

# Community Leadership Programs: Empowering Future Leaders



Local community organizations often provide leadership development programs. These skill-building programs are open to the greater community or for specific underrepresented populations, and offer an opportunity to invigorate civic engagement. The social capacity provided by these programs can be of mutual benefit to a local agency and its community.

For example, [Smart Valley Places Leadership Institute](#) partners with local non-profits and cities to focus on issues important to the community. This includes the implementation of a regional plan for civic engagement to build understanding of smart growth, community leadership and implementation capacity among local leaders, government staff and stakeholders and, particularly, low-income and minority populations.

Working with local community leaders gives municipalities an opportunity to engage with populations that may be out of reach, and out of touch with local government. In the Central Valley, Central California Regional Obesity Prevention's [Powerful People](#) program has achieved agreements between schools and cities to share facilities, enabling children more access to safe places to play. Participants from the program have made it possible for parents and students to buy fresh produce at school-based farm stands. Further, participants are joining decision-making boards and committees. One Powerful People participant active in local school affairs commented that she never imagined herself talking to the third largest school district in the state and having her words matter.

## What is a Community Leadership Program?

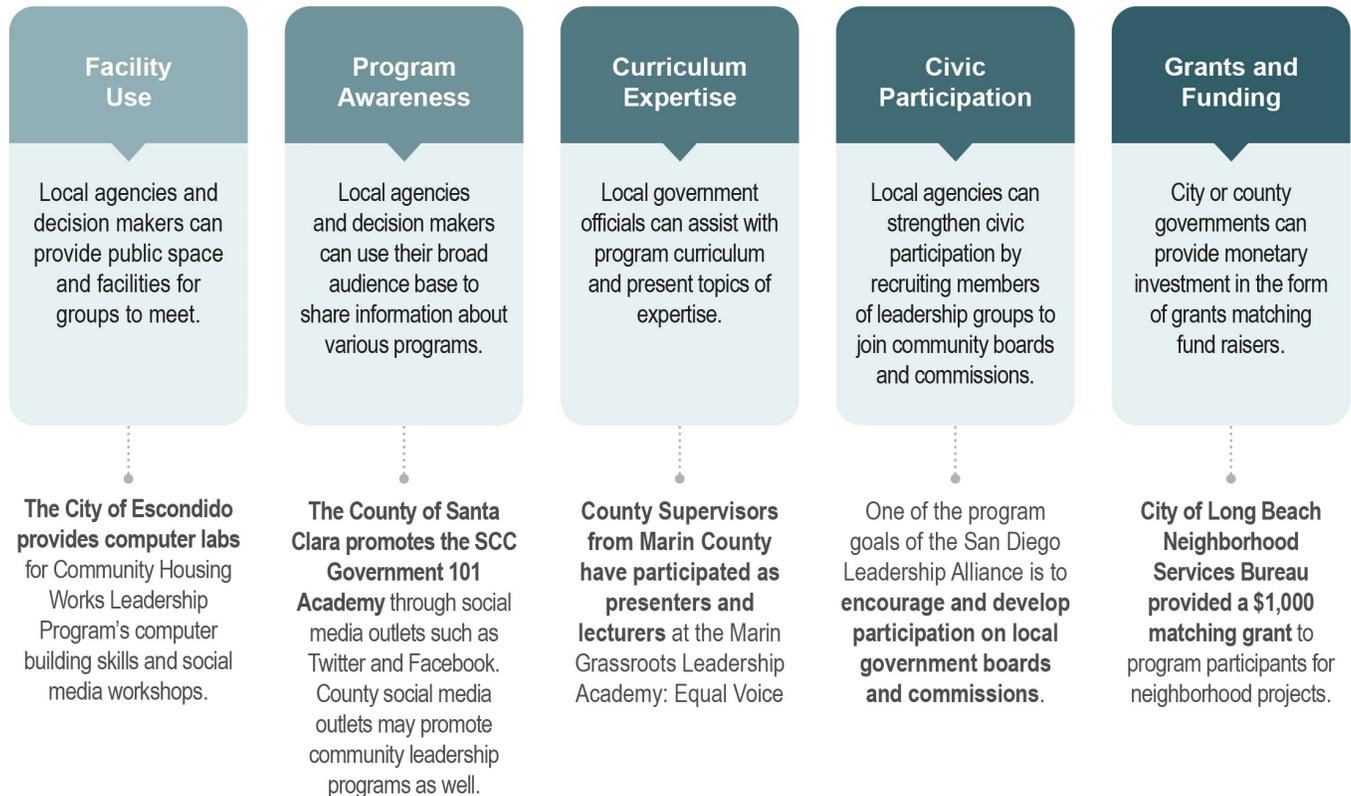
Community-based leadership programs build skills and support the development of emerging leaders through a series of seminars, workshops and other local projects. The programs seek individuals who want to improve their community, and give voice to traditionally under-represented community members.



# Spectrum of Local Agency Involvement

Potential Partnerships Scale of Engagement Between Community Leadership Groups and Local Agencies

*From Low Involvement to High Involvement*



Leadership programs often represent the diversity of their communities. Many programs have a unique blend of participants from different cultures and backgrounds. Fostering relationships that cross cultural and neighborhood boundaries allow all to stretch their views.

Training and curriculum may help educate participants to work across cultural lines. Leaders may experience community matters through different perspectives. Participants learn valuable skill sets required for organizational and leadership roles.

## About the Institute for Local Government

ILG is the nonprofit 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties. For more information and to access the Institute's resources on Public Engagement visit [www.ca-ilg.org/public-engagement](http://www.ca-ilg.org/public-engagement).

Sincere thank you to Roman Bubela for his contributions to this publication.

# Key Components of Community Leadership Programs

## *Identifying Issues of Community Interest*

Leadership groups may tackle community concerns as class projects. Projects have a wide range of topics - from neighborhood beautification to modifying school menus.

In San Bernardino, the [El Sol Neighborhood Leadership Academy](#) trains participants to engage their neighbors about issues concerning health. El Sol participants work in association with The California Endowment's Healthy Communities project to organize community groups to get involved in local decisions. For example, participants addressed issues on pollution by attending local public health and transportation department meetings.

## *Building Skills to Support Engagement*

Typical program curriculum places an emphasis on fundamental skills. Some leadership programs provide specialized training in personal and organizational budgeting.

For example, the City of Escondido's [Community Housing Works Neighborhood Leadership Program](#) provides participants with public speaking, writing, leadership and social media training. Participants are required to organize one community event using social media.

## *Fostering New and Inspired Leaders*

The underlying goal commonly shared by community leadership programs is the desire to inspire new leaders and create leadership opportunities. Programs encourage the development of confident individuals who represent their community. Groups serving in underprivileged communities understand the intrinsic value of these programs and their ability to build confidence.

One example of a program that fosters new leaders is [Leadership Fortuna](#). The City of Fortuna has hired and continues to recruit program alumni. The city values the knowledge participants have gained on local government operations through their participation in the program.

### **Where are Community Leadership Programs in California?**

The Institute maintains a roster of community-based leadership programs in California. See [www.ca-ilg.org/document/resource-list-citizen-and-leadership-academies-california](http://www.ca-ilg.org/document/resource-list-citizen-and-leadership-academies-california) for more information. This list includes nonprofit and community leadership models as well as local agency leadership programs.

To find resources in particular areas, consider reaching out to:

- Local community foundations
- Chambers of commerce
- Regional nonprofits focusing on civic engagement

## Potential Partnership Options



Community leadership development programs and local agencies can partner in a variety of ways. The partners can tailor a relationship around available resources and a relationship may change over time due to leadership and funding levels. A spectrum of involvement may range from low, medium to high and again, change over time.

***Minimal Involvement.*** Examples of low-level local agency involvement in community leadership development programs include providing space for group meetings or sharing updates about the leadership group's programs and events on agency web-based resources.

***Intermediate Involvement.*** Local agency and community leadership development programs may take additional steps to advance their partnership. Examples include:

- Holding quarterly or annual meetings (or phone calls) to discuss upcoming programs of a leadership cohort and current local government matters that may serve as useful topics in connection with the program's curriculum;
- Networking opportunities and connections with municipal departments, agency staff and officials;
- Marketing and community participation; and
- Sharing ideas about potential leadership opportunities, including openings on boards and commissions or committees with program graduates.

***Advanced Involvement.*** As local agencies and leadership groups develop their partnership, additional opportunities to work together may include staff or elected official presentations on local agency matters or curriculum or field trips or tours of municipal facilities such as city hall chambers or offices. Leadership development groups and local agencies may even consider partnering to support a cohort-based service project that benefits the local community where an agency provides a grant or matching funds. An agency may consider recognizing the relationship with a formal agreement, such as a memorandum of understanding (MOU), outlining activities or funding.

# Benefits of Local Government Partnerships



## *Potential Volunteers*

As local agencies develop rapport with the leadership program and get involved in curriculum or networking, the leadership participants may seek additional opportunities to be of service and participate in community-building efforts. A partnership between a city or county and the local community leadership organization may provide the local agency access to the roster of community leaders for sharing important information and engaging volunteer networks.

## *Relationships with Local Community-Based Organizations Results in Stronger Community Ties*

Community leadership programs can be important partners with local agencies. Connecting with leadership programs in one's local area can be valuable as public engagement opportunities arise. These groups can be vital in identifying and engaging underrepresented populations that otherwise might not participate in public discussions and the local decision making process.

## *Pipeline for Emerging Leaders*

Leadership alumni have gained skills that help them understand local agency functions and decision-making processes. Upon completing a leadership program, graduates are often more inclined to attend local agency meetings. Graduates may seek opportunities to put their leadership skills into practice by serving a community, neighborhood or homeowners association. Additionally, graduates may volunteer to serve on a local board, commission, committee or task force. Having relationships with leadership development groups may help a local agency fill appointments to boards and commissions and select a nominee from among a pool of skilled candidates.