

2022 Evaluation of LISC's Rubinger Community Fellowship

Key Findings from a Survey and Interviews with Fellows

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Rubinger Community Fellowship Evaluation Executive Summary

The Rubinger Community Fellowship has allowed me to positively impact my community's businesses by increasing the exposure of Black-owned businesses within the community they serve. I was able to learn from some of the most progressive thinking leaders in communities throughout the country and those conversations were invaluable. LISC's contributions to our development by getting us audiences with internal and external thought-leaders were also valuable. What a wonderful experience!

– 2020 Fellow

In 2022, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) contracted with Wilder Research to conduct the first evaluation of the Rubinger Community Fellowship. Currently in its fifth year, the fellowship provides a \$40,000 award to up to 10 fellows from across the county annually, investing directly in them and their innovative and unique approaches to advance economic and racial justice. The evaluation sought to gather information to understand the fellows' experiences, what they view as strengths of the fellowship and areas for improvement, and the impact on individuals and communities.

In summer 2022, Wilder Research administered a survey to all fellows from 2018-2021. A total of 16 fellows, representing each fellowship year, completed the survey. Additionally, all fellows, including those from the 2022 cohort, were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Sixteen fellows participated in an interview. Participants included at least two fellows from each fellowship year. Some demographic data about the fellows is also included in the full report.

Key findings

Fellows and project characteristics:

- Rubinger fellows are demographically diverse. Individuals funded span 34 cities and 18 states and Puerto Rico. The majority of fellows work for a nonprofit organization, are founders and/or executive directors, and are deeply rooted in their communities having lived there for over 10 years.
- The fellowship funds a broad range of projects spanning multiple sectors, inviting intersectional initiatives. Most often, fellows used the funding to support new ideas, initiatives, or programs.

Most helpful aspects:

- The financial resources provided, the flexibility of the funding, and the peer-to-peer learning and support were the most valuable aspects of the fellowship. Fellows also found the in-person events, leadership development opportunities, and regular check-ins supportive throughout the fellowship year.

Areas for improvement:

- Key recommendations from fellows for improving the fellowship include: more in-person events, technical assistance, leadership development opportunities, and mentorship. Other desires include greater leveraging of LISC expertise, resources, and marketing/communications, enhanced alumni involvement, more clarity around the fellowship objectives, and sustained funding or outreach for fellows beyond the fellowship year.

Impacts for individuals and communities:

- The greatest value of the fellowship for individuals is connecting with peers, networking, and being provided the ability to pursue innovative projects and ideas. The fellowship offered validation and encouragement and, for some, provided a stable situation in a time of financial instability.
- For some, the fellowship year served as a bridge to additional funding that allows their organization to have a positive impact on a greater number of community members. For several fellows, the work they are doing is the first of its kind and has the possibility of being replicated in other places across the nation. It provided a platform for these projects to be recognized and promoted.
- The fellowship promoted relationship building and a better understanding of community needs and assets among changemakers working in areas that can transform the quality of life for individuals, from housing to economic development to financial justice.

Advice for future fellows:

- Advice for future Rubinger fellows include: 1) be present and engaged with the fellowship activities, 2) connect with your cohort, 3) take advantage of LISC connections, and 4) believe in yourself and your project.

People who work in this space, we don't make a lot of money. It's really hard to take risks to start new things. And we tend to come from backgrounds where we don't have a lot of financial buffers from our family. All of those things combined create an inequitable civic innovation space. People from wealthy families are able to start the things, but to my first point about racial and economic justice, there's so much community-based knowledge and community-based assets. So I think the funding is a huge equity component that cannot be overstated.

– 2022 Fellow

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Introduction

The Rubinger Community Fellowship invests in local changemakers by providing a \$40,000 award to up to 10 fellows from across the country annually. Diverse nonprofit leaders are supported to test forward-thinking ideas and explore innovative solutions within their communities to advance economic and racial justice. In the fifth year of the fellowship, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) contracted with Wilder Research to conduct the first evaluation of the fellowship. The evaluation findings provide learnings from the fellows’ experiences, what fellows view as strengths of the fellowship and areas for improvement, and the impact on individuals and communities.

As part of the fellowship, fellows receive various supports to nurture five key areas: professional development, capacity building, leadership skills, innovation, and peer-to-peer learning. These supports have been developed and enhanced over the past five years. Figure 1 provides a description of the types of supports provided through the fellowship. Fellows participate in several in-person meetings, including kick-off, midpoint, and final meetings. Since 2020, several of these meetings have occurred virtually.

1. Description of supports provided by LISC during the fellowship

Professional development	Trainings, consultants, and workshops to help fellows develop skills, stay up-to-date on best practices, and further their careers.
Capacity building	Expand fellows’ ability to work on impactful projects through financial resources, kick-off and midpoint sessions, mentorship, and networking opportunities.
Leadership skills	Uplift fellows as leaders in their field and magnify their work across LISC platforms. Support skill-building through group dialogue and public speaking through end-of-year presentations.
Innovation	Provide time, resources, and coordination to advance new methods, ideas, and forms of creative thinking.
Peer-to-peer learning	Opportunity to learn with and from a community of their peers, including fellow Executive Directors, who they might not otherwise have an opportunity to connect with. A “safe space” to share challenges, frustrations, and best practices.

Note. This list was provided by LISC. The number of meet-ups and supports evolved over time; therefore, some of these may not have been provided in the first years of the fellowship.

Methods

Wilder Research developed a web survey with feedback from LISC. The survey asked fellows questions about their overall experience and satisfaction, the helpfulness of the supports provided, how the fellowship could be improved, overall impacts, and demographics. The survey included closed- and open-ended questions and took about 10 minutes to complete. The survey was sent to 39 fellows from 2018-2021. Three reminder emails were sent to fellows inviting them to complete the survey. The survey was closed after three weeks. A total of 16 fellows completed the survey (41% of potential respondents). Given the small sample size, responses are reported using numbers rather than percentages. Fellows from each year of the fellowship are represented in the survey responses (Figure 2).

Additionally, Wilder developed an interview protocol to gather more in-depth information from fellows about their projects and experiences with the fellowship. Unlike the surveys, fellows from 2022 were included in the invitation. Of the 49 fellows invited for an interview, 16 participated (Figure 2). Interview participants received a \$35 gift card as a thank you. The interviews provided rich qualitative data and allowed for some case studies to illustrate the variety and types of individuals and projects supported by the fellowship.

2. Number of survey and interview respondents by fellowship year

Year	Number of survey respondents	Number of interview respondents
2018	4	3
2019	4	2
2020	6	3
2021	1	4
2022	N/A	4

Note. One survey respondent did not answer this question. Fellows from 2022 were not included in the survey sample as they had not yet completed their fellowship year.

Evaluation questions

The following evaluation questions informed the development of the data collection tools.

- Who are the fellows? What are the characteristics (e.g., demographics) of those who participated in the fellowship?
- How do fellows become aware of the fellowship opportunity?
- How do fellows use the funding and supports provided?
- What are the most helpful or supportive aspects of the fellowship program?
- How could the fellowship program be changed to better support changemakers to have a greater impact?
- What are the impacts of the fellowship for participants’ personal and professional development as a leader? What do participants learn? Specifically, how has the fellowship impacted the following key areas: professional development, capacity building, leadership skills, innovation, and peer-to-peer learning?
- What is the impact of the fellowship for communities? Specifically related to economic and racial justice?

Key findings

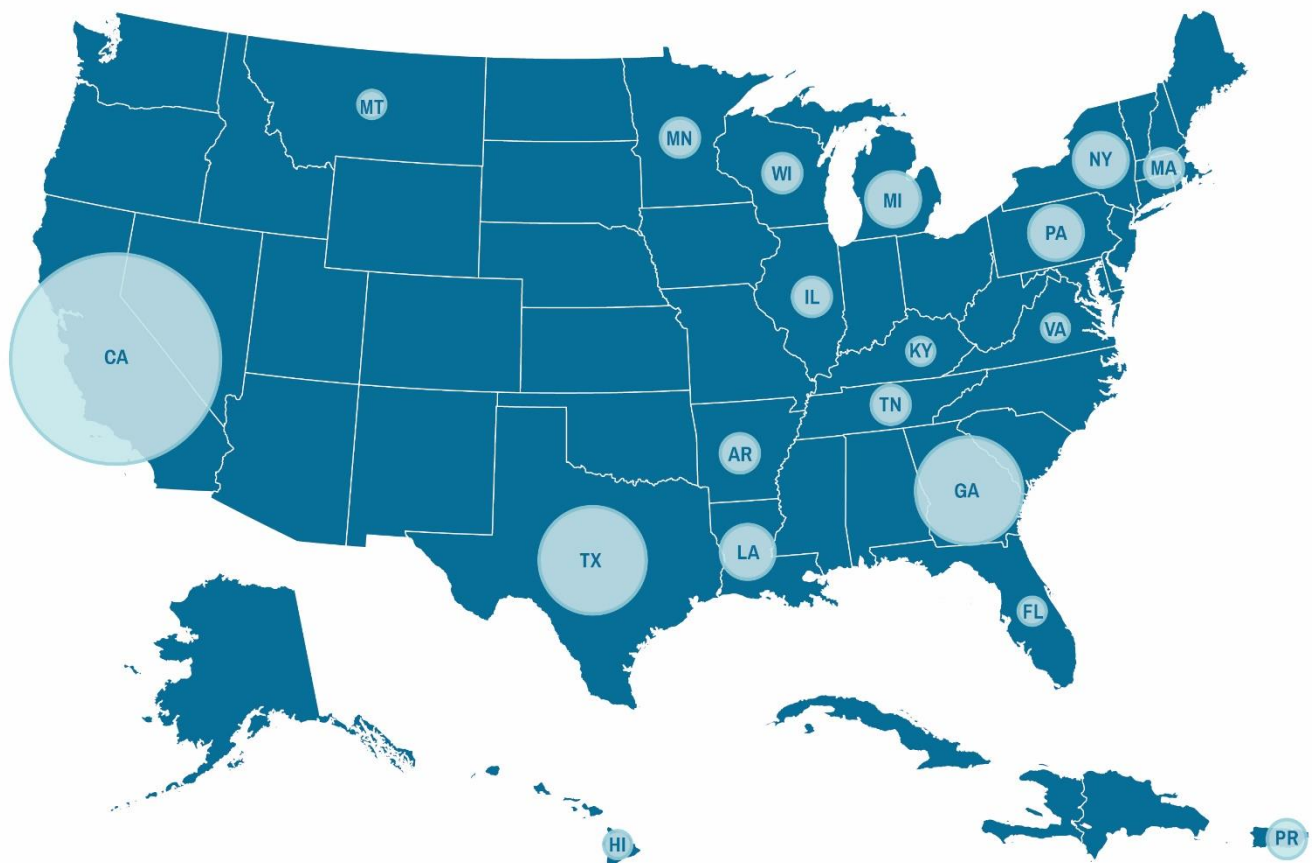
Characteristics of fellows

➡ Rubinger fellows represent a diversity of identities.

The following characteristics are based on administrative data collected by LISC at the start of the fellowship. Over two-thirds of fellows (69%) identify as women (34 women, 15 men). The largest proportion of fellows identify as Black/African American (41%), followed by White/Caucasian (18%), Hispanic/Latinx (16%), and Asian (10%). Other fellows identify as Indigenous, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander.

➡ Fellows were funded across 34 cities in 18 states and Puerto Rico.

3. A map of the distribution of fellows across the United States



Survey respondents were asked additional questions about their characteristics:

- Two-thirds of survey respondents (10 out of 15) worked for a nonprofit organization at the time of their fellowship. Other respondents worked for a for-profit organization or social enterprise (n=4), or a college or university (n=1).
- About one-half of survey respondents identified as a founder (n=8) and/or executive director (n=8). Other respondents identified as deputy, assistant directors, or vice presidents (n=3), or program manager/officer (n=1).
- The majority of survey respondents (12 out of 15) had lived in the city where they completed their fellowship for more than 10 years.

Among interview respondents, fellows said they were nominated for the fellowship by someone they currently or had previously worked with professionally. Several fellows were promoted by someone at their local LISC office.

How the funding is used

➡ **The Rubinger Community Fellowship funds a broad range of projects spanning multiple sectors, inviting intersectional initiatives. Most often, funds were used to support new ideas, initiatives, or programs.**

When asked to best describe the nature of their work during the fellowship, survey respondents noted projects distributed across seven different areas.

4. Fellowship project focus areas among survey respondents



Among interview participants, the greatest number of projects were focused on economic development and comprehensive community development. Projects varied from starting a youth transportation service to guaranteed income programs to efforts aimed at increasing the supply of nutrient-rich vegetables in communities that need it the most.

Interview respondents also noted projects related to child care and early development, education, food justice, and environmental sustainability.

The largest proportion of fellows used the fellowship funds to build a new idea, program, or initiative. Several fellows used the funds to support their leadership (e.g., to compensate their time or supplement their salary), for research and development, or to expand or build on an existing program or initiative. Few fellows used the funds to sustain an existing program or initiative.

I wanted to make sure that I could be stable so that I could strategize properly on what the organization needed to do. It allowed me that stability. It allowed me that bridge funding to get to my big funding in March that happened with the \$4 million. It allowed me to put some systems in place too. Hiring systems, finance, HR. That money, some of it, I pitched to consultants to set that up for us. It was very timely because when the \$4 million did arrive, we were really ready. – Interview respondent, 2022 Fellow

I used the funds primarily as seed money for the cooperative business that I was incubating. So that allowed us to get a consultant and have some startup capital. – Interview respondent, 2020 Fellow

An exploratory study to support survivors of domestic violence



Natalia Otero – Executive Director at DC SAFE (2019 Fellow)

Natalia Otero is the co-founder and executive director of DC SAFE (District of Columbia Survivors and Advocates for Empowerment), an independent nonprofit organization focused on crisis intervention and advocacy for domestic violence survivors. When Natalia was nominated to the Rubinger Community Fellowship, she saw an opportunity to pursue a research project that has been on her mind for years. Her goal was to conduct a study that would help DC SAFE understand what emergency financial assistance would look like for survivors of domestic violence, particularly those from under-resourced communities. Natalia wanted to explore what options for emergency funding were currently available and what the financial needs and capacity are for survivors. She also wanted to help change the misperception that survivors are not fiscally responsible enough or have the capacity to become fiscally healthy.

The original goal of this project was to interview 100 survivors, and her team ended up interviewing over 250 survivors by the end of the fellowship year. The interview tool used in this project was developed in collaboration with a diverse group of advocates who had years of experience working to support domestic violence survivors. Through this research project, DC SAFE learned that there are two types of survivor financial needs: Life-Driven Group and Abuser-Driven Group. Life-Driven Group describes survivors who were already experiencing issues such as housing insecurity or underemployment before the abuse, and would need more holistic services focused on basic needs and financial capacity building for the longer term. Abuser-Driven Group describes survivors whose reduced financial capacity is a result of abuse and who would benefit from short-term supports like skill development or emergency funds to get to the next stage. For the Abuser-Driven Group, Natalia learned that there are existing models to provide this kind of short-term assistance. When the Washington D.C. City Council created a flexible funding stream for survivors as a result of COVID, DC SAFE had the research to support the advocacy for the organization to receive funding and was ready to implement a program. Through these funds, DC SAFE has been able to give the needed emergency funds to people experiencing domestic violence to help them get in better situations. The original amount of emergency funds were for \$80,000 and then went up to \$250,000 in the second year. The survey tool also has the potential to be replicated in other cities and regions, further informing this field on how best to support domestic violence survivors.

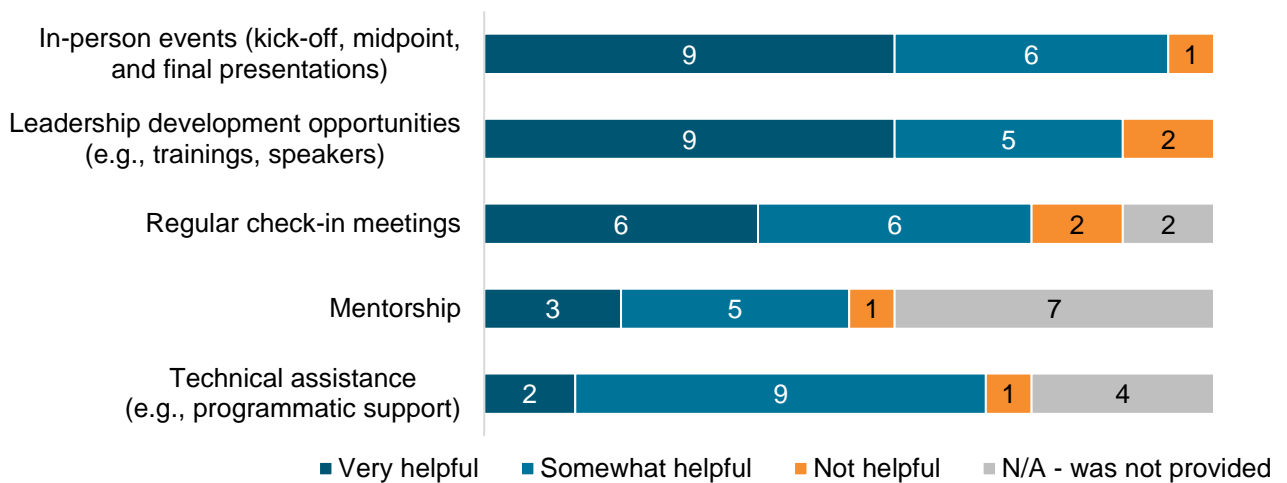
Reflections on the fellowship experience

- ➔ **Overall, fellows expressed high levels of satisfaction with the fellowship.** Twelve out of 16 survey respondents reported that they are “very satisfied”, three reported “somewhat satisfied” and one respondent was “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” with their fellowship experience.
- ➔ **All survey respondents agreed that the flexibility of the funding was important to achieving their goals and felt that they had autonomy over how the funding was used.** When asked about whether the amount of funding received was sufficient for the fellows to achieve their goals, 13 out of 16 respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed.” Three respondents gave a “neutral” response.

Most helpful or supportive aspects of the fellowship

- ➔ **From a list of key supportive aspects of the fellowship, survey respondents shared that the in-person events, leadership development opportunities, and regular check-ins were most helpful.**

5. Helpfulness of supports among survey respondents



Note. Some of these supports may not have been offered to fellows from earlier years as programming and supports offered to the fellows evolved to better meet the needs of the fellows over time.

Other helpful supports, each mentioned by one survey respondent in an open-end response, include: access to thought partners, connecting one-on-one with fellows, access to in-house LISC experts, and recognition as a result of being awarded the fellowship.

- ➔ **According to interview respondents, the financial resources and flexibility of the funding, and the peer-to-peer learning and support were the most valuable aspects of the fellowship.**

I think the incredible flexibility I had was incredible and different – this is not called a sabbatical, but it gave me the ability to do something different. – Interview respondent, 2018 Fellow

- ➔ **Financial resources and flexible funding.** For many, the funding allowed fellows to focus or work on something they would not otherwise have been able to. It provided the time and space necessary to move

forward work that would have otherwise sat idle. Fellows valued that the flexible parameters around the funding from LISC honored the expertise of those leading the projects and acknowledged the real-world context in which the projects were implemented. Several fellows commented on how rare it is to receive funding that allows for change and growth and opportunities; to have the ability to redirect and be responsive to community along the way.

Obviously the funding made it possible. Without the funding it wouldn't have happened. It's not all about the money, but in a sense it is. One of the goals is that they wanted to give us resources and the time. The time part is more valuable than the money, but you can't create time without the money. It's the capacity of us who are trying to accomplish these things that haven't been done before. – Interview respondent, 2020 Fellow

Honestly, had my program changed more, I feel like they probably would have been understanding about that. So of all the things to worry about, it was good to know that I didn't have to... I could just be honest about where things were going. If there needed to be changes, I think everyone was really clear that you live in the real world, you don't need to make something up for the purposes of this fellowship. Do what makes sense for your community and the work that you're building. I thought that was tremendously helpful and relieved a lot of stress. So many times with funders, you feel you have to do exactly what you put on the paper even if things on the ground have changed significantly. So I thought that was really great. – Interview respondent, 2022 Fellow



➡ **Peer-to-peer learning and support.** Fellows appreciated the cohort model and the diverse skills and expertise brought by the other fellows. Interview respondents noted the value of having a safe space to share and learn from others' challenges and successes in their work. Fellows learned a great deal from each other and some made meaningful connections with those doing similar work in other parts of the country. Some mentioned that they have stayed in contact with members of their cohort after the fellowship.

Having a safe space to discuss leadership challenges was also really valuable. I had meetings with other fellows and leaders of the program and have been able to learn about what challenges people face and how they're addressing them. Share ideas with each other or just encouragement even. Or having a place to go complain about something we're dealing with. – Interview respondent, 2022 Fellow

Other key positives aspects of the fellowship included the notoriety that came with being a LISC fellow, the connections made to thought-leaders and additional funding opportunities, and accountability that helped move projects forward. Fellows also appreciated having the in-person gatherings with their cohort. Alternatively, fellows from years that were affected by COVID-19 wish there could have been more in-person opportunities. For many, being awarded the fellowship was validating and affirmed, for many, that the work they are doing is valuable.

The prominence that the fellowship carried with it elevated my work and people's value for the work. LISC's reputation. – Interview respondent, 2020 Fellow

This fellowship made me more focused on doing that, whereas it probably would have been more of an abstract goal without a set timeline. I would have been like, 'I'll get to it when I get to it...Thinking about the fact that there would be a product at the end helped to refine those ideas and have it not just be an abstract thing that I should do at some point. – Interview respondent, 2022 Fellow

A restorative justice initiative

Michelle S. Johnson, Co-founder of Institute for Public Scholarship, CEO of Playgrown, and Co-founder of The Cultural Land Stewardship (2021 Fellow)

When Michelle was nominated to be a Rubinger fellow, she saw this as an opportunity to have concentrated time and resources to establish Cultural Land Trust, a project that encompasses much of her thinking and approach to restorative justice for Black and Brown people. The purpose of The Cultural Land Trust is to combat gentrification and secure spaces that are a part of Brown and Black communities that are in jeopardy of being lost. She sees this as a historical and environmental need in her community of Kalamazoo, and her stewardship approach is a way to preserve this property for them.

During her fellowship year, Michelle was able to finalize the stewardship structure and incorporate elements from other models into this process (including some of the work of another Rubinger fellow). Through the funding, Michelle was able to pay herself and project managers for each of the properties they began to take on under the stewardship. Her team was able to secure predevelopment funding towards a multi-million dollar investment into a hub of six businesses in Kalamazoo, in a building with historical significance for the Black community. She was also able to secure an agreement for a 10-acre nature based retreat center and began to host activities there as a safe space for Black and Brown people to gather outside. Another one of Michelle's lasting impacts through the stewardship is the building of new homes for people who were cleared out of an encampment on property she was developing in Kalamazoo. During the final sweep, she talked with people who were living on the land and asked if there was anything she could advocate for them. They told her they wanted sustainable and safe housing for their families and to be able to be off the city grid and mobile. Michelle conveyed this vision to the architectural designer and now they have raised close to a million to develop and fund the housing community on this land.

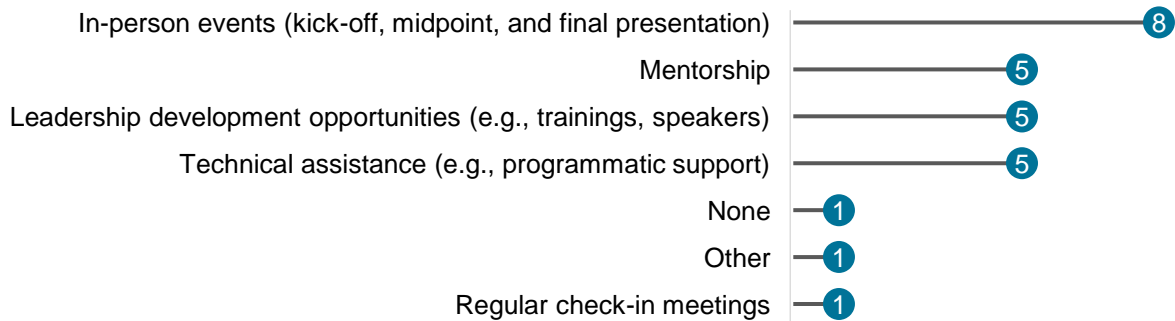


The bulk of my career is responding to what people have asked for and I make it happen. This was a tragic moment transformed into something so great, we are making dreams come true in a tangible way.

Areas for improvement

➡ When asked which supports or resources they would have liked more of during their fellowship, the greatest number of survey respondents mentioned in-person events, mentorship, leadership development opportunities, and technical assistance (Figure 6). The desire for more in-person events may be due to the fact that fellows in years 2020 and 2021 had limited in-person interactions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. More supports or resources desired among survey respondents



Again, when asked an open-ended question about what could be improved about the fellowship, respondents (n=3) shared that they would like more in-person gatherings. Other recommendations, each from two respondents, include more mentoring and coaching from LISC staff with topical expertise, connection to additional resources and funding opportunities, and alumni involvement from past fellows.

LISC could have offered high quality support to accomplish our individual goals in the form of TA and mentoring/coaching. This seems to be a capacity of the org that was not leveraged. – Survey respondent, 2021 Fellow

A deep dive on fellowship support

Interview respondents were asked to comment on what they liked about the supports provided and how they could be improved for future fellows. The following sections summarize key takeaways.



Professional development

Overall, fellows felt the professional development provided, such as trainings, workshops, and presentations from consultants was helpful. However, some fellows did not recall having received professional development support and those that appreciated it wanted more. Fellows from more recent years commented more positively about the professional development support provided, suggesting that this area of support has been improved since the beginning of the fellowship.

Fellows suggested that LISC consider developing a more formalized process to gather input from incoming fellows about the types of professional development topics and formats they would benefit from. Rather than keep it open-ended, LISC could offer some options based on their expertise and what they believe fellows may be interested in (e.g., leadership skills, communications skills, organizational structures, fiscal innovation).

Capacity building

Overall, fellows felt the fellowship built their capacity. The greatest supports for building the capacity of fellows were the time and resources that the financial support made possible and the networking with members of the cohort. A 2020 fellow shared the example of learning about Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) during the fellowship and that now his organization is applying to become a CDFI and, as a result, will better be able to serve African American entrepreneurs.

People who work in this space, we don't make a lot of money. It's really hard to take risks to start new things. And we tend to come from backgrounds where we don't have a lot of financial buffers from our family. All of those things combined create an inequitable civic innovation space. People from wealthy families are able to start the things, but to my first point about racial and economic justice, there's so much community-based knowledge and community-based assets. So I think the funding is a huge equity component that cannot be overstated. – Interview respondent, 2022 Fellow

Interview respondents suggested the fellowship could enhance its capacity building supports by providing more instruction about how to leverage other LISC funding opportunities, funding opportunities beyond a year, and mentorship or training on how to fundraise. For individuals carrying out projects that are not connected to an organization, LISC might consider providing a project manager to help those fellows with implementation.

[It] could be awesome, if with the reach that LISC has, for them to pre-select some of their networks that would be interested in connecting with us. Making that more acute would be helpful. You want the fellows to have the resources to continue their mission and they can bring people to the table who are interested (fiscally, mentorship, collaboration). – Interview respondent, 2019 Fellow

Leadership skills

Overall, fellows felt their leadership skills were supported over the course of the fellowship. Fellows said the opportunities to present to their cohort helped them articulate their work and to learn how to share it with others. Exposure to other leaders and their leadership styles, through dialogue and interactions with fellows in their cohort, was inspiring and prompted them to examine their own leadership style.

To improve LISC’s support in the development of fellows’ leadership skills, fellows suggested more intentional and focused trainings or workshops. For example, one respondents said they would have appreciated training around effective communication with a team.

I feel like we would have benefited more from something that was more about leadership development, like what type of leader do you want to be, how you run your organization, or how you... kind of like basics for nonprofit civic founders. I don't know if that's a charge of this fellowship, but it's something I would have liked to have seen. – Interview respondent, 2022 Fellow

Innovation

Many fellows noted that innovation was central to the fellowship, if simply due to the cohort members themselves and the innovative work and ideas they shared with the group. As noted previously, the majority of projects funded are new ideas or initiatives. Fellows particularly appreciated the time made for reflection and thinking.

They chose people (for the fellowship) with great ideas. ...putting together a group of innovators and helping them to refine to get to an execution stage. – Interview respondent, 2020 Fellow

Fellows suggested a more intentional focus on innovation as a goal of the fellowship and some said they would appreciate access to readings and resources in this area. A 2022 fellow mentioned a few specific aspects of the fellowship focused on innovation, including learning about Adrienne Maree Brown’s Emergent Strategy and hearing presentations from past fellows.



Peer-to-peer learning

Fellows benefited most from peer-to-peer learning that occurred during each cohort year and sometimes across cohort years. The quality of individuals selected for the fellowship and the shared experiences as executive directors/founders allowed for organic networking. Additionally, skilled facilitation and the creation of a safe space during convenings allowed for meaningful sharing, helping fellows to grow in their work and as individuals. Many fellows were able to name someone from their cohort who they valued getting to know and continue to be in touch with. Among survey respondents, three-quarters (12 out of 16) said they stayed in contact with other fellows after the fellowship ended. Fellows appreciated the diversity of projects, yet often connect with a member from their cohort doing similar work. One fellow noted, “I liked the knowledge-sharing from the other fellows and the emotional support.”

During the sessions I got the most from others in the group like managing expectations and hearing ideas that they have worked through – soaking up their expertise – that is what I remember the most.
– Interview respondent, 2019 Fellow

LISC could do even more to facilitate the organic peer-to-peer learning and networking during the fellowship year and across years. For example, meeting the outgoing and incoming fellowship cohort was valuable for those who had that opportunity. Consider formalizing that as part of the fellowship moving forward. This helped fellows to prepare and take advantage of all that is offered during their fellowship year.

I loved being able to meet the incoming class. I would like be able to reconnect with them. So, linking the classes once or twice a year by category. Have people doing housing do a check in or symposium so there can be regular interaction. – Interview respondent, 2021 Fellow

In general, more clarity about these five supports and objectives associated with them would be helpful for fellows to understand up front. Additionally, it may be helpful to understand what types of professional development or leadership skill building each cohort group believes would be beneficial to them and customize some of the supports provided by leaning on experts within LISC and past fellows. A large portion of fellows felt that LISC could have done more to leverage their expertise internally to support all of these areas.

Key recommendations for improvement

Ideas for how the fellowship could be improved varied across interview respondents. Fellows shared the following ideas:

- Provide more clarity about the goals of the fellowship and the five areas key areas it aims to support.
- Allow more time for getting to know each other, each other’s project, and troubleshooting challenges along the way as a group.
- Enhance alumni connections and learn more about past fellows and their projects.
- Facilitate more intentional mentorship, professional development, and capacity building support.
- Leverage more of the expertise housed within LISC, using more of LISC’s funding and programmatic resources and more transparency about if and how fellowship projects are being promoted or highlighted through LISC networks.
- Follow up with fellows to continue the relationship and help to sustain projects post fellowship. One fellow talked about making longer-term commitments to the fellows, knowing that structural barriers do not end after a year, and shared the idea of creating a pipeline for the fellows to diversify the pool of consultants LISC works with.

An advisory collective for development of a guaranteed income program

Hope Wollensack, Executive Director of the Georgia Resilience Opportunity Fund (2022 Fellow)

Hope is launching the Georgia Resilience Opportunity Fund (GRO Fund), which will be one of the largest guaranteed income programs in the country. This program plans to support around 650 Black women across three communities in Georgia and will guarantee an average of \$850/month for two years for women participating. This \$17 million initiative is unique from other guaranteed income programs in that the GRO Fund is a community-based model: all aspects of the fund are guided by the community from its inception to the core tenants of design and how outreach is conducted. Hope's fellowship project is focused on deepening this community-based work. Her goal for the year is to convene a community advisory collective to advise on the design and implementation of GRO Fund as well as to co-author reporting and sharing of the impacts of the fund.



...Community should be driving decisions in their communities. Community-driven design and changing around, flipping the idea of who are the experts, who has assets in solving these problems. There's no problem we don't have a solution for, maybe just the right voices haven't coming to the table or the right voices have been silenced at that table.

Since applying for the Rubinger Fellowship, the GRO Fund has scaled up from having only administrative funds to fundraising \$13 million in just a few months for cash transfers and building out an entire program team. The program went from one community site to three sites around Georgia. The original plan for the fellowship was to co-write some preliminary results of a small-scale pilot, but with her successful fundraising, Hope's ideas for how to work with the community have expanded. The plan moving forward is to co-write something more focused on the design phase of the GRO Fund, including what community-driven design looks like and some of the core principles based on their work with the community. With the resources from the Rubinger Fellowship, Hope is able to dedicate time to this community collaborative effort to define and share the GRO Fund's approach in a way that she would not have been able to otherwise.

Impacts of the fellowship

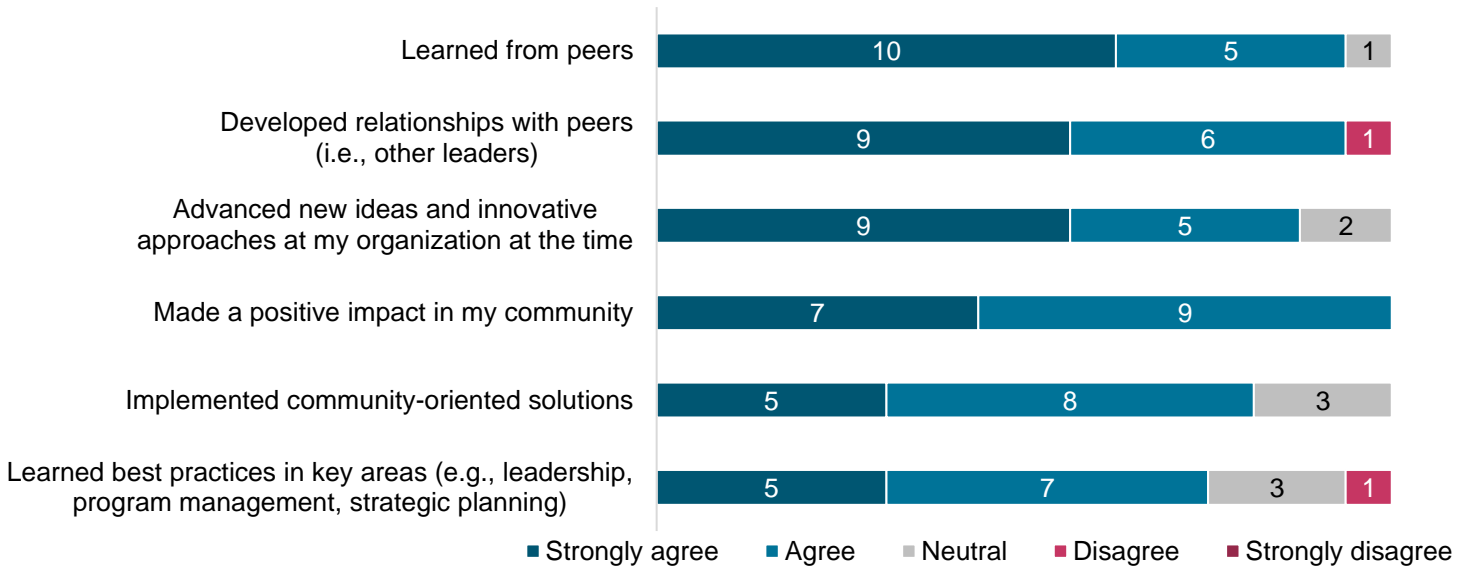
➡ **When asked to describe the value of the fellowship experience, the greatest proportion of respondents described connecting with peers and networking (n=6) and being provided the ability to pursue innovative projects and ideas (n=4).**

I really appreciated the fellowship for giving me the space and funds to pursue and experiment with ideas that were critical to my work but that there was limited ability to pursue with existing project funding and capacity. I also appreciated the opportunity to connect with the other fellows and see the work that they were doing in their communities. – Survey respondent, 2020 Fellow

From a list of potential benefits from participating in the fellowship, all respondents felt they had made a positive impact in their community. Nearly all respondents (15 out of 16) felt they had developed relationships with and learned from peers.

7. Impacts of the fellowship among survey respondents

As a result of participating in the Rubinger Community Fellowship, I...



Individual-level impacts

Among survey respondents, 5 out of 14 respondents reported that the fellowship did not have an impact on their personal life. However, some respondents noted that participating in the fellowship helped increase their confidence and self-esteem (n=3), alleviated financial stress (n=2), and allowed them to think critically about their work (n=2).

Interview respondents shared that the greatest individual-level impacts included the ability to try something new and go in a different direction than they might have otherwise and the validation and encouragement that came with being awarded the funding.

I think the biggest thing is that it gave a morale boost and a little bit of momentum at a time when the whole project seemed uncertain. – Interview respondent, 2022 Fellow

For some, the fellowship provided a stable situation at a time of financial instability. It also provided a space for learning and professional development, which many fellows said they typically do not have time for. Some fellows said it strengthened their relationship with LISC, facilitating future work with the organization.

When asked about the impact of the fellowship on their professional work and their organization at the time, survey respondents shared that it allowed for important research and development (n=4), brought benefits to other staff at their organization (n=4), brought helpful networking connections (n=3), and validated or legitimized the work and purpose of their organization (n=3).



Establishing the organizational infrastructure needed for a new food justice initiative

Jamiah Hargins, Founder of Crop Swap LA (2022 Fellow)

Jamiah utilized the fellowship funds to support himself while building out the infrastructure and refining the strategies for his new nonprofit, Crop Swap LA. He needed the space to develop all the necessary systems thoughtfully and the Rubinger Fellowship helped provide the funds for him to do this. Crop Swap LA aims to increase the supply of nutrient-dense produce and distribute these products locally and equitably. This innovative program not only supports people to set up their own micro-farms, utilizing a new water recycling system created by Jamiah, but also offers produce for purchase hyper-locally, to people living within a one-mile radius of the micro-farm. Because this is a brand new program, Jamiah found many benefits in being able to talk with other Rubinger fellows about challenges or stresses as a leader in his work with others who were also trying to implement innovative programs in their community. Having a safe space to discuss leadership challenges and hear how others were addressing them was valuable.

Community-level impacts

- ➡ **When asked about the impact of the fellowship on their community, fellows were able to share several tangible examples of major contributions to economic and racial justice (see bulleted examples).** Many of these examples are highlighted in the case studies throughout this report. For some fellows, the fellowship year served as a bridge to additional funding that allows their organization to have a positive impact on a greater number of community members. For several fellows, the work they are doing is the first of its kind and has the possibility of being replicated in other places across the nation. The fellowship provided a platform for these projects to be recognized and promoted.
- Damon Jiggets (Executive Director of Peter Paul Development Center, 2019 Fellow) was able to launch an after-school transportation service, helping close to 300 middle school students per day get to programs and activities they might not have been able to participate in without transportation.
 - Ana María Cintrón (Founder of Causa Local, 2021 fellow) used fellowship funds to hire more staff. This enabled her to expand her organizations' lending reach to eight new communities in Puerto Rico and provided support to over 500 small business owners.
 - Syrita Steib (Founder and Executive Director of Operation Restoration, 2020 Fellow) was able to build out a new partnership with a local organization in New Orleans that could introduce formerly incarcerated women to promising and varied careers in the film industry. During the start of the pandemic, she was able to shift and provide employment to those her organization serves through COVID cleaning and sanitizing on film sets. Despite shifts in the industry, formerly incarcerated women were able to gain employment, exposure to the film industry, and receive training that could lead to future employment opportunities.
 - Kerry McLean (Vice President of community development at Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation, 2018 Fellow) implemented a research study on the state of immigrant financial well-being in the Bronx. A few years later, using her fellowship research study results, Kerry helped open a credit union in the Bronx which will support the community in accessing banking services and credit that they historically have not been able to get.

The fellowship promoted relationship building and a better understanding of community needs and assets among changemakers working in areas that can transform the quality of life for individuals, from housing to economic development to financial justice.

The community greatly benefitted from the further development of our housing first village and, eventually, gained support from the Fannie Mae Foundation for the actual development of the project, which has been operational since Nov. 2021. – Survey respondent, 2021 Fellow

The fellowship provided a way for me to provide services to community partners at no cost to them. – Survey respondent, 2019 Fellow

We were able to help over 30 businesses improve their relationship with the community and increase their revenue. – Survey respondent, 2019 Fellow

Bringing together businesses and community, building relationship and trust, to support black-owned businesses



Joseph Caesar, Founder and Executive Director of the Legacy Institute for Financial Education (LIFE) (2021 Fellow)

During his fellowship year, Joseph learned valuable insight about the importance of building trust within a community and taking care not to move faster than the speed at which trust is built. Claiming to have a “logical and rational mind,” he has taken many of the lessons he learned during his fellowship year to continue to build relationships and increase his understanding about the community context in which he’s working. As part of the fellowship, Joseph convened black-owned business owners to support each other’s businesses in a rural town in Texas. Through these meetings, some businesses started sourcing each other’s products and making connections to each other and resources through LIFE that will help sustain and grow their businesses moving forward. The business owners are now eager for future meetings and are engaged in the supports offered by LIFE. An economic development leader from a nearby town heard about what was happening in Lufkin, TX to support Black-owned businesses and reached out to collaborate in the future to set something similar in his community.

Advice for future fellows

➡ **When asked what advice they have for future fellows, the most common responses were to: 1) be present and engaged with the fellowship activities, 2) connect with your cohort, 3) take advantage of LISC connections, and 4) believe in yourself and your project.** Fellows encouraged others to engage in the fellowship by asking questions, going to in-person events whenever possible, and approaching the fellowship as a learning and development opportunity.

Be present. This is the organization recognizing what you have done and what you can do in the future. It is not an investment in the current project you are doing. This made me less worried about the polished product. Remind yourself to be present in the experience you are having. – Interview respondent, 2021 Fellow

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