

Where Citizens *Impact* Public Policy



Join us at the intersection of **common ground**, not gridlock

# Citizens League

## 2016 Annual Report

## A message from 2016 Board Chair **Susan Hammel** and Executive Director **Sean Kershaw**

For over 60 years, the Citizens League has brought together diverse perspectives to develop solutions to the biggest problems facing Minnesota. Thanks to our dedicated and engaged members that power this effort! Our work would not be possible without the strong support of our members, both financially and through the collaborative work we do together.

In 2016, the Citizens League brought many important topics to the forefront of conversation. Topics such as the Metropolitan Council, developing new a new generation of diverse leaders at the Capitol, helping families talk about aging, education and workforce development were just some of them. Because we believe everyone can be a policymaker surrounding these issues, these discussions happened not only in the halls of government but in community conversations and at kitchen tables.

Convening Minnesotans to tackle tough issues is in our DNA. We find that gathering people with diverse perspectives together brings out the best discussion. With events like *Policy and a Pint®*, sponsored by Target, *The Voting Booth Chronicles*, sponsored by Comcast, and *Mind Openers*, sponsored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, we tackled such issues as the state of political parties today, water quality in Minnesota, and better coordinating mental health resources. We also began teaching our Quantum Civics™ leadership development program for active citizenship to our members, demonstrating the role all citizens play in policymaking. Civics@Work programming, available to our organizational members, provided timely and non-partisan public policy information during workday sessions. Speakers from state executives to media analysts to trade experts led interactive lively discussions.

The year was capped off with a tremendous Civic Celebration honoring the legacies of Wheelock Whitney and Dr. Glen Nelson, and how their leadership has had ripple effects through generations. More than 400 guests joined us to recognize these two for their inspirational leadership.

Our members make our work possible. It was a pleasure for us to lead the Citizens League in 2016, and we look forward to great things ahead!



Susan Hammel,  
2016 Board Chair



Sean Kershaw,  
Executive Director



The Citizens League is a member-supported nonpartisan nonprofit organization that champions the role of all Minnesotans to govern for the common good and promote democracy.

Through our work:

- Minnesotans of all backgrounds, parties and ideologies are engaged, inspired and empowered to see the role they play in public policy and act on it, reigniting Minnesota's ability to implement innovative and effective policy solutions for the 21st Century; and
- The Citizens League is a relevant and respected policy resource, leveraging the strength of our 60-year legacy with a focus on solving tomorrow's problems, and earning the ongoing support of our members, board, leadership and staff.

In 2016, the Citizens League utilized its unique reputation as a respected non-partisan, non-profit public policy organization to bring together different perspectives to tackle big challenges facing Minnesota today, from Met Council reform to helping our communities plan for our aging population. In addition, by hosting several events throughout the year, the Citizens League facilitated discussions on a variety of issues, inviting differing points of views on topics, encouraging comments and questions from our audience, and challenging all in attendance to consider other ideas. Here are some of the initiatives, projects and events the Citizens League took on in 2016.

### **Metropolitan Council Reform**

In 2016, the Citizens League convened a diverse task force to study concerns related to the Metropolitan Council, a regional planning entity. The charge of the task force was to look at the Council's performance against its goals; learn more about the concerns raised; examine the tensions between counties, cities, and individual Minnesotans; and discuss some of the changes that have been suggested from the starting place of preserving the Council's regional effectiveness.

The [19-member task force](#) began the six-month study in late September 2015 and completed its [final report](#) with recommendations by March in time to inform the 2016 legislative session. Visit the Citizens League's [comprehensive project page](#) for background, meeting minutes, the final report, and links to media mentions. The recommendation made their way into two bills.

## **Education**

To meet projected workforce demands in light of Minnesota's changing demographic trends, the Citizens League has been leading and supporting efforts to grow and maintain a skilled workforce. Last year, the Citizens League helped pass the [first-ever higher education attainment goal](#) to provide the state with a unified higher education target. As a member of the attainment goal advisory committee led by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education, we are excited about this [report on baseline estimates](#).

In 2016, the Citizens League continued to support [Students for Education Reform](#) on reimagining remedial education. With millions of dollars spent by college students to get the education they should have received in high school, this continues to be a barrier to completion for many. The Citizens League was also part of a large coalition led by the Minneapolis-Saint Paul Regional Workforce Innovation Network ([MSPWin](#)) to get more investments in adult workforce training. Lastly, the Citizens League supported the [Civics Education Initiative](#), which we viewed as critical to having an informed citizenry.

## **Capitol Pathways**

During the 2016 legislative session, the Citizens League and the program's founding members Annie Levenson-Falk, Juventino Meza, Claire Wilson, and Pahoua Yang Hoffman launched the inaugural year of the [Capitol Pathways program](#). The Capitol Pathways program was created to strengthen Minnesota government by making it more representative of the state's population. Despite growing diversity throughout Minnesota, people of color are largely absent from legislative decision making in the state. The program placed 26 college students of color—freshmen to senior—from 12 two- and four-year higher education institutions.

Of the 26 students, 13 identified as Black or African-American, three identified as Mexican/Mexican-American, one identified as Asian-Indian, one identified as Korean, one identified as Bengali, three identified as Hmong, one identified as Tibetan, one identified as Brazilian, one identified as Nigerian, one identified as Central-American/Honduran/Peruvian, one identified as Cambodian, one identified as Liberian/Lebanese-American, one identified as Latino, and one identified as Ecuadorian. Please note that students were allowed to choose multiple categories. We anticipate a similar makeup of students but extra effort will be used to recruit Native-American students.

At least eight have gone on to pursue policy related jobs/further study. Here are some of their titles:

- Legislative Assistant in the House
- Legislative Coordinator at the Minnesota Department of Revenue
- Clerk with the MN Judicial Branch
- Local and Regional Policy Coordinator at the Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers

## **Aging**

In 2016, the Citizens League launched *Calling Home*, an initiative that explores the concept of “home” as a starting place for intergenerational conversations about aging and planning. Along with partners, the Citizens League convened five community conversations around the state: Moose Lake, Suburban Ramsey, Heritage Park (North Minneapolis), Harmony, and the Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center also in North Minneapolis. Twin Cities PBS, a partner on the project, followed up with individuals and families who attended the community conversations to see if they would be comfortable being featured in the video shorts. Video production took place August through October. On Thursday, November 17, a small screening of the completed videos so that the individuals, their families, and our funders could see them before they aired on public television the month of December 2016 and January 2017.

## **Policy and a Pint®**

For over a decade, we have partnered with Minnesota Public Radio’s The Current to engage people in important conversations about public policy and issues in the news. Policy and a Pint is committed to bringing diverse perspectives and people together, and engaging all types of Minnesotans to understand important public policy issues and the role citizens can play in contributing to solutions. Sponsored in 2016 by Target, we hosted a variety of lively conversations: [using technology to solve community problems](#), [the changing landscape of politics and political parties](#), [the state of water in Minnesota](#), the [emergence of a new generation of leaders](#), and [an examination of Minnesota’s mental health care system](#).

[Read more about Policy and a Pint®, and future events you can join, on our website.](#)

## **The Voting Booth Chronicles**

Sponsored by Comcast, this new event series brought diverse perspectives on the unique election of 2016. Topics covered election topics such as the process of caucusing, how political conventions come together and what really happens at them, and the complex world of campaign laws and campaign finance.

## **Mind Opener Policy Breakfasts**

For this series that continued in 2016, we invited speakers to present a viewpoint on a particular policy topic. Sponsored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, these discussions include topics ranging from the economic status of Minnesotans, to the emergence of self-driving cars. [Click here to read more about these discussions, and how you can join.](#)



## **EDTalks**

In 2016, we continued with EDTalks, a lively series of networking and education events that engages young professionals in public education issues in the Twin Cities. Each program features two compelling presentations by cutting-edge educators, youth advocates, journalists, artists and others, along with ample time for conversation and networking.

EDTalks is presented by the Citizens League and Achieve Minneapolis in partnership with Twin Cities Public Television, Young Education Professionals – Twin Cities and Young Professionals of Minneapolis. It is sponsored by a generous donation from the Verne C. Johnson Family Foundation, with additional support provided by the Bush Foundation.

## **2016 Civic Celebration**

At our annual [Civic Celebration](#), hundreds of Citizens League members, supporters and friends gathered to celebrate the legacies of Dr. Glen Nelson and Wheelock Whitney, two inspiring civic leaders in Minnesota. Over 400 of our members, supporters and friends gathered to recognize how the legacies of these two serve as the foundation of Minnesota's future. During our program, they were honored by current and future Minnesota leaders for their lives of inspiration and dedication, of risk-taking and innovation, and for leading the way for future trailblazers.



*Common ground. Common good.*

## Thanks to our 2016 contributors

The work of the Citizens League is made possible with the support of hundreds of individual, household, business, foundation and organizational members.

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The Citizens League wishes to thank the hundreds of individual and household members who made contributions in 2016 between \$1 and \$249. Your support is essential to our continued success!

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*We have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of this information. If we have inadvertently missed or misspelled your name, please accept our apologies, and let us know: [info@citizensleague.org](mailto:info@citizensleague.org).*

The Citizens League would like to thank the following members who have generously included the Citizens League in their estate plans: Catherine & Chris Beltmann, Judy Blaseg & John Engelen, Ellen & Peter Brown, Cal & Phyllis Clark, Charles & Carol Denny, Sue Herridge, Jean & Tom King, Archibald & Christine Spencer, Tom & Arlene Swain.