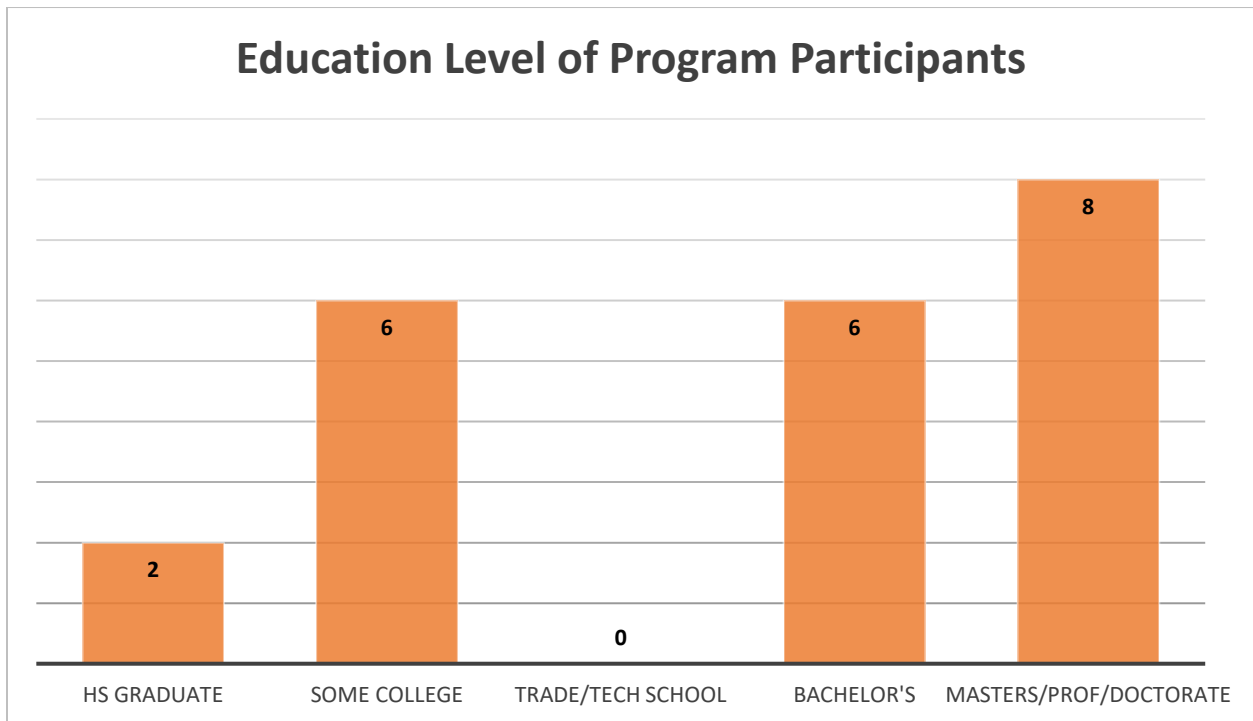


Figure 10. Education level of program participants.

Program participants are more educated than the general population in Washoe County, with 63% of participants having a Bachelor's degree or higher (Figure 10). Per U.S. Census Quick Facts (2021), 33.7% of the general population in Washoe County has a bachelor's degree or higher.

Q16 - What was your total household income for 2023?

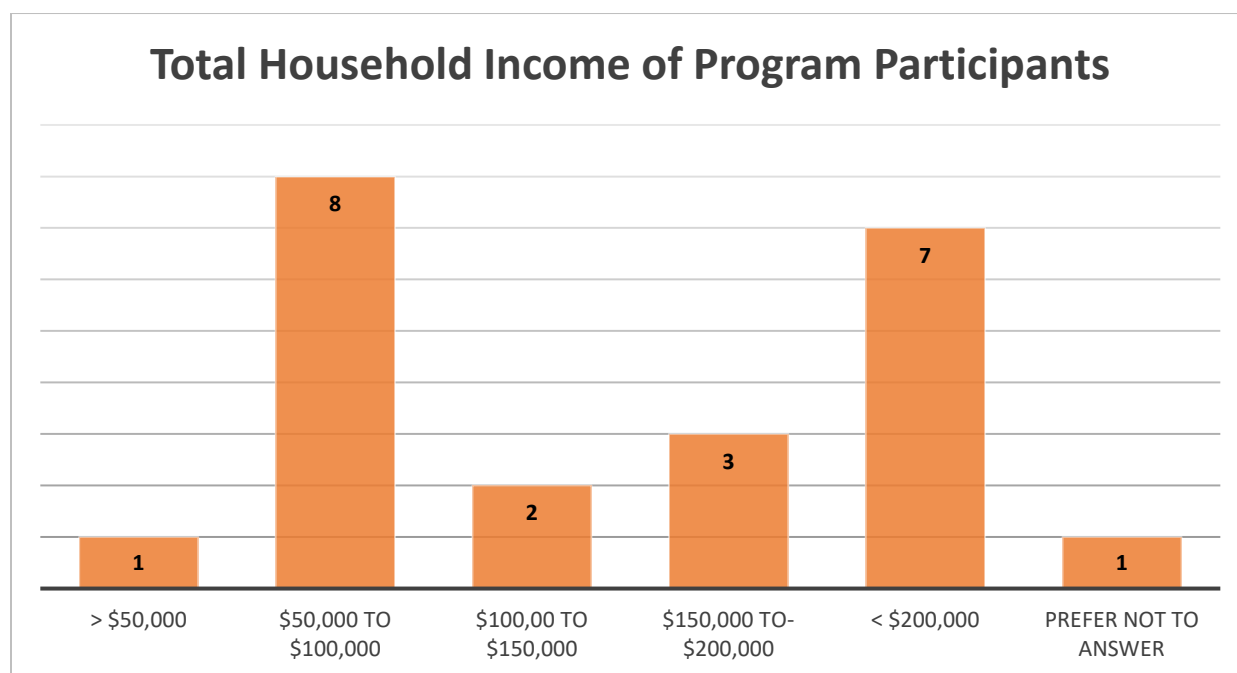


Figure 11. Total household income of program participants.

The median household income for Washoe County according to U.S. Census Records (2021) is \$74,292. Thirty-six percent of program participants (n=8) have a household income between \$50,000 and \$100,000. At least 54% of program participants (n=12) have a household income greater than the median household income for Washoe County (Figure 11). While income alone is not a predictor for community engagement, research does indicate that those who have higher incomes tend to be more involved in their community due to more skills and confidence in how to engage effectively. Measuring income is important to ensure that there is a diverse mix of socioeconomic demographics among program participants.

Q17 - How long have you lived in Washoe County?

Of those participants who answered the question (n=20), 45% have lived in Washoe County between six to 15 years, and 30% have lived in Washoe County 16 to 25 years (Figure 12). Therefore, 75% of program participants have lived in Washoe County six to 25 years (Figure 12). Residents who are long-term residents tend to feel a stronger sense of community and attachment to place and are more likely to be involved in their community.

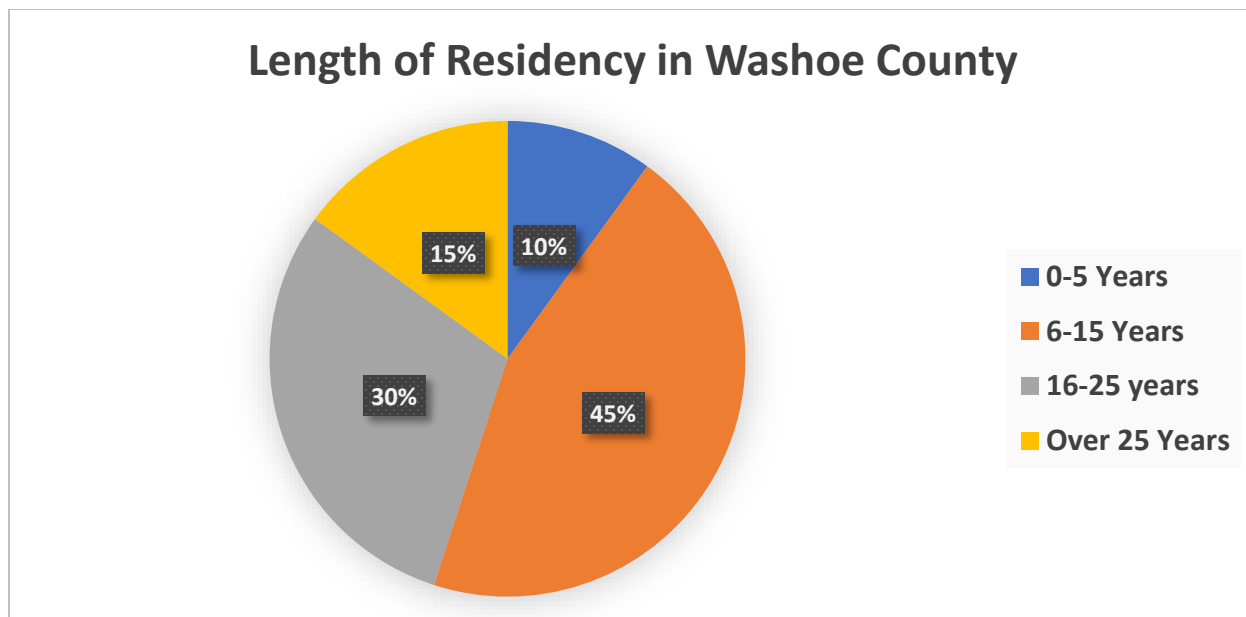


Figure 12. Percent of program participants' length of residency in Washoe County, Nevada.

Conclusion

The Washoe County Leadership Academy (WCLA) concluded its second year (2023-2024), and for the second time, empirically demonstrated a strong impact on its participants. T-tests examining the skills training topics (i.e., leadership styles and goal setting, public issues, civility, managing conflict, and collaboration) from before the program (Table 1) to after the program (Table 2) found significant ($p < .001$) gains on all skills topics (Table 3). Again, these selected training topics are considered foundational skills for community leaders (Pigg et al., 2015). Providing an opportunity to put recently acquired skills into practice is an important and critical step in building skilled and confident local leaders.

Ninety-six percent of program participants indicated the program *exceeded* or *greatly exceeded* their expectations (Figure 3). All participants perceived the program to be both highly effective and highly valuable (Figure 4). Lastly, all program participants (100%) (N=22) state they would increase their community involvement due to their participation in the program (Figure 5). Assessing participants' perception about the program effectiveness and value addresses three important issues: 1) ensuring the education objectives are met from the perspective of participants; 2) ensuring that the program is a valuable use of their time; and 3) highly satisfied participants are an invaluable recruitment tool for future participants.

After last year's pilot year and subsequent program evaluation, some changes were made to the program. Some of the more notable changes to the program in 2023 to 2024 were the increased assistance and support for participants on the class project, and the inclusion of teaching about public issues, as most of the class project involves addressing a public issue. The program continues to strive for excellence and to

implement changes and minor adjustments to further enhance program improvement. A few potential changes to the 2024 to 2025 program, based on participant recommendations from 2023 to 2024 may include the following:

- Include an introductory review of local government structure and organization, perhaps even providing an organization chart to be included in the leadership binders for reference throughout the program and visits with various departments.
- Provide more facilitated assistance and mentorship on selecting and carrying out the class project.
- Enhance more networking with previous WCLA cohorts.

Other improvements may be incorporated but will depend upon feedback from Washoe County staff and their associated county departments. When comparing last year's evaluation and demographic data to this year's, there were some improvements regarding a more diverse group of participants for income, length of residency and education level. Overall, it appears Washoe County Leadership Academy has a template for success, and will continue to improve and have a lasting impact for both participants and the Washoe County community.

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