

LeadAR Program Description

The State of Arkansas is made up of hundreds of distinct communities and regions. Woven together by a diverse natural environment, these communities comprise Arkansas' 75 counties, the majority of which are characterized as rural. Each community consists of businesses, industries, organizations, governments, and people all working together to form dynamic economies bolstered by a strong quality of life and place. Over the past decade, these communities have changed drastically. Many have experienced rapid growth while others have been greatly challenged by demographic shifts, loss of businesses, and continued migration to urban areas. No matter what set of social and economic challenges communities face, Arkansans must collaboratively work to close this gap so all Arkansas communities can thrive.

What is LeadAR?

To address these gaps between rural and urban communities and the state, LeadAR recruits talented and passionate people eager to usher in positive change. Designed to broaden Arkansans' understanding of critical issues and opportunities facing our state, LeadAR strengthens participants' knowledge, skills, and network and empowers them to positively impact communities and advocate for long-term economic development.

Founded in 1984, LeadAR was originally modeled after the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's leadership training program. Now more than three decades later, LeadAR has over 500 alumni serving as leaders in businesses and communities throughout Arkansas, especially in rural and agricultural areas. Past participants include educators, farmers, advocates, bankers, state legislators, lawyers, mayors, quorum court, city council, school board members, and more.

How Does LeadAR Work?

The LeadAR model employs an interdisciplinary approach to leadership development by championing the intersection of theory, practice, and application. While exploring the major issues facing Arkansas communities is key to achieving lasting change, LeadAR recognizes that that is not enough. Subject matter experts, leadership theory, communication techniques, experiential learning opportunities, and critical thinking exercises equip participants with the tools necessary to catalyze change using strategies that are equitable, empowering, and sustainable.

Why Join LeadAR?

LeadAR is for Arkansans from rural and urban parts of our state who want to:

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- Understand complex cultural, social, and economic issues impacting us today and, in the future
- Improve their ability to interact and work with others
- Deepen their understanding of social, economic, and political systems to effectively bring about change
- Develop critical thinking and decision-making skills to become a better citizen and leader
- Connect to people and resources that can help them make a difference

What is involved in being a LeadAR participant?

LeadAR is an 18-month intensive hands-on program. If selected, you will participate in:

- One three-day team building and goal setting seminar at the C.A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center in Little Rock.
- Six two-day seminars located around the state, including tours, guest speakers, and interactive activities
- Video-conference sessions and other activities between seminars for supplemental learning
- National study tour to Washington, D.C. to learn about issues and policy making from a national perspective
- International study tour to learn how international issues and policy impact the U.S. and Arkansas, explore innovations and different approaches used in other countries that we can learn from, and see the world from a different perspective
- Leadership service project to make a positive difference

As a LeadAR participant, you will travel to these different locations across the state and take part in issue-based discussions, skill building exercises, and hands-on activities with your fellow LeadAR class members. One-on-one and small group discussions, expert panels, and site visits will enhance your learning experience on topics encompassing agriculture, education, public health, policy development, criminal justice, natural resources, environmental sustainability, water quality, poverty, cultural diversity, and community and economic development.

National Study Tour

In year one you will travel to Washington D.C. where you will explore the complexities of policy development alongside law makers and policy experts. Additionally, you will meet with top-level officials representing government agencies, nonprofits, and industry. You will also meet with your congressional delegation and their top aides to discuss current issues facing your own communities and how they can be addressed.

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International Study Tour

In year two you will have the opportunity to travel to a different country for seven to ten days. This study tour offers the opportunity to meet with a broad array of leaders including ambassadors, farmers, government ministers, corporate executives, nonprofit leaders, and other stakeholders. Through this hands-on approach, participants will explore different global issues and political dynamics—issues such as politics, economics, trade, commerce, education, culture and agriculture—and compare them to the United States.

Since the program began, LeadAR class members have visited 35 countries. The country selected for the international study tour is determined by the LeadAR Advisory Council with approval by the UA System Division of Agriculture’s Associate Vice President for Agriculture – Extension. Travel locations are selected based on current events, learning opportunities, and in-country resources that support the program’s educational objectives and safety of the participants.

Note: If you believe that you might have professional or personal obligations that might preclude you from participating in all the program seminars and activities, please reach out to the program director to discuss the specifics of your situation before applying.

Leadership Service Projects

As part of the program completion, you will plan and implement a Leadership Service Project. This will require you to identify a community need, design a project and implement the project aimed at improving the quality of life for their communities. Past projects have included building a local library, applying for grants to secure restrooms for a public park, and the development of the annual Goat Festival located in Perryville, AR.

Tuition and Other Costs

Tuition for LeadAR is \$3,500. This covers seminar expenses, including most lodging, most meals, travel expenses while at the seminar (e.g., bus tours), and other seminar expenses (e.g., materials, admission fees). If you need flexible payment options, contact LeadAR staff, to set up a payment plan.

You are welcome to seek tuition support from outside sources. Employers often recognize the value of the LeadAR program and may be willing to assist with tuition payment. In the event of financial hardship, where full tuition cannot be secured, scholarships are available to assist with payment. Scholarship requests should be made in writing to LeadAR staff by your interview date. It is the participant’s responsibility to pursue these financial aid options, and to ensure that all tuition charges are paid in full.

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As a participant you will be responsible for travel to and from each seminar, additional lodging costs are not included in the seminar schedule (i.e., one or more nights before the start or after the end of a seminar), some meals (relatively few), tips, incidental expenses at hotels (e.g., room service, movies, etc.), and alcoholic beverages. The program makes every effort to keep these out-of-pocket expenses to a minimum.

Most group meals will be arranged and paid for by the program. LeadAR staff will make every attempt to accommodate special dietary requirements (e.g., food allergies, diabetic requirements) for group meal functions. However, it may not be possible to accommodate all requests in all locations. If you have special dietary requirements, you may want to bring provisions for these situations.

Attendance Policy

Selection for the LeadAR Program is very competitive. We select individual participants who not only want to develop their leadership skills but who also want to develop lasting relationships and effect lasting change for Arkansas communities. When you miss a seminar, you not only diminish your ability to benefit from this program, but you also compromise your classmates' opportunity to learn from you.

Furthermore, tuition covers only a fraction of the full cost of participation in LeadAR. Program sponsors and donors make significant investments in your leadership potential. These individuals and organizations have a legitimate right to expect a return on that investment, which is jeopardized by a failure to fully participate in the program.

Finally, much of what we do in the program builds upon material covered in earlier seminars. If one seminar is missed, it is often difficult or impossible to comprehensively catch up. You are not just expected to show up at seminars; you are expected to participate fully and productively from start to finish of each seminar unless prior arrangements have been made with the program director.

For these reasons and more, we set a very high attendance expectation. We expect ALL class members to be at ALL seminars, ALL the time. That said, we realize that as busy adult professionals, sometimes circumstances beyond your control may prevent your full participation. Unexpected health emergencies, a death in the family, a true crisis at work or a previously scheduled, major commitment, may be grounds for an excused absence. (Note that simply being "too busy" is not an acceptable excuse; it is more an indicator of poor planning and time management.)

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No matter the cause, *each absence should be brought to the attention of LeadAR staff as soon as possible and before the seminar begins.* With the multiple modes of communication available today (telephone, e-mail, text message), there is no excuse for lack of communication in advance. Each absence will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and excessive absences may be grounds for dismissal from the program.

The LeadAR Advisory Council has established specific guidelines for dealing with absences. As a general rule, absences will be excused for:

- Family Emergencies
- Natural Disasters
- Illness
- Court Subpoena

Other absences will be reviewed by the LeadAR Advisory Council. Penalties and disciplinary actions will be imposed for excessive unexcused absences.

Program Approach and Assignments

LeadAR is an educational program with an array of learning opportunities. As a participant you will be involved in open discussions, facilitation, individual/group presentations, speaker introductions, peer-to-peer coaching, and much more. Along with the seminars, you will be asked to complete assignments on your own and in a group setting. Some of these assignments may include the use of social media, video conferencing, research, and interactions with alumni and other relevant stakeholders. All participants will select, implement, and complete a leadership/community service project in their local area. Other assignments may include:

Electronic Media: Most communication between LeadAR staff and class participants will be via email and phone. The class will use an online platform for other assignments and group work. All evaluation will be web-based and completed after each seminar. Video conferencing will be utilized throughout the program between seminars to enhance the learning opportunities and maintain participant engagement throughout the program.

Reading: Books and articles will be recommended. These readings are designed to prepare participants for upcoming seminar programs and other homework.

Public Speaking/Presentations: You will gain experience in public speaking through a variety of experience and activities. This includes but is not limited to self-introductions, impromptu speaking, speaker introductions, presiding over sessions, individual/group presentations, and group facilitation.

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Assessments: Part of the program involves increasing your self-awareness as a leader. A variety of assessment instruments, peer to peer coaching, and individualized coaching will be used to accomplish this.

Seminar Evaluation: You will be expected to complete an anonymous online survey evaluation after each seminar. These serve as very important reflection tools that help to complete the adult learning cycle and allow all participants to gain insights from their classmates. They also help us improve the program. Evaluation summaries will be shared with participants and program sponsors. Additionally, these surveys help LeadAR staff with program effectiveness and delivery.

Participant Expectations

Program educational philosophy: LeadAR has been specifically developed to “grow leaders from the inside out.” This concept is based on leader development research showing that to become a person of influence and an effective leader, one must first understand yourself. LeadAR follows adult learning principles indicating that adults learn best through a continuous cycle of instruction, practice, feedback, and reflection (Kolb). LeadAR utilizes a transformative learning approach, which transforms the learner from a receiver of information to a learning initiator, information seeker, problem solver, and evaluator. LeadAR program content is designed to provide opportunities to develop, self-awareness, enhance self-motivation, and hone self-regulation.

Tolerance, respect, and open-mindedness: As a LeadAR participant, you will be exposed to points of view, value systems, allegiances and individual beliefs that may conflict with your own perspectives. We believe that exposure to these differing points of view optimizes learning through cultivating rigorous and challenging learning environments – environments that champion the notion of common ground and empathy. We do not expect you to change your beliefs or values, but we do expect that you will consider others’ viewpoints in an environment of tolerance and mutual respect.

Non-partisan, non-political: LeadAR provides an intensive learning opportunity on topics that include government, the political process, and lobbying. It is important to remember that we do not advocate one political ideology over another. LeadAR does not endorse candidates or take a position on political/legislative issues, and participants should refrain from portraying themselves as representing the program when engaged in such activities. While we hope you will get involved in the political process, our role is to teach you how to be more effective in those roles rather than dictate a specific agenda.

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Room Assignments: You will share a room with a classmate of the same gender at all seminars and study tours. Room assignments will be rotated so that each participant will room with a different classmate throughout the program. Program staff will make the room assignments. This programmatic component is well established and non-negotiable.

Dress Code: Leaders in general - and representatives of the LeadAR Program in particular - are expected to present themselves in a manner appropriate for the settings in which we operate. Dress codes for specific portions of our program will usually be suggested in seminar agendas.

Participants should use good judgment. Our dress code will be listed as one of three categories, with the following descriptions:

Business Attire: To be worn in formal settings

Men – suit (or sports coat and slacks), dress shirt, tie, and dress shoes

Women – business suit or business dress, dress shoes

Business Casual: The most frequent dress code for seminars

Men – sport coat or sweater (depending on weather), dress or collared shirt (tie optional), slacks or khakis (no jeans), dress shoes

Women – Dress slacks or khakis (no jeans), skirt, dress shirt or blouse, dress shoes

Casual: Infrequent; used only on travel days, free time, and some tours

Men – Casual slacks (or clean, neat jeans), collared shirt, casual shoes

Women – Casual slacks or skirt (or clean, neat jeans), shirt or blouse, or dress, casual shoes

Program Selection Process

- The selection process is intended to attract and secure the most promising, highest quality candidates from Arkansas. As an applicant, you should demonstrate potential to improve leadership skills that will benefit Arkansas communities and contribute to the learning experience of your classmates. Program qualifications include Applicant must be an Arkansas resident.
- Applicant must be at least 25 years old by the first seminar.

Selection Policies

Close relatives (spouses, siblings, or children/parents) will not be selected for the same class. Each class selected will be representative of Arkansas' diverse population and cultures, geography, professional responsibilities, and related industries.

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All applications will be considered impartially regardless of gender, race, religion, creed, disability, age, marital status, veteran status, sexual orientation, or national origin.

Up to 30 participants will be selected for the upcoming class. Class representation will be sought from several sectors with the following goals for composition: 25% from agriculture, 25% urban, and 50% rural participants. A selection committee approved by the LeadAR Advisory Council and Extension administration will screen applications, interview, and recommend candidates for the program.

Selection Procedures

The selection process is governed by the LeadAR Advisory Council. The Council's selection committee will screen applications, interview candidates, and recommend the class roster for Council approval. Applicant scores are determined by application responses (75 points) and the interview (25 points) for an overall score of 100 points.

Application Timeline:

- Applicants are required to submit an application online no later than February 7, 2025.
- Applicants will provide four references and the employer consent form to move forward in the selection process.
- The Selection Committee will screen applications and select candidates to interview.
- The applicants will select a date and time for interview before submitting their completed application.
- Interviews will be conducted February 17-26 (when applying, please hold these dates on your schedule).
- All applicants will be notified of Class 21 selection status by March 7, 2025.

For More Information Contact

Dr. Julie Robinson, LeadAR Director, 501-733-3101 or Lisa Davis, Program Associate-Leadership, 501-519-5472 | LeadAR@uada.edu | www.uaex.uada.edu/leadar

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LeadAR Class 21 Schedule

Date	Session Theme	Location
2025-2026		
May 27-29, 2025	Goal Setting and Team Building	In-Person
July 17-18, 2025	Health and Education	In-Person
August 22, 2025	National Study Tour (NST) Preparation	Virtual/Via Zoom
September 14-19, 2025	National Study Tour (NST)	Washington D.C.
October 24, 2025	Debrief NST Experience & Public Policy Preparation	Virtual/Via Zoom
November 20-21, 2025	Agriculture	In-Person
January 22-23, 2026	Public Policy and Media	In-Person
March 26-27, 2026	Community and Economic Development	In-Person
May 21-22, 2026	Manufacturing and Infrastructure	In-Person
July 23-24, 2026	Agriculture	In-Person
August 28, 2026	International Study Tour (IST) Preparation	Virtual/Via Zoom
September 13-23, 2026	International Study Tour (IST)	TBD
October 23, 2026	Debrief IST Experience	Virtual/Via Zoom
November 19 or 20, 2026	Graduation	Determined by Class