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https://ruralprospertyne.unl.edu/rural-fellowship
A new community center. Youth entrepreneurial classes. A county-wide geocaching game. These are just a few of the projects Rural Fellows have completed during their summer-long immersive internships. Since 2013 the Rural Fellows program has connected college students with rural Nebraska communities as part of a collaborative service-learning experience.

A core objective of this program is to develop inclusive leadership capacity in the students that participate as Rural Fellows and the community leaders that mentor them. The preparation before, the interaction and coaching during, and the meaning-making process each participant experiences as a result of this experience advances the inclusive excellence goal of our university, college, and state.

Rural Fellows spend their summers living in Nebraska towns, working on locally-designed projects that support local business, and making progress toward strategic and specific goals to help communities thrive. Rural Fellows commonly create an impact in the following areas:

- Business development
- Community marketing and communications
- Community, workforce and economic development
- Early childhood education
- Entrepreneurship
- Inclusive leadership development
- Mental health services
- Population health
- Tourism
- Social determinants of health
- Sustainability, environment and energy

Rural Fellows and rural residents work together to improve, strengthen and create communities that help us all live better in Nebraska.

The Rural Fellows program exists to:

1. Create an experiential learning opportunity that is transformative and develops the inclusive mindset of students and community leaders while they are working together to complete community-defined projects.
2. Conduct research that advances the development of inclusive community leaders.
3. Connect rural Nebraska communities with NU experts and resources.
4. Create meaningful economic and workforce impacts in rural areas through community-identified projects.
2022 BY THE NUMBERS

8,748 hours worked
201 hours volunteered
50 community leaders
30 projects
25 students
10 RICA students
9 communities
8 communities of practice

Click on the image below to view the 2022 highlight reel.
Summer Projects

- Created floor plans for Alliance Recreation Center
- Mapped out recreation in town
- Organized pet and animal emergency preparedness activity for children
- Created business continuity emergency preparedness plan
- Hosted bake sale fundraiser for Sandhills Center for Health

Hours Worked: 1,200
Hours Volunteered: 30

“Not only did we gain experience related to our majors, but we gained experience on how to handle life.”
—Landyn Bish

I’ve been working remotely, but the experience I’m getting is beyond my expectations.
—Pascaline Niyonshuti

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Summer Projects

- Create case studies to build awareness of cooperative models
- Create shorter highlights to share on websites and with communities exploring cooperative models

Hours Worked: 294
Hours Volunteered: 6

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**Summer Projects**

- Coordinated community workshop, conducted tourism Survey, and compiled and analyse data
- Create map and materials for a web page to promote the Farmers Market trail
- Added walking tours for Fort Robinson State Park on the Discover Northwest Nebraska website
- Updated the “A Parent’s Guide to Emergency Protective Custody” brochure to improve readability

**Hours Worked**

- Faith Junck: 667
- Benoit Kayigamba: 598
- Alexandra Salinas: 17
- Arden Tyree: 20

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**“Serving as a Rural Fellow for the summer is proving to be one of the greatest experiences of my college career so far.” — Faith Junck**

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**“Community isn’t just your hometown. Community is being surrounded by people that not only support you, but empower you.” — Alexa Salinas**

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Summer Projects

- Worked on a beautification plan on the Scottsbluff/Gering corridor as outlined in the Economic Development Strategic Plan. Some work has been done on the plan but is in the beginning stages.
- Small Business Outreach Project which would entail surveys of small businesses with 10 or fewer employees and compile a database of these businesses based on the interview questions for Scottsbluff/Gering

I look forward to taking all the lessons learned from this experience to any career I might end up pursuing in the future.
—Esther Ingabiribyishaka

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Summer Projects

- Assisted with East Campus Discovery Days and Farmers Markets
- Assisted with promotional and event supply inventory
- Assisted with promotional campaigns, press releases, social media, graphics, web site, digital message boards
- Assisted with the CRM database management including: data entry, list management, attendance tracking and report generating

It has been a valuable learning experience. This feels more like an introduction to my future career.
—Laurent Ikuzwe

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Hours Worked

| GERING | 441 |
| GERING | 441 |
| Scottsbluff | 7 |
| Gering | 7 |

Hours Volunteered

| Scottsbluff | 10 |
| Gering | 10 |

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Kimball County Leadership Development
Marthe Niyingenera and Clare Umutoni

Summer Projects
- Youth Advisory Committee with Kimball Area Foundation Fund
- Kimball County Citizens Institute on Rural Design
- Bushnell Community Center and outdoor community gathering space
- Sidney Creative District
- Refreshed database of existing leadership programs from across Nebraska

Hours Worked
713
Hours Volunteered
21

“This is one of the best ways we can give back to Nebraska’s people.”
—Clare Umutoni

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
Marthe Niyingenera and Clare Umutoni

Summer Projects
- Conducted a review of community leadership development programs
- Conducted a literature review of leadership transition
- Conducted a literature review of embedded leadership approaches
- Parking lot to discuss at “Academy”
- Underserved/marginalized leadership needs/opportunities

Hours Worked
723
Hours Volunteered
21

“I had made the conclusion that America is a busy place, at least too busy for me. I was wrong. Small towns are different.”
—Marthe Niyingenera

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Summer Projects

- Provide a framework to build capacity among students for GHG accounting, which will help student as graduates from UNL to contribute solutions for current and future local, regional, and global environmental challenges possess the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful in the job market, the pursuit of a graduate degree, and working across disciplines.

**Hours Worked**
708
**Hours Volunteered**
10

It's incredible how much work can get done when everyone has the same vision in mind.
—Anne Kluthe

Summer Projects

- Conducted a literature review on rural childcare
- Collected information from state wide early childhood organizations
- Identified a potential comparison community to include in the cross-case study
- Scheduled and participated in observations of childcare related meetings, RPN events, and other activities related to early childhood capacity building efforts

**Hours Worked**
375
**Hours Volunteered**
10

When we work together, it's easy to make a significant influence on the community, whether in Nebraska or another place.
—Flora Sangwa

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Summer Projects

• Literature review on factors affecting retaining and attracting residents
• Case study on 5 communities
• Gather secondary and primary data
• Develop an interview protocol
• Conducted interviews via email, phone call or Zoom
• Implement ideas gathered from feedback

Hours Worked
480

Hours Volunteered
0

“Working online opened my eyes to many opportunities because it allows me access to so much data and to create connections.
—Japhet Ingeri

Summer Projects

• Developed a literature review on rural housing successes, challenges, and resources
• Created 3-5 case studies of successful rural housing initiatives
• Identified challenges and barriers rural communities face in addressing housing issues
• Coordinated work with strategic housing council

Hours Worked
256

Hours Volunteered
2

“I am extremely excited to transfer the skills I am learning as an inclusive leader into my daily life and future roles.
—Aline Abayo

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SCOTTS BLUFF COUNTY AREA VISITORS BUREAU
Ben Atali Benimania and Ashtyn Humphreys

Summer Projects
- Developed survey to determine who, why, and how tourists are coming to Scotts Bluff County
- Assisted attractions with social media/online marketing
- Assisted Attractions/SBCVB with pictures of events/tourism
- Assisted attraction/SBCVB with IT issues
- Provided a younger perspective for attractions/tourism

Since tourism is such a broad industry, we are working with a lot of entities throughout the industry—no two days are the same.
—Ashtyn Humphreys

Hours Worked
761

Hours Volunteered
34

STANTON
Josie Ganser and Gabin Kundwa

Summer Projects
- Increased the positive social media presence of businesses and community organizations

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Patience and cooperation made a world of difference, when it comes to an educational and progress-oriented experience.
—Josie Ganser

Hours Worked
400

Hours Volunteered
10

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**Valentine Wakefield Progressive**

Grace Mabiala-Maye and Carine Mushimiyimana

**Summer Projects**

- Helped develop a plan for Daycare at Cherry County Hospital and community
- Helped research and develop plan for trails and other recreational opportunities in the Valentine community

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**Wakefield Progressive**

Devi Dwarabandam and Jacob Zitek

**Summer Projects**

- Set up Hybrid Wellness Center at Farmers Market, and increased the sales and business opportunities at the Farmers Market
- Health Education and Health Promotion: increased the awareness of Healthy Lifestyle
- Local Wakefield Owned Grocery Store setup: Conducted needs assessment using Literature Review

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"An African proverb says: “Alone you go faster; together we go further.”

—Grace Mabiala-Maye

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"We will keep on sticking together, whatever may come in the future"

—Jacob Zitek
What Community Fellows are saying . . .

“It taught me how to identify and ask myself, “Who can I bring into this work? How can I utilize other people’s experiences and voices?”
—Amber Ross, Ravenna

“They helped our community fall in love with each other again.
—Susan Norris, Pierce

“Economic development is all about getting people in the right seats, and our state is in good hands with [the Fellows] in leadership roles.
—Andrew Ambriz, McCook

“Overall, we loved the program and it was truly beneficial for our town.
—Audra Jedlicka, Schuyler

According to a 2022 survey of Community Fellows from the previous nine years . . .

- 74% have a stronger relationship with fellow community leaders
- 70% said training enhanced their effectiveness as leaders
- 66% better understand how to identify their own biases
- 61% are more effective at collaborating with diverse groups
- 57% more consistently seek and include diverse perspectives

70% said training enhanced their effectiveness as leaders
66% better understand how to identify their own biases
61% are more effective at collaborating with diverse groups
57% more consistently seek and include diverse perspectives
57% have a stronger relationship with fellow community leaders
According to a 2021 survey of Student Fellows from the previous nine years . . .

A special thank you to our team. The Rural Fellows program isn’t possible without your dedicated and inspiring efforts.

According to a 2021 survey of Student Fellows from the previous nine years . . .

The highest reward for a human’s toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it.
—John Ruskin

See the full report here.
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