

# The Barriers, Breakthroughs, and Backbone of Rural Elected Women

100 Rural Women Research Findings



100 RURAL WOMEN

## About Us

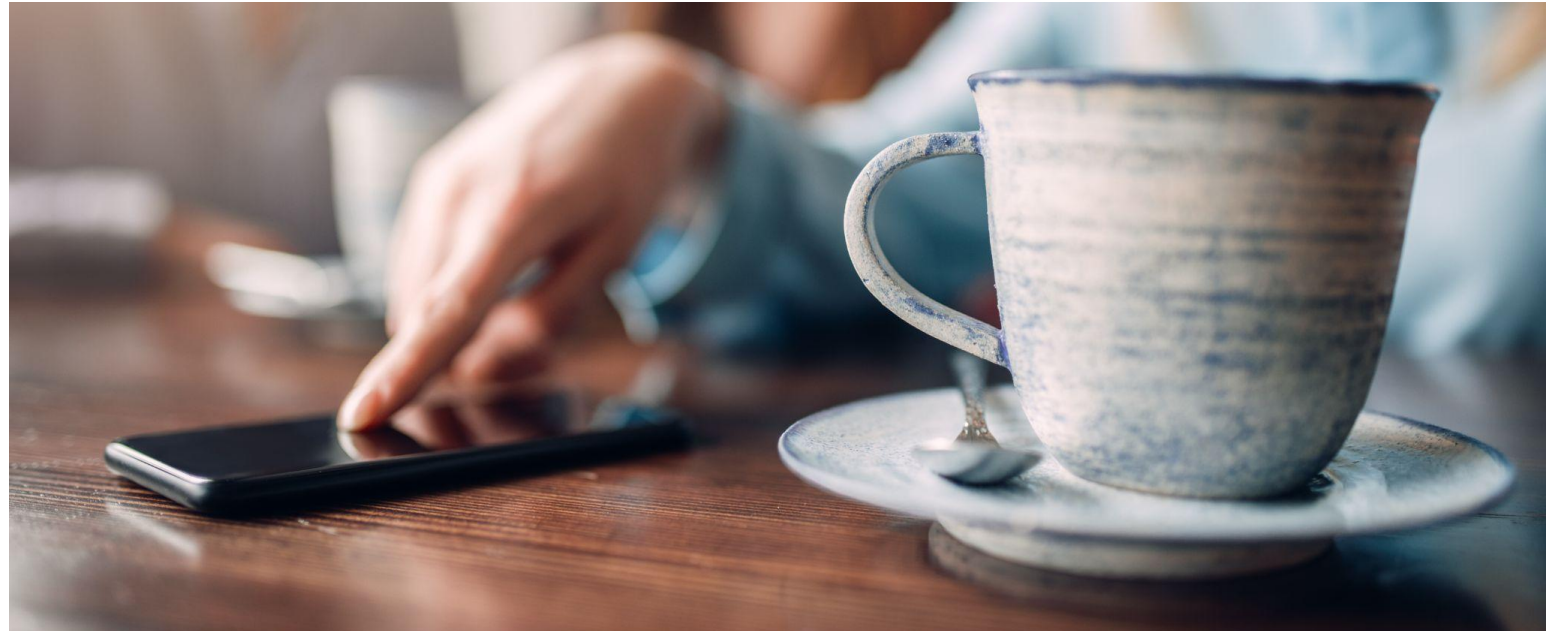
**100 Rural Women sees a future where more rural women lead positive change for themselves, their families and communities, the nation and the world.**

We are committed to building leadership through networks, mentorship, education and civic engagement.

Our organization is non-profit and non-partisan.

# Breakfast Club Webinars

Monthly since November 2020



We believe it is more important than ever to lift up rural women leaders and their crucial work in their communities. We do this by sharing resources, networking, and developing our leadership skills so we can continue to empower each other to do our best work.

# About this Project



HUMPHREY SCHOOL  
OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Each year, the Humphrey School connects with community organizations on field projects. This partnership allows students to gain real-life experience while the organization gets to leverage the skills of graduate students.

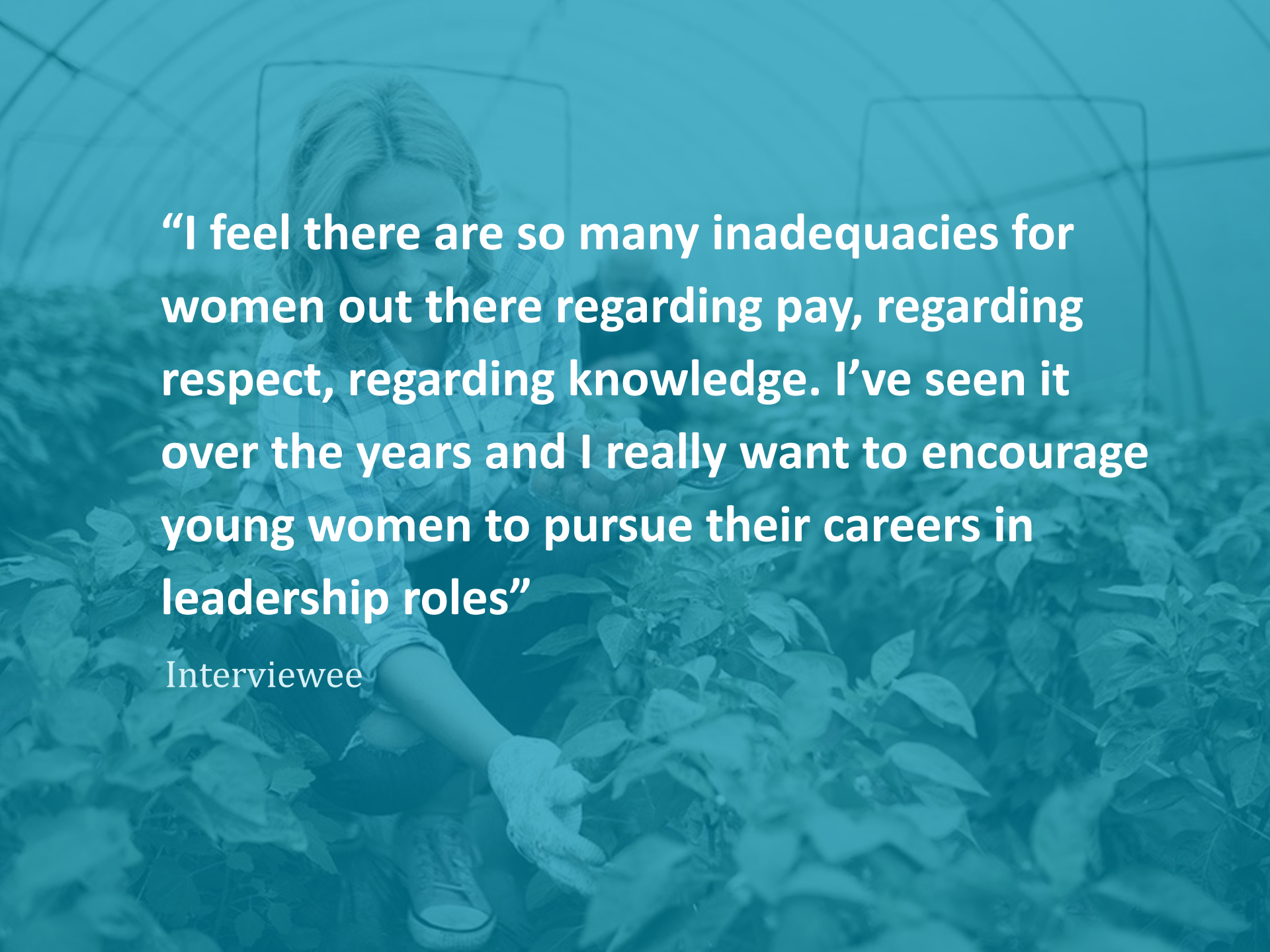
Each year, the Humphrey School offers approximately 13 different capstone workshop courses and completes approximately 40 different capstone projects in support of community clients from the public and nonprofit sectors.

# The Barriers, Breakthroughs, and Backbone of Rural Elected Women

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**“I feel there are so many inadequacies for women out there regarding pay, regarding respect, regarding knowledge. I’ve seen it over the years and I really want to encourage young women to pursue their careers in leadership roles”**

Interviewee



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# Introduction



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# Meet the team

Delaney Stekr



Naa Korkoi Larmie



Caitlyn Walker





# Agenda

- Introduction of Project
- Research Questions
- How we conducted our research
- Results
- Recommendations
- Limitations
- Question and Answer

# Project Introduction

- 31.8% of the Minnesota Legislature is female, while 50.3% of the overall population is female <sup>1</sup>
- Women perceived to be more compassionate and better problem solvers than their male counterparts <sup>2</sup>
- Rural women have less access to infrastructure, opportunities for paid employment and access to services <sup>3</sup>

## 100 Rural Women and Our Project

100 Rural Women is a nonprofit seeking to fill the gap of rural women in leadership positions

How our project fits in:

- Utilizing the knowledge of women who have run previously to support women potentially seeking office
- Learn what types of mentorship activities would be beneficial



# Research Questions



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# Research Questions

1. What are the motivators and barriers to women who have run for elected office?
2. What support already exists, and which are the most effective for elected women?
3. What are the specific barriers to rural women compared to urban women thinking about running for office?



How we conducted our research



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# Literature Review

- Research on the issue of women in elected positions and found:
  - Lack of parity in government representation
  - Women face a variety of barriers to elected office
  - Importance of mentorship

# Interview Sample

- Sample size - **19 interviews**
- Interviewees include rural elected officials, former elected officials, peer organizations
- Types of offices represented:
  - Mayor
  - City Councilmember
  - Hospital Board Member
  - School Board Member
  - County Commissioner
  - Sheriff
  - Tribal Representative
  - State Senator
  - State House Representative
  - County Attorney



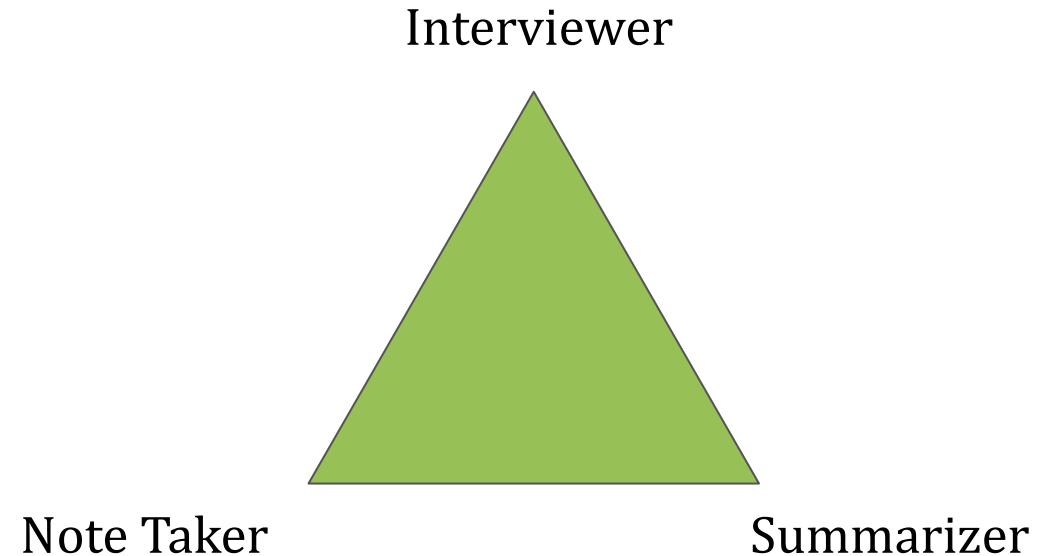
# Interview Questions

## Questions we asked:

- What got you interested in running for elected office?
- What **supports exist** to support you currently in your role as an elected female?
- What was the **biggest barrier** in your run for elected office? How did you overcome these challenges?
- How do your **identities** impact the work you do as an elected official?
- How would you **design a support network** for rural women seeking elected office in Minnesota?

# Thematic data analysis

- Triangulation
- Analyzed data based on common themes
  - Motivators to run for office
  - Supports that helped their run for office
  - Barriers to running for office
  - Impact of their identity on their run for office
  - Challenges specific to rural women
  - Mentorship ideas



A photograph showing two women walking away from the camera on a dirt path. The woman on the left is wearing a light-colored t-shirt and dark pants. The woman on the right is wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt, dark pants, and a brown hat. They are walking past a building with corrugated metal siding and a wooden section. In the background, there are railroad tracks and a cloudy sky. A dark semi-transparent box is overlaid at the bottom of the image containing the text "Results/Findings".

# Results/Findings



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“I think honestly the reason I ran ultimately at the end of the day is I that I don’t feel like I am being represented. I don’t think a lot of women are being represented”

Interviewee



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Motivators

# Motivators

What motivates rural women to run for office?

- Want to facilitate change in their community
- Do not feel the elected body is representative of the community
- Are asked to run by others/previously elected officials
- Have family, friends, or mentors that are politically active
- The timing is right

“I got on the board with a group of very smart, very strong and very experienced ladies. They took me under their wing and they kind of moulded me ...”

Interviewee



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Existing Support

# Existing Supports

What supports help  
rural women?

- Many formal organizations exist & provide limited support
- Informal supports are critical
- Campaign managers & previously elected mentors
- Flexibility with jobs, family, and other responsibilities
- Experienced staff

“I think my biggest barrier was getting the support that I felt I needed to pull this off to make this work. People of color, minorities have to do twice the convincing to show they were a credible candidate and I did not even feel I had the initial support I needed.”

Interviewee



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Barriers



# Barriers

What barriers to rural women face?

- Good ol' Boys Club & lack of other women
- Limited knowledge of how to run a campaign
- Having their qualifications questioned because of their gender
- Little support from others
- Community credibility
- Work/home/life balance

“I think that my identity as a woman and as a mother probably affects my politics the most; they’re the things I tend to focus on.”

Interviewee



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Impact of  
Identity

# Impact of Identity

- View their identity as making them more relatable
- Making them the subject matter expert on certain issues
- Making it difficult to support all constituents
- Identity and values used as their guiding philosophy
- Impacting the issues they prioritize

“You know, even to the nuances of what it means to be talking about roads and bridges: roads in urban versus bridges in rural, you’re still talking infrastructure but you might be talking more transit in the urban areas than you are in rural areas. So the issues are definitely a big part of it and the tactics are slightly different.”

Interviewee



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Rural Barriers

## Specific Rural Barriers

- Small-town catch-22: everyone knows you
- Being viewed as an outsider
- Compensation
- Unique set of issues
- Physical distance



# Recommendations



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## Supports that Women Need

- Financial support
  - Financing campaigns
  - How to run campaign finances
- Basic campaign “how-tos”
  - Door knocking
  - Yard signs
  - Professional photos
  - Flyers and newspaper ads
  - Running social media
- Insight and guidance on how to do the job once elected

## Mentorship Network Recommendations

- Host virtual and in person events/meetings
- Facilitate informal meetings to build trust
  - Provide opportunities for group meetings & one-on-one meetings
- Facilitate experience-sharing between women
- Take advantage of elected officials who want to support other women
- Accommodate the busy schedules of elected officials





# Limitations



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# Limitations

- Schedules of elected officials
- Time constraints of our project
- Non-response from some elected officials
- Mentorship suggestions are based on individual preferences
- Minnesota specific
- Most interviewees were white

Thank You!

- 100 Rural Women
  - Teresa Kittridge
  - Delaine Anderson
  - Emma Higgins
- Professor Kevin Gerdes of the Humphrey School of Public Affairs
- All of the women who volunteered their time and insights to our research

# Sources

1. Interview 03. Interview. Conducted by Naa Korkoi Larmie. 11 March 2022.
2. Horowitz, J. M., Igielnik, R., & Parker, K. (2019, December 31). *2. views on leadership traits and competencies and how they intersect with gender*. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. Retrieved April 19, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/09/20/2-views-on-leadership-traits-and-competencies-and-how-they-intersect-with-gender/>
3. Pozarny, P. (2016). *Gender roles and opportunities for women in urban environments* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1337). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

Questions?



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Building out a Network of 100 Rural Elected  
Women Mentoring 100 New Rural Women  
Pursuing Public Service

What's next?

# The Value of University & Community Partnerships



Graduate  
Student  
Support

In order to keep moving forward accessing talent - we are partnering with the U of M via the Mary Page Fund to raise funds to support graduate student. Your gift -- no matter the amount -- makes an immediate impact. With your support, we can continue building a pipeline of graduate students to help learn more about rural issues.





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# Thank you for joining us!

We look forward to seeing you at a future event.

[100ruralwomen.org](http://100ruralwomen.org)