

ASPIRE Student Leadership Program - FAQ

General Information

What is the ASPIRE Student Leadership Program?

The ASPIRE (Accelerating Student Participation in the Rural Economy) program is a student leadership initiative focused on community and economic development in rural areas. It provides students with leadership experiences, networking opportunities, and mentorship while engaging in real-world projects that benefit their communities.

Who is eligible to participate?

Students from participating community colleges in the Midwest are eligible. Each institution may select 4-5 students to participate in the program.

What are the key program components?

Participants will:

- Attend the **C2A3 Conference** in Wausau, WI (Sept. 15-17, 2025)
- Engage in a **community-based project**
- Attend **two leadership webinars** (October and November)
- Work with a **community mentor** (minimum of two meetings)
- Submit a **final report or portfolio** on their project
- Participate in the **USDA Outlook Forum** in Washington, D.C. (February 2026)

Application & Selection

How do students apply?

Students must submit their applications electronically by **April 15**.

When will students be notified of their acceptance?

Students will be notified by **May 1**.

What is required for the community-based project?

Students must identify a rural issue related to agriculture, rural development, or economic sustainability. They will collaborate with a mentor and submit a project outline/proposal by **October 15** for approval to C2A3_aspire@northeast.edu.

Advisors & Mentors

Who are the advisors, and what is their role?

Each institution must identify an advisor, who does not have to be faculty. Advisors will:

- Help identify mentors for students
- Assist with travel arrangements for the conference and Outlook Forum
- Support students in their projects
- Collect, approve, and submit final student submissions to C2A3_aspire@northeast.edu

How are mentors selected?

Students and their advisors will work together to find mentors that align with their career goals or project focus. Mentors must meet with students at least twice and sign a confirmation form.

Funding & Travel

What travel costs are covered? Travel stipends for 4-5 students and one advisor from each institution will be provided.

- **Up to \$750/student and one advisor** for travel to the C2A3 Conference
- **\$800-\$1000/student and one advisor** for travel to the Outlook Forum
- **Hotel costs for the Outlook Forum for students and one advisor** will be covered by C2A3

Does the college receive funding?

Each institution receives a **one-time payment of up to \$1000** to cover implementation costs. Colleges with less than 4 students participating may receive a lesser, pro-rated amount.

Expectations & Requirements**What happens if a student does not complete the project?**

Students who fail to complete the project will be ineligible to attend the Outlook Forum in Washington, D.C.

What kind of final submission is required?

Students must submit a **final report, portfolio, or presentation** that meets the program guidelines to their Advisor. We will work with advisors on approval of specific projects and final report.

Extension Requests for Final Report Submission

Extensions beyond the December 31 deadline for final report submission will not be granted. Students who fail to meet this deadline will be ineligible to travel to Washington, D.C., in February. C2A3 must finalize student registrations and secure hotel contracts based on the confirmed number of travelers. To ensure proper planning, it is essential that the final participant count is determined by the first week of January. Advisors are responsible for setting clear expectations regarding submission requirements and deadlines. C2A3 will collect the final reports and may share selected submissions with program sponsors as appropriate.

Who can I contact for more information?

For additional details and application links, visit program website (<https://agalliance.net/projects/aspire-student-leadership-program/>) or Cassie Cowles (ccowles@northeast.edu)