

Developing Leaders for a National Movement

Challenge:

Increase the number of leaders of color in the LGBT movement

Approach:

Provide a customized, yearlong professional development experience specifically to meet the needs of rising LGBT leaders of color

Investment:

\$140,000 over three years (part of a \$475,000 annual budget)

Result:

Participants who find their voice, learn new skills and gain courage to take advantage of leadership opportunities

Players:

Gill Foundation,
Pipeline Project

Rashad Robinson isn't shy about who he is or what he wants from his career. For a fast-rising, ambitious LGBT leader of color, that's a good thing. But it also left him feeling virtually alone in terms of professional networks and peers.

As a newly promoted 26-year-old program director at the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), Robinson wanted to gain core leadership skills that would move him to the next level. "I'm very good at developing and executing campaigns; it's what I was recruited for at GLAAD. But I didn't want to remain a program director," he says. "I wanted a broader skill set that would look more like an executive director's to other people."

In 2009, Robinson joined the first cohort of the 21st Century Fellows Program, created by the New York-based Pipeline Project specifically to support the advancement of leaders of color within LGBT organizations.

"We knew that there was a problem with attrition in leaders of color in the movement, and a lack of people of color ascending

to leadership positions," explains Clarence Patton, Pipeline Project's founder and director. "Leaders of color were leaving, sometimes unhappily. We wanted to signal to them that there was an interest from funders and organizations in seeing them advance. Fortunately, we found several funders who shared the same priority and also wanted to maximize the impact of the investments they'd already made in LGBT organizations. We all believe this approach will help organizations improve their effectiveness over time as leaders become more representative of the LGBT community."

Patton credits the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund with helping create the vision for the 21st Century Fellows Program and notes the Arcus and Gill Foundations as important funding partners.

"Serving the LGBT community is our primary mission," says Gill Foundation Senior Vice President of Programs Katherine Peck. "If you're a true student of what constitutes good leadership development practices, you come to understand that you can't just go to a seminar and come out a good leader. Leadership is a matter

Why Invest in Leadership Development?

We have goals and objectives for policy and behavior changes. We can't achieve what we want without having strong organizations that can engage in any number of strategies and tactics. You can't have strong organizations without strong leaders and deep benches. It's fundamental. We get better organizations, better work product and more results."

— Katherine Peck, The Gill Foundation



In Their Words:

“I wasn’t dealing with one-size-fits-all problems, but rather with unique and challenging issues. I didn’t have many peers. Having coaching and mentor support in the context of a program focused specifically on LGBT leaders of color was helpful.”

— **Rashad Robinson**
Executive Director
Color of Change

of practice over time. In addition, we recognized the importance of developing leaders who come from different backgrounds and aren’t necessarily the usual suspects.”

“The way people advance is by tapping their networks, and if you don’t have a network, you don’t have as much of a chance for personal movement,” says Patton. “We thought of the fellows approach because we thought that a sense of community was missing in the LGBT movement. We wanted to create that community among people of color to help them build valuable personal networks with others in the movement.”

The 21st Century Fellows Program currently is open only to individuals from grantee organizations of the funding partners. Applicants must be nominated by the executive director of their organization, then complete the application process.

Peers and Professional Support

Robinson and 19 other members of his cohort met for the first time in an intensive, five-day retreat hosted by the Rockwood Leadership Institute, where they participated in 360-degree assessments and a number of skill-building sessions. Over the course of the following year, the cohort met for three additional two-day retreats to hone and reinforce skills. Each Fellow also was matched with a leadership plan consultant and a coach who provided ongoing support.

“Leadership coaching and leadership development needs are so real and so lacking, especially in terms of mentorship,” says Robinson. “The fact that 21st Century Fellows had that component was the biggest value for me. I wasn’t dealing with one-size-fits-all problems but rather with unique and challenging issues. I didn’t have many peers. Having

that coaching and mentor support in the context of a program focused specifically on LGBT leaders of color was helpful.”

“There is a way in which people of color, or women, or other marginalized folks negotiate ourselves out of things that we need or want or deserve,” Robinson reflects. “We often undersell ourselves while others don’t. Recognizing and addressing that was important in terms of owning the leadership role that I have and being able to make good on the opportunities that are presented.”

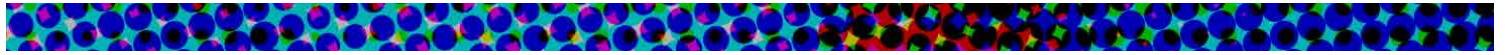
Of course, the program hasn’t been without challenges, but Patton sees those as opportunities to improve.

“It’s sometimes hard to figure out exactly what’s going to be most effective in cohort gatherings,” he observes. “We managed that by having staff and faculty meet at the end of every day to debrief on that day and adjust our direction accordingly. It’s a very agile program.”

Peck echoes Patton’s observations about knowing what works on a broader scale. “The challenges come in designing a program that engages people over time and deals with people at different skill levels and levels of resources. LGBT leaders of color in big cities have a much different environment in which to work than those in organizations that are very small and resource challenged.”

“Recognizing that we don’t have the capacity to serve everyone who could be appropriate for the program has been a challenge, but it also helps add caché for those who are selected,” says Patton.

Another challenge was managing the expectations of executive directors in terms of staff time away during retreats. Some CEOs were ready and



Lessons Learned

- **Capacity and buy-in/support from leadership at the organizational level is critical.**

“There needs to be support from participants’ organizations if you want the strongest outcomes,” observes Herrod. “Taking a staff member away from a needy organization is difficult. It can also hurt the fellow’s ability to participate when he or she is pulled away.”

Robinson also suggests that programs incorporate some support to help participants’ institutions prepare for their return as stronger leaders. “If we’re trying to build a more diverse movement by building leaders, how does a program also incent institutions to accept and empower the new leaders? It can’t just be one side of the coin.”

- **Plan for long-term, sustained support.** “You can’t do this without knowing that it must be comprehensive and not a one-off,” says Peck. “It’s too easy for participants to fall back into the same old patterns. You need to maintain a day-in, day-out formal program of at least a year, with follow-up over the next two.”

- **Find the sweet spot for participants.** “In selecting people for a program like this, you have to be sensitive to where they are in their careers,” Patton advises. “Too junior, and they won’t have opportunities to apply the work. Too senior, and they already think they know it all. The middle level is a sweet spot that can really pay some dividends.”

- **Take a leap of faith.** “One barrier for this kind of funding is associating outcomes with it,” says Herrod. “Leadership development is especially challenging because you can say that as a result of a program like this, X number received promotions or are running organizations, but is that an end to itself? How do you measure their effectiveness and results as leaders? Sometimes you need to take a leap of faith. You can collect some metrics and some anecdotal evidence, but beyond that it’s reliance on your theory of change.”

- **Be specific.** “Be very specific and intentional about who you’re trying to work with, how many and why,” says Patton. “Our program benefits from focus on a small universe of people who share a great deal. We get to hone detailed things.”

Program Performance



Advancing the Next Generation of LGBT Leaders, an evaluation conducted after the first year of the 21st Century Fellows program, found that:

- 83% of fellows were employed at the same organization as when they started and 94% were still employed in the LGBT field.
- 45% reported that they had assumed a more senior position, and many reported taking on new responsibilities.
- On a scale of 1 (no improvement) to 4 (a large improvement), fellows reported gains in: understanding and taking responsibility for their leadership journey (3.82); developing confidence as a leader (3.78); reconnecting with their purpose (3.61); and developing and communicating a clear vision for the organization (3.13).

Learn More

Find out more about how foundations are supporting development for nonprofit leaders at:

- epip.org/genchange
- lgbtpipeline.org
- gillfoundation.org

This case study is part of **Generating Change**, an initiative designed to illuminate, inspire and activate the funding community to invest in talent and leadership development in grantee organizations, across networks and sector-wide. Generating Change is an initiative of Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy, a project housed at the Tides Center. Founded in 2001, EPIP builds extraordinary new leaders for foundations and the communities they impact.