The Balancing Communities Initiative:  
Bridging child care, housing, economic opportunity, and creative placemaking

The Northwest Minnesota Foundation and Lead for Minnesota are teaming up to launch the Balancing Communities Initiative. Four core pillars of a balanced community are having adequate childcare, affordable housing, a skilled workforce, and an active arts and culture scene. Northwest Minnesota Foundation will be providing **four $10,000 grants** to support the placement of four Lead for Minnesota Fellows throughout the northwest MN region to bring additional capacity and leadership to communities working on projects related to the four pillars of the Balancing Communities Initiative. Each of the four Fellows will spearhead a project related to one of the four pillars and work together to build an integrated approach for communities to address all four pillars in their own communities.

**What can Fellows do?**
Lead for Minnesota Fellows are dynamic, energetic leaders looking to invest in their hometowns or home state. During the 2 years, Fellows receive ongoing graduate-level training from our higher education partners (University of Minnesota, Harvard Kennedy School, Tisch College of Civic Life - Tufts University). Our training program equips Fellows with the skill sets to lead community engagement efforts, program development and management, research & evaluation, among other projects. Additionally, project scopes are developed in partnership with host communities and Lead for Minnesota conducts targeted recruitment for Fellows with specific technical or artistic skill sets.

**Eligibility:**
Public agencies, local units of government, and nonprofits located in the following counties are eligible to apply for funding through the Balancing Communities Initiative:

*Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Kittson, Lake Of The Woods, Mahnomen, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, and Roseau*

Eligible projects areas are:
- **Child care**
  - Communities across Northwest Minnesota are experiencing a child care availability crisis that impacts businesses and employers, children and families, and community prosperity. We seek to support collaborative community projects that advance innovative, sustainable solutions to the child care shortage.
- **Housing**
  - Across the state and across the region, communities are experiencing a shortage of housing at all levels of affordability. A lack of suitable housing options has an impact on businesses and employers, families, and the overall economic competitiveness of the Northwest region. We seek to support innovative, community driven solutions to increase production of housing units in the region.
- **Economic Opportunity**
An active entrepreneurial ecosystem is a vital component of a thriving community. We seek to support initiatives that accelerate economic development, small business generation and expansion, and business skills training.

- Arts & Creative Placemaking
  - Arts and culture play an important role in elevating the vitality of a community. Communities with an active arts and culture scene have more actively engaged residents, greater retention of workforce, and more vibrant downtowns. We seek to support the development of public art projects, arts events & festivals, initiatives that engage the community, downtown revitalization and preservation efforts, and other creative approaches to placemaking in the region.

**How much do we need to match the grant?**
Northwest Minnesota Foundation will be providing four $10,000 grants to communities looking to host a Lead for Minnesota Fellow in 2021. The expected host contribution is $15,000 to fully fund the placement of a Fellow in your community.

**How do we apply?**
To apply, please complete this form. The deadline to submit the intake form is **Friday, October 23rd**. Applicants will be reviewed and contacted for additional information on a first come first serve basis. Up to 4 applicants will be selected as grantees.