



For Immediate Release
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Nebraska Communities Tackling Big Issues in Workshops

OMAHA —Community and county leaders in and around Mead, Kearney, Grand Island, O'Neill, Beatrice, and Columbus will be taking on big issues such as water quality and quantity, economic development, energy resources, transportation, access to technology, and more as the Nebraska Sustainability Leadership Workshops visit these communities.

The Nebraska Sustainability Leadership Workshop (NSLW), a series of 20 workshops for civic leaders throughout the state, is now under way to address communities' specific priorities, and to help them learn how these priorities can be addressed using sustainable practices. The mission of the NSLW is to help leaders throughout Nebraska craft shared visions for economic opportunities, efficient resource use, environmental quality, alternative energy, effective public policy, healthy and vibrant cities, and food-based coalitions.

Workshops are being held in Mead on December 11 and 12, in Kearney on January 8 and 9, in Grand Island on January 29 and 30, in Columbus on February 12 and 13, in Beatrice on February 26 and 2, and in O'Neill on March 12 and 13. Future workshops are planned for Alliance, Broken Bow, Holdrege, McCook, Norfolk, North Platte, Sidney, and Valentine, among other communities.

"While invited civic and community leaders will be given precedence, anyone who is interested in sustainability and would like to attend the workshops should contact us," said Katie Torpy, program manager. "In some cases, we can make accommodation for individuals interested in building sustainability in their communities."

Two workshops in the series already have been held in Omaha and Lincoln in the past two months. City planners, school board members, county commissioners, city council members and mayors engaged in lively examination of such issues as urban sprawl, job location versus workforce location, nitrates in water, retrofitting older buildings to be more energy efficient, water resources, community gardens, and more. Of particular interest was public policy and how community leaders can enhance their leadership skills to help to build political will among their constituents and colleagues to make necessary changes in sustainable ways.

“These leaders bring to the workshops particular issues in their communities,” said Torpy, “and the NSLW pairs them up with experts in the field to help them find ways to meet to their critical challenges.” Among the rotating panel of experts available for the workshops are engineers, attorneys, architects, agronomists, eco-tourism and agri-tourism consultants, hydrologists, and many others. These experts/consultants are being provided at no charge to the attending civic leaders.

“Our community leaders are the chief designers of our communities and their component parts—central business districts, subdivisions, schools, industries and highways—and hold significant influence over current and future public policies,” said W. Cecil Steward, the founder of the NSLW and president of the Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities. “Civic leaders hold enormous sway over whether or not a new development is a good fit that brings long-term economic benefits without harming the ecological or cultural fabric of the community.

“The NSLW is part of a new partnership program that is preparing Nebraska’s communities for today’s and tomorrow’s complex ecological challenges,” Steward said.

He said that an uncertain energy future, growing shortages of water and other natural resources, and the unfolding consequences of climate change “represent daunting challenges for Nebraska’s community leaders.”

“Whether they live and work in sprawling cities or depopulating towns, all are struggling with myriad priorities as natural resources become increasingly scarce while demands on resources continue to rise,” Steward said.

Among other key components of the workshops will be new ways of looking at and measuring sustainability, and ways of enhancing leadership practices in addressing issues of sustainability in the participants’ communities.

The Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities, primary sponsor of the workshops, has received funding of \$200,000 from the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund to support the creation of this unique forum for community leaders to explore solutions to environmental challenges. Initially the program will run for two years under NETF funding, plus matching grants.

More information and updates on the NSLW can be found on the web site www.nslw.org.