



DATE: December 5, 2022

TO: Mayor Robinson and City Councilmembers

FROM: Julie Ellenhorn, Community Relations Coordinator, 452-5372
Mark Heilman, Neighborhood Outreach Manager, 452-2735
Community Development Department

SUBJECT: Bellevue Essentials 10th Anniversary Program Update

Bellevue Essentials recently completed the 10th year of the City's civics academy leadership program. The program teaches emerging leaders about Bellevue city government and encourages participants to become more civically engaged. On December 7, Bellevue Essentials will welcome 35 new graduates! *Bellevue Essentials Extended (BEES)*, the alumni group that hosts social, community service and educational events throughout the year, now totals 342 alumni. In addition, there are 275 graduates of a parallel employee program.

Demographic Snapshot (Class of 2013 – Class of 2022)

Average number of applicants each year: 61
57% of applicants accepted and 98% of participants graduated
40% male, 60% female
47% POC
Representing all 16 Bellevue neighborhood areas

On December 7, Bellevue Essentials will host a combined 10-Year Anniversary and Graduation Celebration event, featuring keynote speaker, Gary Locke.

Background

Bellevue Essentials grew out of the recognition that the City of Bellevue needed to develop a cadre of informed community leaders who would bring new voices to city government. City leadership recognized that having a better informed and educated community would lead to a more active and engaged community, both for the City and the community.

In 2013, Bellevue Essentials was launched with a vision of a class for emerging leaders. Its core mission was to create a growing group of individuals who were grounded with a base of knowledge about the inner workings of city government, informed about city issues and were ready to get involved at the local level. As the group of graduates grows each year, the public engagement level in Bellevue has also grown measurably.

Bellevue Essentials has exceeded its initial expectations. Board and commission application numbers have risen significantly, with over 55 graduates who have served or are serving on boards and commissions, and dozens more that have integrated into City volunteer opportunities and attended public meetings. The consistent attendance of knowledgeable

Bellevue Essentials graduates has had an impact on public meetings, forums and educational events. These graduates have become resources for projects and initiatives City wide, and neighborhoods have benefitted from graduates taking on leadership positions. The quality of participation, meaningful dialogue and leadership in our city has grown in the past 10 years as a result of the Bellevue Essentials program.

Curriculum

Bellevue Essentials is an 11-week civic engagement program that accepts 35 participants annually. Participants are educated on the structure of city government through hands-on activities, simulating day-to-day challenges of city government. Each session includes a networking dinner and a chance to meet City Councilmembers, City staff and leadership, as well as fellow community members. The program focuses on approximately 12 topics, with each session covering either one or two topics in depth.

The curriculum includes history, demographics, diversity, equity and inclusion, public process, parks and human services, utilities, finance and budget, economic development, community development and planning, development services, transportation, public safety and neighborhoods. Classes include site visits such as neighborhood bus tours, Lewis Creek Park and Botanical Gardens, Spring District walking tour, Global Innovation Exchange tour and an on-site learning session about Utilities at Bellevue Service Center.

By learning how the government and the community partner together, the goal of Bellevue Essentials is to inform residents of the mechanics of city government, give them tools to create change within the community and fuel their passion for civic engagement.

What are Bellevue Essentials graduates doing?

This year, the alumni network of Bellevue Essentials Extended (BEES) numbers 342 individuals who are committed to civic engagement and actively work in the community. From board and commission members to leaders in neighborhood organizations, alumni serve as volunteers and leaders in the broader community. Some even have become elected officials in city government.

The BEES alumni group is active throughout the year. Educational events are organized each year, including an active listening training, "Homelessness 101" course, and diversity, equity and inclusion training. The alumni also participate in other activities, such as summer community service days with Jubilee Reach, a summer picnic, networking breakfasts and coffees and Bellevue Essentials graduation. We estimate that approximately 40 percent of graduates have remained active in the Bellevue Essentials Alumni network.

At the end of 2022, over 55 are serving or have served terms on City boards or commissions. Alumni are on Council-appointed boards and commissions including Parks, Arts, Human Services, Planning, Environmental Services, Transportation, Bellevue Diversity Advantage Network and the Bellevue Network on Aging. They also serve on City advisory committees such as Strategy Team 2044, and regularly attend public meetings and events, such as Neighborhood Leadership Gatherings, comprehensive planning events and parks master planning meetings.

Other City programs that alumni lend their leadership skills to include Conflict Resolution Center, Community Emergency Response Team, Master Naturalists, Stream Team, Police Academy, Bellevue Youth Theater and numerous neighborhood association boards. Alumni also volunteer throughout the community serving with various nonprofits including Backpack Meals, Jubilee Reach, Wellspring, Lifespring, Hopelink, Eastside Legal Assistance, Kiwanis, Bellevue School District, Bellevue Arts Museum, Mary's Place, King County Library System and many more.

Sharing lessons learned with other municipalities

Staff published an "Organizing Guide" and has mentored program managers from other cities who launched civic engagement academies. During the virtual sessions in 2021, City staff invited our peers from other cities in three states to listen in and learn from our program. Staff has led training through the Regional Area Neighborhood Coordinators group for Washington and Oregon and has assisted with launching programs in Kent, Auburn, Renton, Shoreline and Bremerton.

Some comments from alumni:

"People are our greatest asset and Bellevue is rich with diversity, innovation, and kindness! Imagine the change we could create if more cities offered their citizens an opportunity to learn from each other's differences and invest in shared goals and interests." Linda Hoffner, 2019

"I had my preconceived idea about the city government and governments in general. Bellevue Essentials enlightened me about the complexity of government and its operations. I have new appreciation for the city government and elevated respect for the elected officials and the employees - their love, devotion, and dedication are exemplary." Adnan Siddique, 2020

"I am very lucky being part of the Bellevue Essential program. It's eye opening to see how the city runs. The openness builds trust and bonding. I feel like finding my hometown!" Lucy Zou, 2017