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# CITY

# FEST

2025 ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE

CONNECTING  
LEADERS  
.....  
CELEBRATING  
COMMUNITY



JUNE 25-27  
DULUTH

.....  
DULUTH ENTERTAINMENT  
CONVENTION CENTER  
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# Rural Democracy

Making a difference in our  
local community

# OUR BEGINNING PREMISE

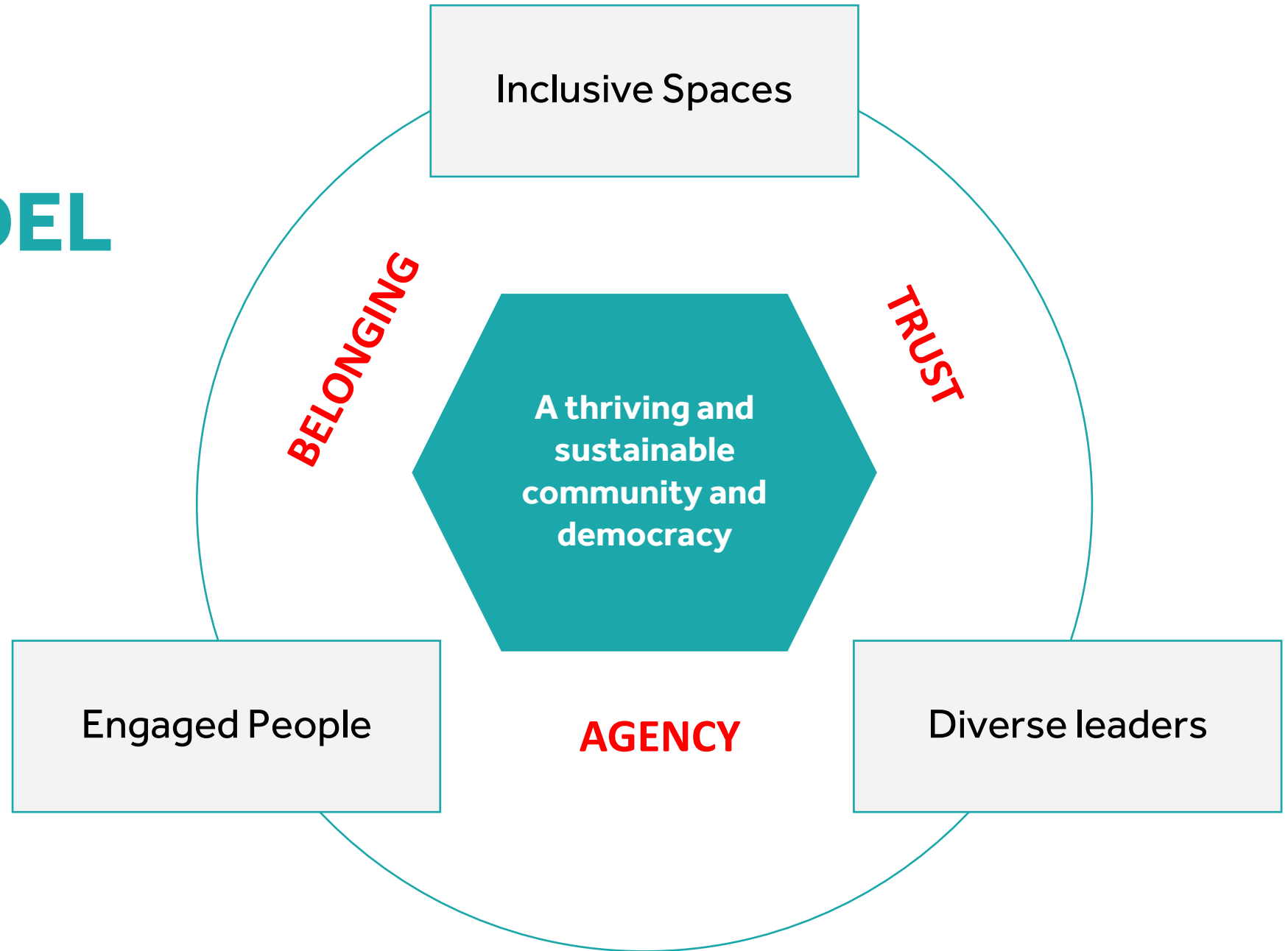
Thriving and prosperous rural communities require thriving and strong civic culture.



# OUR CONTEXT



# OUR MODEL





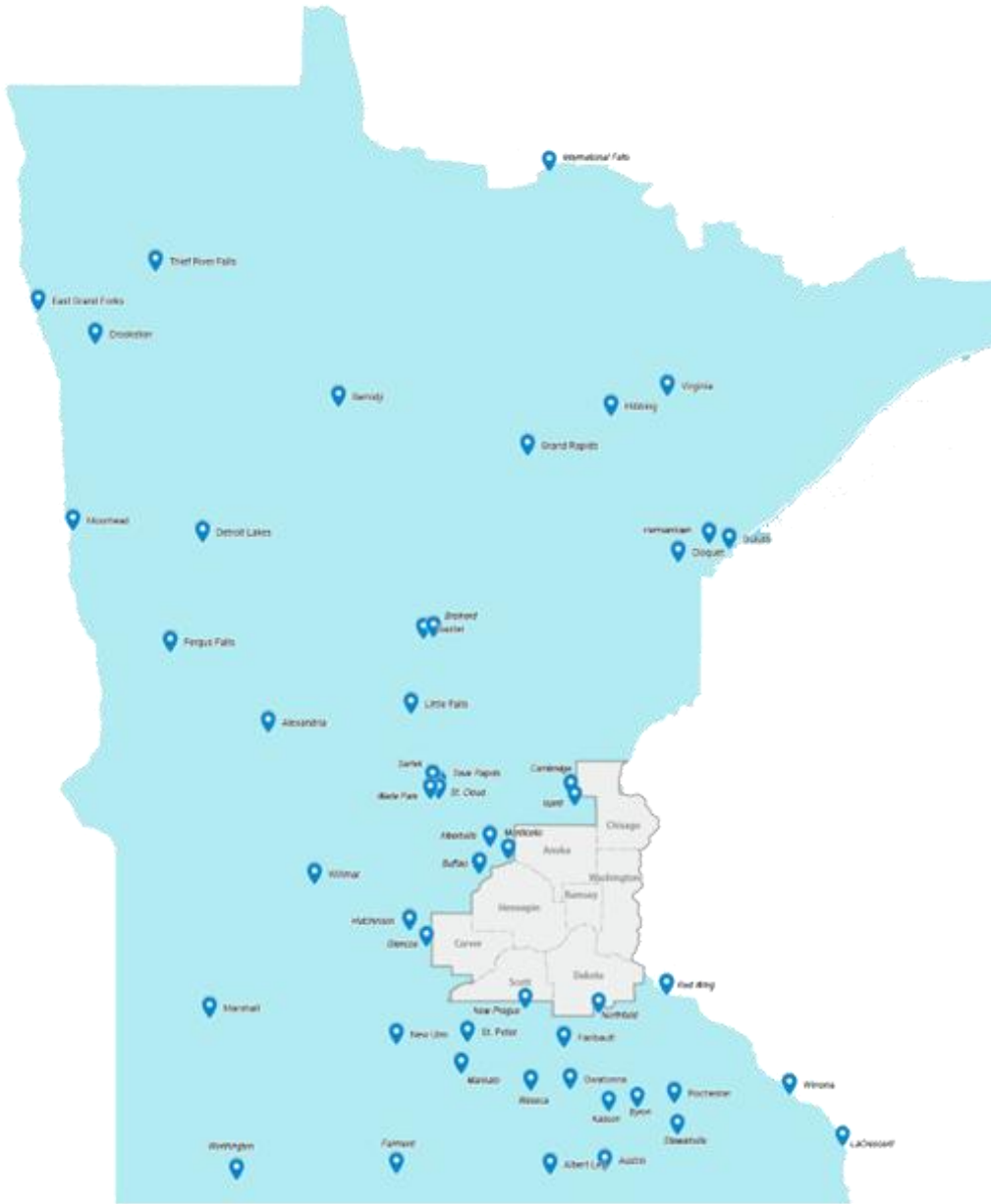
## THREE GAPS

- Public Leadership
- Civic Engagement
- Inclusive Civic Spaces



# RURAL PUBLIC LEADERSHIP DEMAND

- In 2024 - 70% of Minnesota's local races went uncontested
- Our leaders often don't look like the communities they represent
- Rural areas face unique leadership challenges
  - Urban Areas → 1 in 950
  - Rural Areas → 1 in 37





# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGE



- Loss of civics education
- Loss of trusted local sources of information and news
- Narratives that individuate social problems – not collective issues requiring collective responses
- Advocacy is bewildering to most people – seemingly futile to others

# FEWER SPACES FOR CIVIC DIALOGUE



- Decline of social capital – *Bowling Alone*
- Fewer opportunities to interact with others with different views
- Interactions invite statements rather than conversations/ solutions
- Increased polarization/ nationalization of local issues

# IMPORTANCE OF GOING LOCAL





# CURRENT RURAL DEMOCRACY INITIATIVES

- **Rural Belonging**
- **Going Local**
- **Intro to Civic Life**
- **Rural Advocacy and Political Leadership (RAPL)**
- **Run 4 Rural**
- **Lead Local**
- **Rural Democracy Network**









# LEAD LOCAL

• MAYORS NETWORK •  
WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA



## PROBLEM

Local News Deserts &  
Fewer Trusted Local  
Information Sources



## Four Community Conversations



# LAYERED CONVERSATIONS



## The View From Here



## Next

What Can We  
Do Locally?









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