Community Impact & Green Pathways

FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM REPORT
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Rooted in Vibrant Communities (RVC)'s Fellowship program places talented leaders of color in a two-year, full-time position at local grassroots organizations led by communities of color. Our Fellows bring the experience, passion, and talent, and we provide a biweekly stipend, benefits, and ongoing professional development training.

We aim to cultivate and strengthen BIPOC leadership in BIPOC-led grassroots nonprofits by providing Fellows with a job and cohort learning experience, training, coaching, and mentorship that centers on Collectivity, Adaptability, Transformative, and Just leadership for themselves and the communities they live, work, play, and serve.

ABOUT THE FELLOWSHIP

RVC BY THE NUMBERS

19
2019-2021 Fellowship Graduates

13
Local BIPOC-led host organizations

480+
Coaching hours provided to fellows & organizations

80+
Professional development and leadership trainings

53
Total leaders of color placed at local organizations since 2015
FROM 2019 TO 2021...

We welcomed the third cohort of the Community Impact Fellowship Program, and the first cohort of the Green Pathways Program. In those two years, our Fellows got hands-on experience at local BIPOC-led organizations while also receiving:

**TRAINING**

Monthly training sessions, Lunch and Learns, and other professional development trainings on nonprofit management, leadership, systemic racism, power, and more.

**COACHING & MENTORING**

1:1 coaching with RVC staff and mentoring with experienced nonprofit professionals as support for their leadership and career journeys.

**COHORT EXPERIENCE**

Learning, working, and growing alongside a cohort of passionate and like-minded BIPOC professionals.
MEET THE GRADUATES

Bilen Eshetu  
SPEB

Uyen Vu  
POWERFUL VOICES

Zig Ziegler  
AGE UP

Maggie Angel-Cano  
DRCC

Fundisha Tibebe  
SPEB

Yolanda Altamirano  
FORTEA

Tracey Wong  
TOTEM STAR

Sharon Huerta  
FOCS

Cly Samson  
KCD

Mandie Rice  
RVC

Shikū Wainaina  
MCC

Naïma Shaltu  
FOCS

Ari Lozano  
AGE UP

Débora Oliveira-Couch  
SURGE

Ash Escobar  
AGE UP

Françoise Milinganyo  
CIN

E.N. West  
SURGE

Zaya Tumurkhuyag  
THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Shaylea Pilarski  
GOT GREEN

*See page 14 for a complete list of host organizations.
CULTIVATING A STRONG NETWORK OF LEADERS

RVC's leadership model centers on the kind of effective leadership that our communities of color need and recognizes that powerful community leadership already exists.

We've outlined a set of four core leadership principles describing the leadership we hope to foster in our communities:

- **COLLECTIVE** leadership is culturally-, community-, and context-driven in a way that affirms, builds from, and advances community leadership networks.

- **ADAPTIVE** leadership is self-reflective and multifaceted in development to take on complex problems.

- **TRANSFORMATIONAL** leadership results in change at the individual, organization, and systems levels that can be experienced, observed, and described by a range of stakeholders.

- **JUST** leadership encourages wholeness, wellness, and interconnectedness within and between communities, and asks leaders to build equitable relationships and challenge the status quo and community injustices.

We spoke with 14 of the 20 graduating Fellows at the end of the program to talk about their relationship to these principles and how they've grown their leadership. In this report, we share their reflections and experiences as a way to recognize and celebrate the brilliance and wisdom of these BIPOC leaders!
COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

How did Fellows embody leadership that is culturally, community, and context-driven? In what ways did they affirm, build from, and advance community leadership networks?

SHIFT IN HOW FELLOWS DEFINE LEADERSHIP

There was a shift in perception of leadership—from one rooted in hierarchy and professionalism to one that calls for collaboration, empowering others, and bringing people together.

“I’ve definitely let go of that notion that there’s one way to be at the top and make a difference. I am much more oriented towards community, and I know I don’t have to be the person with the title to enact change. I’ve definitely let go of a defensiveness around my work, and I have a lot more humility around owning mistakes and asking for help.”

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE NETWORK OF FELLOWS

From start to finish, Fellows described their connections with one another as strong, supportive, and loving. They repeatedly named their appreciation for having a network of people with whom they could share resources, seek advice, and celebrate wins with.

“The major difference that’s allowed me to build my leadership is having different outlets to process everything that’s happening at work. It’s very different when you have the people you work with at your org itself, that’s obviously very important, but when having other people to support you and feel like you can talk about things that feel hard, in a way that it doesn’t feel too daunting, has been really important for me.”

EXPANDED COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Multiple Fellows named that they feel more connected to community after two years in the program. The sense of community from the Fellowship was the most consistent strength raised across Fellows. They credited relationships with RVC staff and the BIPOC professionals who facilitated trainings as supportive and empowering connections.

“What’s been really helpful in having RVC, especially the capacity building and leadership support, is having another set of eyes to push people to another level of how our work can look and feel, and make it an environment where everyone feels pretty good about everything—that the work is split evenly, and the kind of work that people are doing is actually distributed fairly.”
**FELLOW SPOTLIGHT**

**Tracey Wong** (she/her) is a first-generation Chinese-American dancer, educator, and community event organizer. As a Community Impact Fellow, she was placed with **Totem Star**, an organization that supports a diverse community of young artists learning music and life skills through mentorship and meaningful relationships.

In her two years as a Fellow, Tracey accomplished a lot! She led big projects like organizing Totem Star's annual showcase, **Winter Magic**, while also gaining knowledge and experience in the day-to-day work of running a nonprofit.

Tracey's brilliance and strong leadership played a major role in the organization's growth over last two years, and Totem Star is excited to continue their journey with Tracey as their Communications Manager and Artist Mentor.

"Winter Magic was one of my first big projects with Totem Star. All of that work coming together, seeing all of the artists collectively share wholeheartedly themselves, celebrating one another, witnessing each other, hyping each other up — that energy is something that's so powerful, so unforgettable, and something so, so special."

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**TRACEY WONG**

2019-2021 Community Impact Fellowship Alum
Totem Star

Photo credits: Tracey Wong
ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

How have Fellows been vulnerable enough to evaluate themselves, to seek feedback from others, and to acknowledge that change is needed both around and within them?

MAKING SPACE FOR SELF-REFLECTION
Many Fellows appreciated the space to self-reflect both individually and in groups during trainings. This helped some Fellows make it more of a regular practice for themselves, and many attributed self-reflection to be key in their own growth.

Fellows reflected on:
- Culture, identity, and community
- Decision-making and communication
- Confidence and boundary setting
- Delegation and asking for help
- Power, anti-Blackness, and systems liberation

BEING OPEN TO CHANGE
In the wake of the pandemic and civil unrest, many Fellows had to pivot their work by adapting to virtual programming, switching to direct service work, or grappling with staff transitions. Despite how challenging it felt, Fellows said these experiences grew their confidence, let them take on new responsibilities, and build skills.

"I have felt more willing, able, and prepared to take on projects more on my own, rather than feel like I need to wait for support or something like that. With time and practice and just like being able to do this stuff, I feel way more confident in taking on tasks on my own."

MORE OPEN TO GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK
Many Fellows named that they’re now much more open to receiving and implementing feedback. Feedback helped Fellows think holistically about their work, pushed their growth, and helped Fellows both acknowledge and act on their needs—from taking time off to needing to transition to a new host organization.

"My org is very much a space where I can make mistakes, and still have a chance to be in charge of the things that I’m really excited about. It’s a space where I can be honest about the things that I want to be doing and be honest about the things that I don’t really want to do at work, which I don’t think I get the opportunity to do in other places."
Clyzzel "Cly" Samson (she/her) is part of a family line of fishermen and farmers from a small province of the Philippines and is passionate about food justice. As a Green Pathways Fellow, she worked with King Conservation District’s (KCD) Community Agriculture team.

Cly played an integral part in implementing KCD’s Culturally Relevant Seed Starts program, which grows seeds to starts and gives them to low-income, BIPOC, and immigrant and refugee community gardens. Due to the pandemic, Cly and the team had to pivot to growing seed starts from their homes, and were still able to give away almost 2000 seed starts to community! She calls her Fellowship position a trifecta of what’s important to her—food justice, gardening, and community.

"We were able to grow almost 2000 culturally relevant seed starts. That was a big highlight for me—going through that uncertainty and just being creative instead of losing hope. I think it was also just a great gift to community gardeners, especially at a really hard time."
TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

How have Fellows grown their leadership? What transformations have they seen in themselves over the last two years?

**More Confidence in Their Leadership**

By the end of the program, every interviewed Fellow spoke about feeling more confident in themselves. Many named that they feel a stronger sense of pride in their work and how they show up, while others feel more self-assured in their skills, knowledge, and value.

Before, I felt there was always somebody else in the room with more experience, so why would I—unless there was absolutely a need—speak on it? Now I’m realizing that between the trainings through RVC, other readings that I’ve done, and community involvement, I just trust myself and my intuition a lot more.

**Expanded Knowledge and Skillsets**

Multiple Fellows named strengthened understandings of social and environmental justice, capitalism, and power dynamics, in addition to their nonprofit management learnings. They also honed their skills in project management, facilitation, public speaking, supervision, relationship building, and more.

Any skill set and asset I had before I came to this program was deepened with RVC, and anything I had no knowledge of was brand new, and something I truly gained.

**Self-Acceptance and Personal Growth**

Many spoke of feeling an increased sense of self-acceptance. Fellows left feeling more settled in their identities and positionalities, and more able to show compassion and patience for themselves. Fellows named being able to see their value as more than their productivity as key to giving themselves more grace.

I’m taking more ownership of things, but in a way that I can sit back and actually be like, ‘I did a good job,’ and know that for myself. Looking back two years, believing that I was doing well was really hard, but I feel like that’s very different now. I know when I’m doing a good job, and I don’t need to rely on knowing that from others.
TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP, PT. 2

What transformations have they witnessed among their Fellowship cohort? What changes have they seen at their organizations?

CONFIDENT AND CAPABLE LEADERS
Fellows most noted that they feel an overall growth in confidence among the cohort. They mentioned seeing other Fellows taking on more responsibilities, leading programs and events, and just generally delivering on their work as ways they saw confidence shine through.

“I feel like everyone’s confidence has grown in some way. Everyone is learning to love themselves a little bit more and being kinder to themselves. It’s just a really nice thing to see people become who they’re meant to become.”

SHIFTS IN SUPERVISOR WORKLOADS
Multiple Fellows noticed shifts in staff workloads, which allowed for more time and energy for programming. A few Fellows mentioned feeling that their supervisors and executive directors seemed less burnt out with the added staff capacity of a full-time Fellow.

“I’m more willing and ready to take on projects on my own, and I’ve been able to take responsibilities off of our executive director’s workload. Everyone feels that both the amount and type of work people are doing is distributed fairly.”

STRENGTHENED SYSTEMS AND PRACTICES
Fellows witnessed a variety of changes within their host organizations. In reflecting on these transformations, every Fellow spoke to the impact they had in making these changes happen, with many speaking with noticeable pride and confidence in their work.

Changes Fellows witnessed at their organizations:
- Stronger organizational infrastructure and systems processes
- Better board and staff relationships
- Stronger feedback culture
- More inclusivity and openness
- Stronger social justice analyses
- More equitable hiring practices
Before working with Supporting Partnerships in Education and Beyond, I was a stay-at-home mom. I truly only wore the mom cap and it was very hard for me to even identify outside of that. When it was time for me to return to the workforce...given that I had a seven year hiatus, I don’t know if I would have been able to work anywhere else except RVC.

I appreciate and have learned so much. It’s the first time I’ve ever had to give my own pronouns. I’ve also never had a Black or female or immigrant or Muslim boss before—there were a lot of firsts that happened for me with RVC. I just feel beyond grateful that I have been able to have a coach, leaders, friends, peers, who quite literally carry you every step of the way.
JUST LEADERSHIP

How have Fellows fostered wholeness, wellness, and equitable relationships within and between communities? How have they centered their leadership around what is just for communities of color?

SHOWING UP AS THEIR WHOLE SELVES

All interviewed Fellows named that they could be their whole selves fully within their Fellow cohorts and within the RVC sphere. They discussed wholeness as feeling like they can make mistakes, that they don’t have to hide any part of their identity, and that they can show up authentically even in white spaces.

“Being a part of RVC Fellowship taught me what it’s like to be outside of the dominant culture in a professional setting. It taught me that all of these things about me are acceptable because I make it acceptable—not because anyone has to give me the okay.”

SELF-ADVOCACY

Fellows noted a greater comfort in being able to advocate for their needs and name what is coming up for them. Self-advocacy took several different forms, including advocating for more professional development funds, pushing for better support for Black Fellows, or deciding to transition to a different host organization.

“We've really grown in advocating for ourselves. [Fellows whose] placements weren’t exactly working out as expected really had to push back on what their responsibilities and roles would look like as they moved forward, or you know, take themselves out of that situation. It's a big deal to prioritize your wellness before a job.”

JUST VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Every Fellow named ways in which they sought to embody justice for their communities—whether it was teaching others what they’ve learned, modeling wholeness and vulnerability with young people, or centering joy in their leadership.

“I feel like we learned from the Fellowship is to follow our heart, to not stay in the same place just because of job security or financial burden. I feel like the Fellowship emotionally set us free to go do whatever we want to do for work, but also what we like as people. It’s really cool to see [other Fellows] doing what they really love.”
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

19 OF 26 emerging leaders who participated in the Fellowship graduated from the two-year program

90% of graduating Fellows were hired on full-time at their host organizations

95% of graduates continued working in the nonprofit sector

100% of interviewed Fellows would recommend the Fellowship program to others
A BIG SHOUT OUT TO OUR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

All Girl Everything Ultimate Program (AGE UP)
Congolese Integration Network (CIN)
Duwamish River Community Coalition (DRCC)
East African Community Services
Families of Color Seattle (FOCS)
Got Green
King Conservation District (KCD)
Multicultural Community Coalition (MCC)
Powerful Voices
Resource Media
Seattle Music Partners
Somali Family Safety Task Force
Supporting Partnerships in Education and Beyond (SPEB)
Surge Reproductive Justice (Surge)
The Nature Conservancy
Totem Star
Thank you

Your support strengthens and uplifts communities of color all over the Greater Seattle Area.

Whether you've hosted a Fellow, volunteered with us, or supported us financially—your contribution continues to help create lasting, impactful change for BIPOC leaders and the communities they serve.

HOW TO GIVE TO RVC

- **ONLINE** — rvcseattle.org/donate
- **MAIL** — Make a check out to RVC Seattle and send it to 1225 S. Weller St. Suite #400, Seattle, WA 98144
- **BY PHONE** — Give us a call at 206-436-9536