



RFL Civic Impact Project Playbook

Real Organizations. Real Impact. Real Leadership in Action.

At Roaring Fork Leadership, we celebrate organizations that demonstrate leadership through service to their communities. Our **Civic Impact Projects** offer a dynamic opportunity for local organizations and community groups to collaborate with teams of emerging leaders who bring energy, strategy, and innovation to real-world challenges.

Since the inception of this initiative, **RFL has completed over 90 Civic Impact Projects**, working with **countless community partners** across sectors—from mental health and accessibility to economic development and civic inclusion.

1. Introduction: Why Civic Impact Projects Matter

Roaring Fork Leadership (RFL) believes in the transformative power of community-driven leadership. Our Civic Impact Projects provide an innovative platform to build leadership capacity while advancing real-world solutions to local challenges. It's a lab for practicing leadership and advancing social issues.

Our goals:

- Increase civic engagement and leadership development
 - Foster cross-sector collaboration
 - Deliver measurable community benefit (Community ROI)
 - Elevate your organization's visibility and project outcomes
-

2. What Is a Civic Impact Project?

A Civic Impact Project is a real-world issue or opportunity submitted by a local organization, nonprofit, or community group. Projects are selected and tackled by RFL Academy teams throughout their 10-month leadership journey.



3. What Makes a Strong Project?

We're looking for project proposals that:

- Address a real, timely community challenge or opportunity
- Offer opportunities for sustainable solutions
- Are feasible for a 6–8 month project timeline
- Allow for meaningful collaboration between your organization, other organizations and community members, and an RFL team

Note: Participants cannot work on projects they sponsor themselves.

4. How to Submit a Project

- **Deadline to Submit:** August 21, 2026, by 5:00 PM
 - **Form:** Complete the online Civic Impact Project Submission Form
 - <https://rflleadership.org/civic-project-criteria/>
 - **Review:** All submissions are reviewed by RFL staff, board members, and alumni
 - **Project submitters will be informed of the final decision by August 28, 2026**, if their project meets the RFL criteria to present to the RFL Academy cohort.
 - **If selected by an RFL Civic Impact Project team:** Announced by October 5, 2026.
-

5. What You Can Expect as a Sponsor (see Role of a Project Sponsor)

- A team of 6–8 emerging leaders assigned to your project
 - Develop your own leadership
 - Two trained Leadership Advisors supporting the team and ensuring alignment with RFL's values
 - Regular updates and collaboration
 - A final deliverable or outcome that addresses your core challenge
-



6. Timeline Overview

- **August 21:** Project submissions due
- **August 28:** Project sponsor informed if project meets criteria to present to RFL Academy class
- **By October 5:** Project sponsors are informed if project was selected by a civic impact team and introduced to team members.
- **October – April:** Project work and development
- **May – June:** Project close-out, presentations, and community sharing

7. Get Involved

Ready to partner with RFL? Submit your project or reach out with questions.



What's in it for You? The Sponsor Advantage

Partnering with a Roaring Fork Leadership team offers your organization a significant return on investment. As a project sponsor, you can expect to:

*

Tackle a Critical Need: A team of 6-8 talented, emerging leaders could select your project, focusing on an adaptive challenge or a desirable future that you currently lack the capacity to address.

*

Harness Diverse Expertise: Teams are composed of individuals from various professional sectors, age groups, and backgrounds, bringing fresh perspectives, innovative strategies, and a wide range of skills to your project.

*

Achieve Measurable Results: Our projects have a 95% success rate in meeting their agreed-upon goals, providing your organization with a final deliverable that addresses your core challenge.

*

Increase Community Visibility: Sponsoring a project elevates your organization's profile and project outcomes within the community.

*

Build Your Own Leadership Skills: The process is designed to be a rewarding experience for sponsors, offering you a chance for your own leadership development as you guide and collaborate with the team.



The Role of a Project Sponsor

Each year participants of the incoming RFL class are divided into civic impact project teams – approx. six people to a team. Each team takes on a civic impact project during the program year, which equates to a timeframe of October to May. These projects vary in time, effort and scope.

The goals of the civic project teams are:

- To provide a laboratory for participants to practice skills
- To develop a sense of personal efficacy – “I can change things” and collective efficacy “Together, we can make a difference”
- To make an impact in the community – we refer to this as our ‘Community return on investment’ (ROI)
- Participants gain insights on the impact they have on a team and other participants, and take-on personal goals of leadership transformation

The RFL teams are comprised of individuals from all over the valley, representing different sectors, age groups, and professional levels. The civic project idea will be reviewed by all the teams, and if chosen will be a large focus of their time during the program. Therefore, the project should be one of importance to you and/or your organization, to justify your time and effort on it as well. We specifically articulate that the project should require ‘leadership’ not labor. This is not an opportunity to delegate something that your staff does not want to do to a group of volunteers. This is an opportunity to have a group of people taking on new ways of leadership to develop something for your organization and October make something happen that otherwise would not have occurred, to create a highly desirable future and then bring that future into reality – **an adaptive leadership change initiative.**



What is Expected of a Project Sponsor:

- Do a brief 7–10-minute presentation at the Decisive Leadership/Civic Impact Project Selection session at the Third Street Center in Carbondale, CO on October 2nd, 2026.
- If your project is chosen, attend a full day session (9A – 5P) with your team on Friday, December 4th, 2026, at The Gant in Aspen. This day is spent with an RFL Faculty, alumni, and participants, building the framework of the project.
- One member of the RFL civic project team will be designated as your point person throughout the project to streamline communication. (Team Liaison)
- Attend Project Sponsor/Project Liaison Training in November – Date TBD.
- Work with the team as necessary throughout the project.
 - Be the guard rails
 - Develop a relationship and communication plan with the team
 - Help determine scope
 - Sustain the results of project
 - Work with your team at the December 5th session to build project charter, stakeholder analysis, elevator speech, etc.
 - Hold civic project team accountable
 - Bring things to their attention through liaison
 - Answer questions
 - Acknowledge team and celebrate successes
 - It is not your responsibility to tell them how to do things
- It is best if the designated project sponsor remains the project sponsor throughout the project. But if a change in personnel is required, we ask that you contact the Executive Director of Roaring Fork Leadership to help with this transition.

This can be a tremendously rewarding experience for both you and the teams. RFL projects have a 95% success rate in meeting the agreed goal of the project and a 97% success rate in having the RFL Academy participants develop their leadership skills. The goal of the projects is to be a learning lab and opportunity for participants to practice leadership while making a difference in their community.



Project Sponsor Agreements

I understand my role as a project sponsor as outlined in the civic impact project sponsor role.

- Attend civic impact project training – Date TBD.
- Attend the RFL (Roaring Fork Leadership) Academy December Leading Change Session from 9:00A – 5P.
- Work with the team as necessary to attain the project goals.
- Create, define, and agree on the project goals with the team.
- Hold the team accountable to any agreements.
- Give permission for the team to hold you accountable for any agreements.

I understand the goals of the RFL civic impact project are:

- To provide a laboratory for participants to practice leadership.
- For RFL participants to develop a sense of personal efficacy – “I can change things” and collective efficacy.
- For RFL participants to gain a feeling of team workability such as “Together, we can make a difference.”
- For RFL participants to deepen their commitment to make an impact in the community. RFL refer to this as our ‘Community return on investment’ (ROI).
- Participants gain insights on the impact they have on a team and other participants and take-on personal goals of leadership transformation.

I understand the civic impact project purpose is to provide a learning lab for RFL Academy participants to practice leadership.

I will support my team by attending meetings and/or checking in at least once a month regarding project progress, be a sounding board, and provide guidance for questions the team may have.

I will create a communication plan with the project liaison, and it will be shared with the entire civic impact project team.

I am committed to working through any misunderstanding or unworkability with the team and RFL's Executive Director.

I understand it is up to the team to complete the civic impact project with an agreed scope of work/workplan.

I understand there is a risk the team may not complete the project due to unforeseen circumstances. Please note this is a rare occurrence, whereas RFL has had a 95% success rate over the last 12 years with successful project completion and outcomes.



Highlighting Past Civic Impact Project Partners

Here are just a few examples of recent partnerships that showcase the diversity and depth of our impact:

Aspen Camp of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Focus: Accessibility, Inclusion, and Disability Advocacy

Located on 15 acres in Snowmass, Aspen Camp is the only year-round camp in the U.S. dedicated to serving Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and signing communities. RFL participants partnered with Aspen Camp to improve site accessibility, create tactile signage, and host immersive workshops to deepen regional understanding of deaf, blind, and deafblind experiences.

Impact: Advanced inclusion and accessibility for future campers while offering participants a leadership challenge rooted in equity and inclusive design.

Roaring Fork Cricket League (RFCL)

Focus: Cultural Exchange, Community Engagement, and Healthy Lifestyles

RFCL was created to bring cricket—a sport enjoyed by billions globally—to the Roaring Fork Valley, promoting connection among its culturally diverse residents. RFL teams helped launch this effort by developing outreach strategies, building partnerships, and identifying field locations.

Impact: Strengthened community cohesion and introduced a new outlet for cross-cultural dialogue and physical activity in the region.



Headquarters

Focus: Mental Health, Prevention, and Community Resilience

Headquarters is redefining mental health in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys by shifting the focus from crisis response to proactive well-being. Their innovative “Four Quarters of Mental Fitness” model empowers individuals to build resilience across emotional, social, physical, and financial domains. RFL participants supported messaging, engagement, and strategic planning to expand the reach of these tools.

Impact: Enhanced community access to preventative mental health resources while cultivating participant skills in public health leadership and systems change.

With **over 90 completed Civic Impact Projects**, Roaring Fork Leadership has a proven track record of building capacity in organizations while developing the next generation of civic-minded leaders. Each project reflects our belief that leadership is best learned through service—and that **transforming our communities begins with working together.**



More about Roaring Fork Leadership

What We Do

Roaring Fork Leadership (RFL) helps individuals and organizations build effective leaders through training, practice, and application. Formerly known as Leadership Aspen, RFL was founded in 1988 by a group of engaged citizens who saw the need to strengthen relationships and leadership skills across sectors. Since then, RFL has become the region's all-encompassing leadership development organization—advancing collaborative change and long-lasting community improvement.

Our **experiential leadership development model** blends high-quality curriculum, adaptive leadership theory, and real-world practice. We bring in nationally recognized facilitators to guide participants through transformational learning experiences that build self-awareness, critical thinking, communication, and civic engagement.

Whether you're an individual in our flagship RFL Academy or part of a team receiving customized training through RFL CoLab, every program is grounded in the belief that **leadership is a skill that can be taught, practiced, and applied by anyone**—regardless of background, title, or resources.

Our Guiding Belief

We believe leadership depends on engaging and energizing *all* community members, diagnosing systems, framing productive discourse, discovering shared purpose, and experimenting with interventions to make progress (Steffensmeier & Chrislip, 2019).

Leadership is not about titles—it's about building **leadership and civic capacity** to solve our region's toughest challenges together.



Our Programs

- **RFL Academy**

A 10-month flagship experience that combines personal growth, systems leadership, and civic action. Participants develop core leadership competencies while collaborating on Civic Impact Projects that create real change in the community.

 - **Civic Impact Projects**

Embedded within the Academy, these team-based initiatives engage participants in addressing real community needs—partnering with local organizations to design solutions, mobilize stakeholders, and practice adaptive leadership in action.
- **RFL Mastermind**

A 5-month, small-group leadership experience crafted for mid- to senior-level professional women ready to deepen emotional intelligence, elevate presence, connect with a trusted circle of peers and lead with confidence. Mastermind groups provide structured dialogue, feedback, and support.
- **RFL Live**

A community-facing series of interactive workshops, speaker events, and leadership learning opportunities.

 - **RFL Elevate:** is a unique half-day forum gathering created to uplift and connect women across the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys, welcoming those from all walks of life—whether at home, in the workplace, or within their communities. This event is dedicated to helping women of every stage embrace their unique strengths, nurture their well-being, and spark inspiration to create a brighter future.
- **RFL CoLab**

Customized leadership training for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and cross-sector teams. RFL CoLab helps organizations strengthen culture, align teams, and grow internal leadership capacity.

Our Vision

Better Leaders, Better Communities

Our Mission

We believe anyone can be a leader. RFL develops leaders—no matter their experience, background, or resources—who make their communities better.

Roaring Fork Leadership – rflleadership.org – 970-922-6035 – info@rflleadership.org