

Leadership Learning Community (LLC)
Cross-Alumni Program Collaboration Pilot
March 4-6 Retreat Summary
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LLC Cross Program Alumni History

The Leadership Learning Community is a national organization that connects the learning, practice and resources of leadership development program staff, funders and scholars. Through our collective learning and activities we strive to better develop leadership that can transform society. LLC grew out of early leadership alumni organizing efforts and has always been committed to learning and practices that engage sustainable networks of alumni within and across specific fellowship programs. LLC emerged from Creating Space I, a national meeting sponsored by the W.K.Kellogg Foundation in 1998 to bring together leadership programs and graduates to explore opportunities for collective learning and collaboration. A mandate was issued from those gathered to build a sustainability community that could support learning and collaboration among leadership practitioners. LLC was formally launched in 2000 with the support of 12 foundations committed to leadership.

At LLC's national meeting in 2002, Creating Space III, there was a strong mandate from leadership programs and funders to build the potential for a national network of alumni by strengthening each leadership programs' capacity to effectively engage their graduates in sustainable networks. The LLC conducted several learning sessions with over a dozen leadership programs to mine lessons and innovative practices that support the sustainability of fellowship networks. The results of this learning are available on the LLC website (www.leadershiplearning.org/pools/alumni/). During the LLC national meeting, Creating Space IV, May 2003, participants in the Sustainable Networks Circle sessions began actively building relationships across programs around some joint ventures.

Cross Program Alumni Pilot

LLC has convened a group of alumni and program staff representing twelve leadership development programs nationwide to identify and coordinate opportunities for collaboration across programs. The decision was made to select 12-15 alumni organizations and initiatives of the more than 100 programs in the LLC in order to start this work on a more manageable scale that will enable us to explore more organic opportunities to organize collaborative activities, pool funding and connect technology. The work was launched with the expectation

that this pilot group will serve the broader field of alumni efforts by demonstrating early successes and strategies that can be taken to scale. In the final segment of the pilot, participants will be supported in a planning process to develop a proposal for a broad and inclusive network that translates lessons and builds on successes. The first official meeting of the pilot took place in Oakland, CA from March 4-6, 2004.

Participating Programs

Leadership programs participating in the initial pilot phase represent a diversity of geographic regions and a range of issues. Each program participating has begun a significant effort to engage their alumni community. Of the twelve programs participating and eight represented at the initial convening, there was a fairly equal division between foundation-sponsored efforts and non-profit run leadership programs. There were common challenges related to engaging alumni across the experiences of all programs. There were also challenges that were unique, and often defined by the type of program, e.g. whether they were foundation sponsored, the particular issue area and initial structure. Participants spent time learning about each others programs in order to better understand and appreciate the diverse contexts and objectives of each program. One commonality among all programs was the tendency to serve alumni of that particular program—in select cases involving foundation-sponsored leadership programs, there had been some early efforts to collaborate through open invitations to alumni events. In one region there were encouraging examples of joint action around community issues.

Leadership Development Programs Involved in Cross-Alumni Collaboration Pilot

- Agriculture Education Foundation Ag Leadership Program**
- *Annie E. Casey Leadership Fellows**
City Year
- *Eureka Communities—SF Bay Area**
- *Environmental Leadership Program**
- *Kellogg Fellows Leadership Alliance**
National Service Alumni Network
Open Society Institute
- *Public Allies**
- *Robert Wood Johnson Community Health Leadership Fellows**
- *Rockefeller Next Generation Leadership Program**
- *Women's Health Leadership**

*representative participating in March 4-6 retreat

Collaborative Possibilities

A number of collaborative possibilities were raised by the group over the two-day conversation. They included both concrete ideas for collaboration, and provocative questions about the nature of alumni participation in leadership development programs.

Areas where collaboration might be a possibility included:

- Applied research, shared papers, increased knowledge development
- Caucus opportunities for cross program fellows at field related conferences
- Support for replication programs
- Issue-based clusters across programs
- Pooling mini-grants/seed funds
- Priority granting of seed funds to cross fellowship collaborative projects
- Advocacy grants
- Training sessions with current/former fellows available across programs
- Call to Action Forums
- Regional/city capacity to convene fellows across programs on local issues
- Resource directory of fellows by skills/talents/issue interests/location
- Technology—a fellowship database and cross posting
- On line discussion groups by interests
- Size and scale questions, experiment small and take models to scale
- Exploring leverage points/change theories across programs
- Online classifieds/marketplace
- Network weavers/connectors

The Cross Program Alumni Pilot also explored ways to share collaborative funding provided by some programs, and the utility of using technology for profiling demographic information and creating a joint calendar of alumni sponsored events open to the participants of all leadership/fellowship programs. There was also expressed interest in creating more opportunities for regional gatherings that could extend the reach of the pilot around local initiatives and civic engagement in the upcoming elections. As a group clearly committed to how this network could leverage significant social change, many questions arose regarding ways in which leadership networks and policy advocacy work might leverage one another.

Participants also delved into frank dialogue about their concerns and reservations. Some asked what we really know about the desire of the alumni from different programs to actually participate in this type of initiative. Time is a major obstacle that limits the activity of fellows in their own alumni organizations. There was agreement that this initiative would only work if fellows perceived the broad alumni network as an opportunity to work more effectively without necessarily taking on 'new' or 'more' work. Some of the participants in the pilot came with the strong support of their alumni organization and others came to test the waters and learn more about the potential value of these activities. Equity of access was an important concern and issue for the group as they dealt with challenges inherent in funding such gatherings, especially among those non-

profits running leadership development programs who were not sponsored by a foundation with access to ongoing funding for operations and alumni activities.

What We Are Learning

While discussing these issues in some depth, participants identified some key questions and points of learning that would support positive outcomes for the cross program alumni project and benefit leadership development programs nationally. One popular suggestion was to create a virtual progressive marketplace that could connect leadership program “graduates” with training and influential career opportunities. The group supported the idea of focusing on those most interested in alumni activity and networking as an important strategy for creating intellectual capital and pioneering some important first steps. The operating premise is that if you focus where there is energy you will have the greatest success and those successes will bring along those who have more reservations. The pilot identified some key questions that it will be important to address in the course of our work together.

Ongoing learning questions include:

- How will we insure the sustainability of this work?
- How do we develop a transcendent identity beyond our own programs?
- What would stop us from coming together and collaborating?
- How do we maintain this work proactively and not as a reaction to a crisis?
- What is the best way to use and link the technologies of different alumni networks to engage participants and disseminate the results of our work together?
- How do we work together without creating extra work for already busy fellows?
- Can we create and test hypothesis about our work?
- What is the constituency of each program—and their interest in collaboration?
- How can alumni work enhance the continuity of leadership programs and our capacity to train the next generation of leadership?
- How can we contribute to the sustainability of the leadership programming?

Outcomes

The group expressed a commitment to collaboration across alumni programs that builds learning for the field, implements cross program alumni activity invitations, and tests network mobilization in a couple of regions. The retreat concluded with a desire to move in the following directions:

1. Create ways to share resources and best practices;

2. Generate opportunities regionally for alumni to come together across programs and get involved in both ongoing training and policy work; and;
3. Survey leadership programs current alumni program activities to identify events and training that could be opened up to other leadership program alumni;
4. Create a communications apparatus through the LLC website (bulletin boards, listserv, calendar, document sharing, announcements board) to facilitate cross program alumni invitations;
5. Convene alumni programs regionally in New York and the Bay Area to explore opportunities for a coordinated alumni civic engagement initiatives, with one idea being the registration of new voting constituencies through fellow networks.

Beyond these concrete steps forward to pursue over the coming months, there were significant questions that remained to fuel future conversations and learning regarding the nature of funding streams and the sustainability of leadership efforts. How to capture pertinent issues and training topics that will appeal to the broadest pool of individuals and programs; understanding challenges in documentation and dissemination about alumni efforts, including ideas for a national database of alumni, issues and opportunities.

Future meetings will take place regionally in May 2004. The group will also reconvene this fall to extract the learning of the first six months, to continue developing strategies, and shape plans for connecting the ideas and energy of thousands of leadership program alumni.