



Polk-Burnett Leadership Academy Alumni Survey Report

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Executive Summary

In the fall 2008, support staff from the Polk County UW Extension office contacted Polk-Burnett Leadership Academy (PBLA) alumni; Class I, II, III, asking them to comment on their PBLA experience by participating in a survey. Most alumni received an email invitation to participate in an on-line survey. In addition, all alumni received a mailed survey from the Polk County office and a letter with a URL address to which they could go and take the survey on line. Alumni were also contacted by phone as a reminder to complete the survey. A total of 20 (N=42) useable surveys were completed for a return rate of 48 percent.

Key themes that emerged from the PBLA Survey were:

1. The PBLA surpassed the expectations of alumni. Half (50 percent) said that the program “exceeded” their expectation of the experience and another 15 percent stated that the program “greatly exceeded” their expectations.
2. Ninety percent of alumni believed the PBLA was “very important” or “important” in increasing their leadership skills and abilities which suggest the alumni learned valuable leadership skills during their time as fellows.
3. Forty-five percent of alumni report using the skills and knowledge gained through PBLA on an almost daily basis. Half (50%) of alumni used the skills and knowledge gained through the program about once a week.
4. Results were similar from PBLA alumni regarding how important the program was in terms of developing listening and speaking skills. Eighty-one percent of alumni believe the program is “very important” or “important” in developing listening skills; seventy-five percent of alumni believe the program is “very important” or “important” in developing speaking skills.
5. PBLA alumni report an increase in self-awareness and self-confidence as a result of participating in the program. Ninety-five percent of alumni felt the program was “very important” or “important” in increasing their self-awareness and seventy-five percent of alumni felt the program was “very important” or “important” in increasing their self-confidence.
6. For alumni, the action that occurred most often after participating in the program was chairing a committee in their community or workplace. Pursuing additional formal education was the action with least subsequent participation by alumni.
7. Twenty percent of alumni have been elected to public office following their PBLA participation. In total, one-fourth of PBLA have run for public office. . Including PBLA Alum-Class II Bryan Beseler, who was recently elected as the new Polk County Board Chairman In total, one-fourth of PBLA have run for public office.
8. For almost all alumni, the PBLA application process was clear and not too lengthy or complex.
9. Alumni agreed that communication with other PBLA participants was satisfactory, as was communication with UWEX/PBLA staff, and most alumni clearly preferred to be contacted by PBLA through email.

10. The time commitment necessary to participate in the program did not appear to be an issue with most alumni. One hundred percent of alumni “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that the time commitment to PBLA was too much given the value they received.
11. The dollar cost of PBLA was not considered too much for the value alumni received.

Survey Purpose

The Polk-Burnett Leadership Academy Alumni Survey was designed to provide insights into the extent to which the three graduated classes of PBLA has had an impact on alumni leadership abilities, skills, and the work they do to strengthen their communities. The survey was also designed to determine, that after its first three years, if the PBLA had developed the capacity to become a sustainable legal entity, with a governing board, that can begin applying for not-for-profit status.

Survey Instrument

Jim Janke, of the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls, designed the survey instrument for a similar project and shared it with Polk County UW Extension support staff. Response types in the survey instrument consisted of a mix of rating items on a standard Likert scale and open-ended questions. Of the 29 questions, nearly all asked about the impact the PBLA has made on the participant and his/her community; three questions gathered demographic information such as age and gender and lastly, a question was asked to measure interest in serving on a governing PBLA board.

Responses to open-ended questions were compiled by Polk County UW Extension support staff. **Appendix to this report contains a complete compilation of comments.**

POLK/BURNETT LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

20 surveys returned

42 in class

Return of 48%

	Very Important	Important	Un-important	Very Un-important	No Opinion
1. Please indicate how important the PBLA was in developing your <u>ability to initiate action</u> in your community/workplace.	5%	75%	5%		15%
2. Please indicate how important the PBLA was in developing your <u>listening skills</u> .	30%	50%	15%		5%
3. Please indicate how important the PBLA was in developing your <u>speaking skills</u> .	20%	55%	15%		10%
4. Please indicate how important the PBLA was in increasing your ability to <u>assume responsibility</u> to be	40%	55%	5%		

an effective leader.					
5. Please indicate how important the PBLA was in <u>increasing your self-awareness</u> (e.g., strengths and weaknesses).	50%	45%	5%		
6. Please indicate how important the PBLA was in improving your <u>problem-solving abilities</u> .	25%	45%	20%		10%
7. Please indicate how important the PBLA was in increasing your <u>leadership skills and abilities</u> .	30%	60%	10%		

	Almost Daily	Once a Week	Once a Month	Once a Year	Almost Never
8. How much have you actually used the skills and knowledge gained through PBLA?	45%	50%		5%	

	Very Important	Important	Un-important	Very Un-important	No Opinion
9. Please indicate how important the PBLA was in developing your <u>knowledge and understanding of issues facing Wisconsin</u> .	50%	45%	5%		
10. Please indicate how important the PBLA was in developing your <u>knowledge and understanding of national issues</u> .	5%	50%	40%		5%
11. Please indicate how important the PBLA was in developing your <u>knowledge and understanding of global issues</u> .		35%	35%		30%
12. Please indicate how important the PBLA was in preparing you to deal with complex issues.	10%	70%	10%		10%

	Great Extent	Fair Extent	Slight Extent	Not At All	No Opinion
13. To what extent did the PBLA broaden your understanding of diverse perspectives on major issues?	20%	55%	20%		5%
14. To what extent did the PBLA increase your self-confidence?	40%	35%	25%		

15. Please describe one or more examples of an action that you have taken because of your participation in the PBLA and the results and impacts of your action. (Appendix A)

16. Please describe the most important benefits you have experienced as a result of your participation in PBLA. (Appendix B)

17. Following your participation in PBLA, have you:	Yes	No
Chaired a committee in your community (e.g., for your church, a citizen committee, or a local non-profit) or workplace?	65%	35%
Run for elected public office?	25%	75%
Been elected to public office?	20%	80%
Been elected or appointed to a Board of Directors?	60%	40%
Pursued additional formal education (e.g., degree program)?	20%	80%
Pursued additional informal education (e.g., training or certification)?	65%	35%

Started a new business or organization (e.g., non-profit or school) or created a new program or product?	35%	65%
Assumed a leadership position in an industry organization (e.g., state or national trade or professional organization)?	25%	75%
Maintained connections built through PBLA?	80%	20%

18. If there are other actions that you took as a result of your participation in PBLA that were not listed in Question 15, please list them here. (Appendix C)

	Very Important	Important	Un-important	Very Un-important	No Opinion
19. Overall, how important was the PBLA in your development as a leader?	45%	55%			
20. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. Please read the statements carefully because some are worded positively, and others are worded negatively.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
The PBLA application process was clear.	35%	60%			5%
The PBLA application process was too lengthy or complex.			70%	30%	
The time commitment to PBLA was too much given the value that I received.			75%	25%	
The dollar cost of PBLA was too much for the value I received.			60%	35%	5%
Communication with other PBLA participants was satisfactory.	25%	65%	10%		
Communication with PBLA staff was satisfactory.	55%	30%	10%	5%	

	Greatly Exceeded	Exceeded	Met	Did Not Meet	Fell Far Short
21. Overall, to what extent did the PBLA live up to your expectations of this experience?	15%	50%	35%		
	Very Important	Important	Un-important	Very Un-important	No Opinion
22. Are there additional things that you wish that PBLA would do to support the alumni of the program? <u>(Appendix D)</u>					
	Surface Mail	Email	Other, please specify		
23. How would you prefer to be contacted by PBLA?	20%	80%			
24. What one improvement would you suggest for PBLA? <u>(Appendix E)</u>					
25. Do you have additional comments regarding PBLA? <u>(Appendix F)</u>					

DEMOGRAPHICS Tell us a Bit About You.

26. Gender:	Male		Female			
	35%		65%			
27. What is your highest level of education?	Less Than High School		High School Diploma		Some Tech/College/Trade School	
	Two Year Tech/College/Trade Deg.		Bachelor's Degree		Graduate or Professional Degree	
	15%		70%		15%	
28. What is your current age range?	No Ans.	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
	5%	25%	15%	40%	10%	5%
29. Would you be willing to serve on a PBLA steering committee? (Per diems will be paid, 2 meetings per year, determine curriculum, serve on a board) <u>(Appendix G)</u>	Yes		No		Not Sure	
	6 – yes but 3 with no name attached 30%		2 10%		12 60%	

Appendix A: Please describe one or more examples of an action that you have taken because of your participation in the PBLA and the results and impacts of your action.

- **Community Involvement**
 - Become leader at church – leading children’s choir
 - Addressing problems associated with alcohol and drug abuse
 - Continued with ongoing community leadership initiatives, especially running local domestic housing program.
 - I participate on many local community service committees and have stepped forward in more assertive way at those meetings.
 - Subsequently serve on several leadership positions and worked with many other leaders to work to improve organizations through education
 - Developed Plans of Action as well as a Mission Statement to identify and eliminate barriers in order to foster equal access to education, housing, and health care services
 - Initiated plans for a farmers' market in our city, joined a committee of interested individuals involved in growing local foods and developed a seasonal and successful market where local people can buy and sell a wide range of local products.
 - Ran for public office. Involvement in local emergency planning
 - I have joined the board of the Amery Community Foundation. I was asked to develop the agency application form for non-profits which was well received. I continue on a state board for our Faith in Action program. I have done presentations at two state level meetings regarding program management. I also

am mentoring 2 program directors on issues related to board development and program management.

- Currently manage the St. Croix Falls Chamber of Commerce
 - I also started a non-profit organization to improve my towns parks
 - I have initiated developing and implementing classes for youths in my church. I believe the impact will be great.
 - Joined to community boards and plan to run for a school board in the future.
 - Keeping the PBLA experience in mind has been very useful when working in committee settings to develop leadership training and community development educational experiences for others. PBLA has helped me build collaborations and awareness.
 - My wife resigned from her job and joined me in opening a business due in large part to my experiences with PBLA and our desire to benefit our Main Street.
 - Develop plans to start a teen center and started my own business. Working on youth issues in my county and state.
 - Volunteer for the Arnell Humane Society and became treasurer of the board.
 - My plate is still full w/objectives begun prior to the PBLA experience.
- **Local, Regional, State Political Involvement**
 - I have been re-elected and continued serving on our village board. At present, I have PUSHED through a non-smoking resolution for our village owned property and equipment. Have continued looking ahead for the community and its residents in multiple topics, i.e. member of the Comprehensive Planning Commission, member of the local ambulance service board, and actively taking on the planning of the Village Centennial Celebration for 2009. I am also working on reviewing the Fire Dept. Explorers program for the young (high school) adults.
 - I have been able to run more efficient Town Board meetings
 - After completing PBLA I ran for town board and am still serving. I believe that I have had a positive impact on my community. I have also served in leadership positions in other organizations.
 - I have chaired the local Smart Growth planning committee. Our plan is in the final stages before public approval. I have provided input from my PBLA session
 - **The class gave me additional skills and more confidence, so much so I ran for County Board Chair, and was appointed!**
 - I have served on a finance council and started my own small business.
 - I have become more politically involved and have been serving on the Polk County Democratic Party Executive Committee.
 - I have joined the Superior Days delegation to help raise awareness in the Wisconsin senate and assembly of issues we face in Northern Wisconsin.
 - For the City of St. Croix Falls: Presented a proposal to save money/redirect budget for employee benefits.
 - I live in a small community in NW WI, where good leaders are tough to find. Because of my PBLA training, I have served in local office and brought new resources to my community.
 - I think participating in PBLA helped encourage me to run for elected office in an effort to make a difference. I have found public service to be interesting and challenging as we work to solve problems and come up with workable solutions.

- I was involved with the Polk County Renewable Energy Committee related to wind turbine project and concerns. I was involved in drafting a county ordinance to address the issues. The ordinance passed and is in place and has been applied.
- Met with Wisconsin elected representatives (their local representative) to educate and advocate for changes in legislation.
- Running to become School Board Member
- **Personal Development**
 - Able to understand peer communications better through an understanding of personalities and diversity; utilize understanding of age diversity as an elected official and also through my daily work
 - I had my staff take the true colors tests, and discovered what color they were – I feel if this was given at the committee level, at the county board, it would help improve communication between the various groups.
 - Communication skills used with employees and with customers.
 - Implemented the colors test. The generation's topic was awesome.
 - I accepted an invitation to serve on a hospital board, which is something I would not have been comfortable doing, had I not been through PBLA training.
 - I was active in the community prior to PBLA. The PBLA further broadened by perspectives, helped me look at issues more from other points of view.
 - I have taken on projects with more confidence
 - I have been willing to take on greater leadership responsibility at my job.
 - Without a doubt it made me a better communicator/listener has allowed me to transition my personal career and new job.

Appendix B: Please describe the most important benefits you have experienced as a result of your participation in PBLA.

- **Personal Change**
 - Understand and respect for diverse opinions; understanding how to communicate with other ages
 - Ability to engage with diverse groups and individuals to help reach consensus and built coalition at the grass roots level.
 - My self confidence both at my work and at my other job as Town of Jackson Chairperson has been boosted immensely. I am able to better understand those that I work with since I learned about Generational Differences at PBLA.
 - I'm well organized and a hard worker. As a result of the class I realized "I actually am a leader"! This has increased my self confidence and willing to share my ideas and expertise with others.
 - Reading people's personalities has helped my communication with my employees and customers.
 - Learning to speak up
 - Believing in myself and making a difference.
 - Understanding different personalities/conflict styles and how to deal with those in a confident manor
 - To better understand myself. I feel that I have different skills and abilities that have helped me to be successful in my current job.
 - Gain some experienced from leadership philosophy, community planning and action, how to address community issues and impacts.

- I have become much more comfortable leading an organization. I think my participation in a number of other organizations has improved as well even in a contributing role to overall support of the organizations goals and objectives.
 - I realized that one person can affect change. Teamwork is important and each individual must be respected for their talents.
 - I will go back to school and get a master's degree in Public Administration
 - Initiating Leadership Positions
 - It has widened my view of what can be done with teamwork and it has made me a better all around person. It changed my life in many ways.
 - Listening/communication skills
 - Not only the contacts and friends I made, but reaffirming my belief in being involved in the governmental process and decision-making.
 - Personal growth
 - Personally my horizons have been broadened and my awareness of global issues is improved. I no longer view myself as isolated from other cultures, nationalities, issues, or religions.
 - I have appreciated the broadening of my knowledge of the scope of various issues that NW Wisconsin faces.
 - Developing the skills needed to train future leaders.
 - Willingness to get involved with local government activities.
- **Networking**
 - Access to a tremendous resource of people.
 - Networking (2)
 - Meeting others with similar interests and knowing that they are working to make things better in Polk/Burnett Co. We are a small population of residents that learned to look ahead, think about the future, and gain the knowledge to pursue those topics of desired interests and be successful. Most important benefits of the PBLA experience is to remember not to quit. If you believe in something and back/support the truth, the advantage, or the benefit, then don't stop until you have reached that final goal. Opening your "world" to that of the many others around you and realize "the whole picture" and how valuable we all are in every day life.
 - Friends/colleagues with differing expertise across the two counties
 - Learning basic skills from each other
 - I am more comfortable talking to legislators and contacting them.
 - I still stay in contact with a couple of key members of my group and have an excellent relationship with them.
 - I've learned the value of networking and that knowing what questions to ask is as important as listening.
 - Meeting great people and being exposed to UWEX resources. Meeting people like Andy Lewis and Jerry Hembd.
- **Awareness of Issues**
 - A better understanding of the importance of looking at all sides of an issue. Sometime we see things one-sided, PBLA provided a comprehensive look at the two counties.
 - Willingness to step up to changes; gave me a broader awareness of how interconnected we are
 - Awareness of cross-cultural and cross-regional issues. Networking, parliamentary procedures, small big awarenesses

- Constant learning causes me to become aware of things I did not know. For example, the tax structure of Wisconsin and the whole lesson on village, town government.
- Seeing challenges different from my normal work environment.
- How to look at issues and find the middle ground through consensus.
- I am better prepared to participate in conversations on various topics and ask questions and think about implications.
- I am more interested in issues that I was exposed to in the program, such as keeping rural areas strong, environment and planning.

Appendix C: If there are other actions that you took as a result of your participation in PBLA that were not listed in Question 15 (appendix A), please list them here.

- Active member of town planning commission.
- Stop and listen before speaking!
- Stronger control.
- Appointed to committees by County Board.
- I have been able to greatly improve our Budgeting Process at the Town of Jackson.
- I have helped coordinate a political campaign in last election
- I have encouraged others to take the UWEX class.
- City of St. Croix Falls: Health Insurance Costs
- Fort Folle Avoine: Work with the fort to put on an education day for youth ages 8-13.
- Involved with union issues.
- Ran for County Board and lost.

Appendix D: Are there additional things that you wish that PBLA would do to support the alumni of the program?

- Refresher course – 1 day leadership seminar
- Continued communication and networking possible alumni events
- It would be nice to have a follow up, on this, but the program didn't appear to be set up that way
- Referral of other continual educational programs.
- Keep us involved and invited to future activities.
- Have a reunion
- Is there a way to assist with job networking? We don't have one good source around here.
- Bi-Yearly newsletter via email?
- Keep us connected and meeting new participants
- Follow up learning opportunities
- Hosting an up-to-date website that we can reference and refer people to
- Nothing (3)

Appendix E: What one improvement would you suggest for PBLA?

- Do not rotate location for consistency – when folks sign up/apply, they will understand where the class is EVERY month OR at the very least, do not change locations at the last minute.
- I think rotating the meeting between Polk and Burnett County was good, but how about different places in the counties; example: libraries or places of business. I think going into the program it would have helped each person if they brought problems or concerns, they needed help with at the workplace. For example, I think the color exercise would be good for all county board members to participate in, just because some of the topics would have been more beneficial if we had a problem we brought to class. The group really discussed well, and one of the leaders was very organized and the other needed help in this area. I guess if I had one suggestion, it would be to make assignments – although I don't like homework, I felt it would have prepared participants better for the topics as a whole and we would have learned better.
- Keep doing the excellent work that you are doing.
- Debate subjects
- Allow more time for participants to have general discussions on their own
- More Native American
- Nothing/None/None come to mind (3)

Appendix F: Do you have additional comments regarding PBLA?

- It was a GREAT learning experience for me. The classes offered many things I wish I could pass on to my village board or fire department members so they can see and learn what I did and how we all benefit from it.
- A good program
- I felt it was very beneficial and enjoyed it. I really felt the governmental information was worth while learning who the tax structure was.
- No.
- Keep providing this valuable service.
- The leadership book was outstanding. Outside speakers were excellent. Material and handouts were well organized.
- I regard PBLA as an important ongoing education for all. We need to participate in all be reminded constantly to practice and implement what we have learned.
- Great program.
- Bob Kazmierski was G R E A T!
- It is a great opportunity. I wish that more people were able to participate. I think that being concerned with quality both of the program and the applicants is more important than quantity.
- One staff seemed very disorganized
- I have not kept in close contact with PBLA. We are all busy and our priorities change with time.
- Do not forget why the program was started, to help rural people be better leaders

Appendix G:

STEERING COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS:

Sarah McCurdy, Brian Bessler, Jenny Bergmann Mortel, plus three other that withheld names