

running start

Preparing next generation's leaders
to change the world

2025 Annual Report



Participants at our 2025 Elect Her at Grand Valley State University, Michigan



Delegation to the 2025 Reykjavik Global Forum



2025 Congressional Fellows in Washington D.C.

runningstart.org | development@runningstart.org

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Running Start: Investing in Future Leaders

Running Start is a nonpartisan nonprofit empowering young women to lead and transform democracy.

Young women are driven by lived experience and a deep commitment to their communities. They care about the issues that shape daily life. Yet while 65% say they care deeply about civic issues, only 3% believe they have what it takes to lead. The passion is there. The path is not always visible.

Running Start makes that path clear. Since 2007, we have trained more than 30,000 changemakers from all 50 states and over 25 countries. Ninety-four percent of our alums are actively engaged in their communities, and one-third have already run for office.

We are building a generation of leaders who know they belong in power.

Running Start's vision is to infuse the U.S. political pipeline with 1 million ambitious and competent young women who will reshape American democracy.



2025 Congressional Fellows with the Walmart Government Affairs Team

Backed by fifteen Fortune 100 companies.

Supported by 90% of women in Congress.

Fellows placed in over half of all women's Congressional offices.

94% of alums are civically engaged.

1 in 3 has already run for office.

CEO & Board Chair's Letter

At Running Start, we know resilience is not just a leadership quality. It is survival. It is what keeps a young woman standing tall when the world expects her to shrink. It pushes her to dream boldly and step into leadership even when the world is not quite ready for her.

Every young woman who joins our programs carries a story of strength and possibility. Some arrive with clear ambitions. Others are just beginning to imagine themselves in power. When they rise, they give others permission to rise too.

This past year, we put that belief into action. In 2025, we expanded our reach in ways that will transform the face of leadership. We now train more than 150 high school girls each year in New York through the addition of 1st Amendment 1st Vote. We launched a leadership program with two HBCUs in Ohio, ensuring that young Black women have early access to civic opportunity. We hosted a Resilience Summit that reminded young women that the path to leadership isn't always linear. And we designed a new civil discourse curriculum that helps young women build the skills to listen, collaborate, and lead thoughtfully in an increasingly complex civic landscape. These investments are already opening doors that once seemed unreachable.

And we are just getting started. In 2026, we will continue building state and community based pathways that support young women as they grow power where they live. Our leadership training will reach new schools, campuses, and hometowns, so that public service feels like a future that includes them.

Leadership can be lonely. Politics can be challenging. But Running Start ensures none of our young women take this journey alone. They rise with a community that listens, mentors, celebrates, and shows up even when the path ahead shifts.

We are building a movement rooted in belonging. A movement that believes talent exists everywhere, and opportunity should too. As one Fellow said, "Running Start gave me the confidence to walk into rooms I once thought were off limits. Now I know I belong."

Thank you for standing with us as we rise. Together, we are ensuring the next generation of women is not only ready to lead, but confident that they should.

Susannah Wellford

CEO & Founder of Running Start

Congresswoman Ileana Ros Lehtinen

Chair of Running Start's Board of Directors

Our 2025 Impact

A Look Back At Our Programs

In 2025, Running Start strengthened its national programming with impact felt coast to coast.

We reached 20,000+ leaders through various trainings and media, and hosted 50+ workshops across the country.

Ambitious women from around the country participated in our Running Start/Walmart Congressional Fellowship, interning with a Member of Congress - both in DC and in District Offices - while participating in leadership development workshops. The Fellows came to Washington D.C. for a transformational week of professional exposure, meeting with staff on the Hill, D.C. politicians, and executives from top companies like Walmart, The Home Depot, Rocket Companies, and PG&E, and learning directly from women shaping policy at the highest levels.

A key lesson from our alum engagement efforts has been the importance of trusted networks that understand alums' unique realities, and can provide tailored feedback and strategic guidance. Our Next Step program continued to provide such support so as to propel alums forward. The cohort collectively raised \$13,000+ in a fundraising project to support future participants, imbuing the value of "lift as you climb".



2025 Congressional Fellows on Capitol Hill



Participants at our Elect Her training at Grand Valley State University

Elect Her expanded its reach with workshops across the country at various schools, colleges, and partner organizations. We also trained a new class of alum facilitators preparing to bring leadership training directly into their own communities.

Our 2025 Impact

A Look Back At Our Programs

We gathered diverse voices across sectors for our 2025 Resilience Summit. By creating space for candid conversation, shared learning, and honest reflection, the Summit demonstrated that resilience is not built in isolation. It is strengthened when leaders come together, learn from one another, and rise collectively toward lasting impact. The speakers included Congresswomen Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Yassamin Ansari; Congressman Will Hurd; former NASA official Andrea Razzaghi; former cabinet member of the Government of Afghanistan, Muqadessa Yourish; Bowie City Councilmember, Roxy Ndebumadu; Senior Director Federal Government Affairs at Walmart, Erica Johnson Creamer; and Senior Director of External Affairs at Microsoft, Suhail Khan.

We deepened our commitment to HBCU students by continuing our partnership with Xceleader on the HBCU Women's Leadership Summit. As part of the Summit, we worked with the Dayton Chapter of the Links, Inc to bring emerging leaders from Ohio HBCUs to the Summit. In 2026 we will continue this partnership by hosting a workshop in the state.



Attendees reflect on their own experiences at our 2025 Resilience Summit



Running Start delegates with Iceland's Speaker of Parliament, Þórunn Sveinbjarnardóttir

Lastly, Running Start brought a delegation of alums and mentors to the Reykjavík Global Forum, where they connected with women leaders from around the world, led panel discussions, and engaged in thoughtful exchange. Together, they broadened their sense of what political leadership can look like and carried those global perspectives back into their communities.

Our 2025 Impact

Building Local Communities

In 2025, Elect Her brought leadership training into communities nationwide. On campuses from Washington DC to Philadelphia, Seattle to Nashville, and beyond, students gathered to speak up, practice confidence, and discover their place in public life. Workshops were hosted at top institutions including the University of Pennsylvania, Purdue University, Vanderbilt University, and more. In every room Elect Her entered, young women learned that they are already standing at the threshold of leadership.

In 2025 Running Start began our merger with the New York State based nonprofit, 1A1V.

1A1V is a year-long extracurricular high school program designed to equip young women with the confidence, capabilities, and connections they need to run for office. Since the program was started in 2018 by Melina Carnicelli, 1A1V has trained 700+ young women to recognize their rightful place in government leadership.



Students from various high schools across Syracuse NY participated in Running Start's 1A1V Fall Seminar in October 2025

During the course of the year, 155 young women and 29 school mentors from 21 New York state based high schools participated in the 1A1V program. These leaders all came together at the Annual Leadership Action Summit in Rochester, NY, to present bold ideas for improving their schools and communities.

Our 2025 Impact

Civil Discourse

Young leaders today are coming of age in a political climate shaped by division and distrust. If we want more women to see a place for themselves in leadership, we must prepare the next generation not only to speak, but to listen. Not only to express their convictions, but to engage across differences with integrity, curiosity, and respect.

At Running Start we attempt to lead with our values, and encourage our participants to do the same. In our programs, we ensure that not only are we training the next generation of leaders, we are also giving them the tools to work collaboratively in furtherance of our democratic principles.

As a nonpartisan organization that encourages bipartisan collaboration, training the next generation to work collaboratively is a natural and necessary next step for us.

This year, we designed new curriculum focused on building those skills. We developed and piloted a lesson centered on values, perspective-taking, and navigating disagreement. We tested it with our Next Step cohort and with a college class of 30 young leaders, and the feedback was clear. They want the tools to stay in the conversation even when it is uncomfortable, and to lead in ways that strengthen our democracy.



Our curriculum includes elements of personal reflection and values clarification

In the year ahead, we plan to integrate civil discourse training into our broader program offerings so that more young leaders are equipped to lead with confidence, clarity, and mutual respect in moments of disagreement, and to help build a political culture rooted in collaboration rather than conflict.

Our 2025 Partners

Partnerships make Running Start programs accessible to everyone. We are grateful to our 2025 partners for their commitment to support the next generation of leaders.

Corporate and Foundation Partners



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Karen Goldmeier Green



runningstart.org

development@runningstart.org

202-528-5200

Washington, DC

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