



YOUTH
OUTSIDE

INFORMING 
CHANGE

RISING LEADERS FELLOWSHIP 2015 – 2020





Introduction

Youth Outside’s Rising Leaders Fellowship supports the professional development of individuals in entry- to mid-level positions in the outdoor and environmental field. Each year, the program welcomes 15–20 individuals into a year-long cohort series focused on expanding equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy in their work and that of their organizations. The Fellowship recognizes the need to attract and retain talented people of color in the outdoor and environmental field, and provides a space where early career professionals, especially those of color, can learn the concepts, skills, and management aspects of nonprofit work necessary for career advancement as inclusive and culturally relevant leaders.

Youth Outside envisions an outdoor and environmental field that promotes equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy in following ways:¹

- **Equity:** The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of certain groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations due to these barriers and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to provide equal and effective opportunities to all groups.
- **Inclusion:** The act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people.
- **Cultural Relevancy:** Effectively reaching and engaging communities and their youth in a manner that is consistent with the cultural context and values of that community while effectively addressing the disparities of inclusion, equity, and representation within an organization’s entire structure.

The Rising Leaders Fellowship began in 2015 and is now launching its sixth cohort. During each cohort, Fellows participate in eight in-person sessions on topics ranging from social justice, power, and privilege, to technical areas including strategic planning, curriculum development, and funding. By the end of the Fellowship, Fellows identify a capstone project to address opportunities to increase cultural relevancy within their organizations, and consider the needs, impacts, and implications of the project if they were to enact it. Each Fellow also has access to up to three hours of individualized coaching for personal and professional development.

About this Evaluation

In 2019, Youth Outside engaged Informing Change in an effort to evaluate the immediate and long-term impacts of the Rising Leaders Fellowship on Fellows, their organizations, and the outdoor and environmental field. Our evaluation was guided by four primary areas of inquiry:

Fellows’ personal and professional growth

Contributions of the Fellowship on Fellows’ retention and upward career mobility

Organizational changes to expand equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy in their programs and practices

Ways in which the larger outdoor and environmental field promotes equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy more broadly



¹ These definitions appear on Youth Outside’s “Definitions” handout, April 3, 2018. Youth Outside’s definitions for equity and inclusion are borrowed from those of the UC Berkeley Initiative for Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity.

Informing Change conducted data collection for this evaluation in February and March 2020. Data collection activities included:

- An **Alumni Survey** completed by 43 Fellowship alumni (and one partial response) from across all five previous cohorts, for a 57% response rate. The survey assessed the Fellowship's influence on alumni's personal and professional growth (especially related to equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy) and career mobility. The survey sample size yields a 90% confidence level and 9% margin of error, allowing us to be reasonably confident that the survey findings are representative of the population of Rising Leaders Fellowship alumni.
- **Alumni Interviews** with eight Fellowship alumni. The interviews captured alumni's applications of their learnings to support organizational change (especially related to equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy) and perspectives on organizational and field-level changes.
- An **Alumni Focus Group** with seven Fellowship alumni. The focus group captured alumni's applications of their learnings to support organizational change (especially related to equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy), career mobility, perspectives on organizational and field-level changes, and critical components of the Fellowship.

In March 2020, Youth Outside and Informing Change reached out to leaders of youth-serving outdoor education organizations for interviews to capture their perspectives on organizational and field-wide changes, but due to disruptions as a result of COVID-19, organizational leaders were unavailable for interviews.

A Note About Covid-19

All data for this report was collected in the early months of 2020, during the early stages of the known spread of COVID-19 in the United States. Thus, the findings in this report do not directly address the dramatic changes that have happened in its wake. Nonetheless, we stand by the recommendations offered in this report. If anything, the need for advancing equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy in the outdoor and environmental field—and in the social sector at large—will only increase in the wake of the current crisis.

Natural disasters and other public crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic throw into stark relief the places where social systems are failing, where inequities are “baked in,” and, conversely, where systems show resilience and spawn new opportunities to remedy the effects of economic and racial inequity. Thus, the value that the Rising Leaders Fellowship provides, not just for individual Fellows, but also for the field of outdoor and environmental organizations, are all the more necessary as we weather this storm. We must take advantage of opportunities for transformation in the present moment, so that we can emerge together stronger and more equitable.

Personal & Professional Growth

The Rising Leaders Fellowship prepares Fellows to be more confident, culturally relevant, and collaborative leaders with the skills and perspectives that influence their organizations to adopt more equitable and inclusive practices. Our findings suggest that the Fellowship helps Fellows develop personally and professionally in three overarching areas—expanded perspectives and awareness, increased confidence in initiating conversations and making change, and improved technical skills relating to organizational management within an equity lens.



“Setting time aside to be in a room and engage in dialogue with individuals whose perspectives, backgrounds, and lived experiences differ markedly from my own was where the Rising Leaders Fellowship value was for me.”

– RISING LEADERS FELLOWSHIP ALUM

“The Fellowship encouraged me to think about my own cultural and social perspectives of others, while also acknowledging how others might perceive me. I have benefited professionally by adjusting how I approach new audiences, visitors, and program participants.”

– RISING LEADERS FELLOWSHIP ALUM

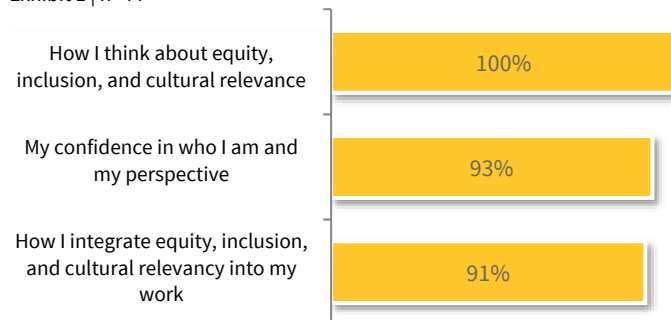
Expanded Perspectives Around Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Relevancy

Alumni report that the Rising Leaders Fellowship **strengthened their ability to critically reflect upon their own perspectives and those of others**. Almost all alumni who responded to the survey said that the Fellowship helped to improve their confidence in themselves and their perspectives (Exhibit 1). Many connected their growth in this area to their experience participating in a cohort of peers in an intentional co-created space for reflection and dialogue.

FELLOWSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS TO ALUMNI GROWTH

Percentage of those who “agree” or “strongly agree” that the Fellowship resources and supports were important to...

Exhibit 1 | n=44



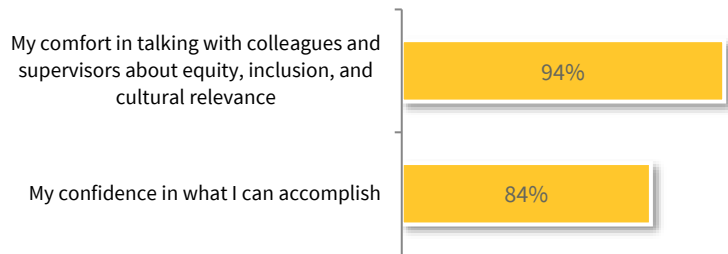
Every alum who responded to the survey said that the Fellowship **influenced how they think about equity, inclusion, and cultural relevance**. In interviews, alumni shared that they’ve gained a greater awareness of how power and privilege operate in outdoor and environmental spaces, including in their interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and program participants. Leveraging this heightened awareness, alumni feel better able to intentionally integrate equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy in their work (see “Organizational Changes” for examples of how alumni have done so).

Confidence to Initiate and Participate in Conversations

In addition to expanding Fellows’ awareness of power, privilege, and others’ perspectives, the Rising Leaders Fellowship also helped to **build Fellows’ confidence in their abilities and comfort in holding conversations around equity-related issues.**

Five out of six alumni (84%) said that the Fellowship helped them to **become more confident in what they can accomplish** (Exhibit 2). This includes the confidence to ask critical questions, take action in support of organizational change, share their learnings, and initiate potentially difficult conversations. In point of fact, almost all alumni (94%) said the Fellowship helped improve their **comfort talking with colleagues and supervisors about equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy.** Fellows feel better able to initiate and participate in these conversations in part due to an expanded language, conceptual framework, and toolkit of strategies for engaging in productive dialogue—honed through their practice doing so during the Fellowship.

FELLOWSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS TO ALUMNI GROWTH
Percentage of those who “agree” or “strongly agree” that the Fellowship resources and supports were important to...
Exhibit 2 | n=44



Technical Skills with an Equity and Inclusion Lens

Through skills training during the Rising Leaders Fellowship, alumni also reported progressing technically in a number of key areas, including curriculum design, facilitation skills, strategic planning, and financial management. When describing their learning in these areas, alumni consistently linked their technical skills growth with an increased ability to apply an equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy lens to their work. In the “Organizational Changes” section below, we include key examples of the ways in which alumni applied these skills to promote increased equity and inclusion within their organizations.

ALUMNI SAY...

“The main thing I gained from the Fellowship was understanding that I have a really powerful voice. It also [helped me] to understand that other people need to have their voice in the room, and also their presence in the room, physically.”



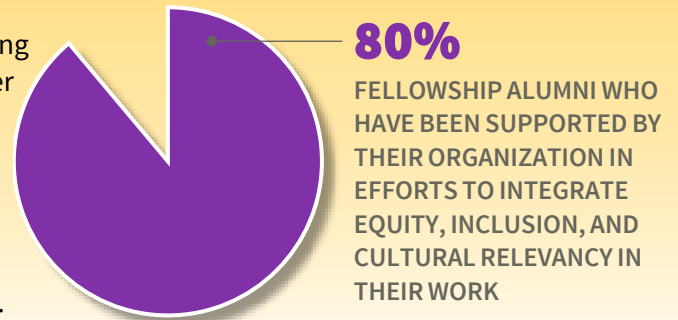
“RLF provided language and tools to hold conversations and enact change regarding equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy. It also provided opportunities to practice using those tools among peers in a safe space. This built community and a supportive network, in addition to skills.”

“The Rising Leaders Fellowship helped me gain knowledge to apply to [my] program, and background I need to set up curriculum to help our youth and program leaders build financial capability into our programs through DEI.”

“I’ve been able to feel more confident in my skills to lead a training on DEI. I’ve felt more grounded than I ever have before in my social justice convictions.”

Organizational Changes

As a result of the Rising Leaders Fellowship, Fellows report finding ways to work more collaboratively and inclusively and are better able to implement equitable and culturally relevant practices within their organizations. Through facilitating conversations, programming and curricular decisions, advocacy for Fellow colleagues and program participants, and input into organizational processes, alumni are helping to make their organizations more equitable, inclusive, and culturally relevant.



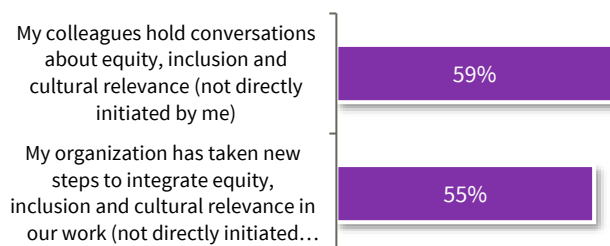
Organizational Commitment to Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Relevancy

Many organizations where Fellowship alumni work are on their own journeys to better integrate equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy in their programs and practices. Fellowship alumni were mixed in their reports of the extent to which their organizations are independently taking action to promote equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy (Exhibit 3). Slightly more than half of alumni reported that they've observed their colleagues hold conversations about equity, inclusion, and cultural relevance (59%), and that their organization has taken new steps (not directly initiated by them) to integrate equity, inclusion, and cultural relevance in its work (55%). Despite these mixed reports, four out of five alumni (80%) have felt supported by their organizations in their efforts to enhance equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy in their work. In many instances, this has helped to amplify alumni's contributions toward organizational culture change, as their organization's stated commitments to "DEI" (diversity, equity, and inclusion) have helped alumni gain buy-in for their efforts among staff who are eager and willing to engage in DEI-related work.

ORGANIZATIONAL EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND CULTURAL RELEVANCE WITHIN ALUMNI'S ORGANIZATIONS

Percentage of alumni who have observed the following in their organizations...

Exhibit 3 | n=44



One alum saw their organizational culture shifting when more staff started questioning the status quo. They shared that it wasn't easy at first: "It is absolutely normal in our dominant culture to become defensive of questioning foundation processes and ways that things have been done. That can make some people feel threatened. I saw that for a little bit." This alum persisted, and with support of other staff, "I saw other people starting to get brave and realize, why weren't these [tough] questions being asked? Other people started to see the benefit of creating equity in these processes and how it could be worth it to make changes.

Other alumni identified ways in which their organizations have lagged either in their readiness or ability to implement changes in support of equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy. As a result, these alumni have felt that they have needed to be the representative or "thermometer" for DEI within their organization at times, despite the organization's stated commitments to DEI. This can lead to feelings of burnout, which have caused some alumni to seek work in new organizations where values and practices are better aligned with their own.

Changes in Organizational Culture, Practices, and Processes

Rising Leaders Fellowship alumni are making significant contributions toward changing culture and processes within their organizations. They do so through activities, including leading staff trainings on topics such as culturally relevant programming; reaching out to supervisors and upper management about equity and inclusion-related needs; partnering with colleagues to provide input into strategic planning processes and HR practices; and encouraging colleagues to more intentionally examine how privilege and power operate in their organization and programming.

In interviews, alumni shared how they have promoted increased inclusiveness within their organizations by **bringing the voices of more staff members and community partners into decision-making processes**. For example, one alum described how they have made every aspect of their work more collaborative, from bringing more colleagues into decision making about their program, holding more inclusive staff trainings, and collaborating with colleagues to create more approachable materials. Another alum joined with their coworkers to advocate “for collective empowerment as a tool to build inclusion and equity,” to help their organization incorporate cultural relevancy from the bottom-up (rather than “top-down”).

Alumni have also partnered with Human Resources at their organizations to **improve hiring and onboarding processes to be more equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive**. Alumni have helped their organizations to update their recruiting materials, website, and trainings with a culturally relevant lens, and have offered constructive feedback to help build better support systems for diverse professionals once hired. One alum even advocated to their CEO on behalf a coworker who was unfairly fired, helping this person get their job back.

Changes in Programming, Curricula, and Community Engagement

Alumni have applied the skills, knowledge, and confidence they gained through the Rising Leaders Fellowship to improve curricula, programming, and community outreach at their organizations. As a result, their organizations have become more intentional in honoring the experiences of participants and their communities in outdoor and environmental programming.

A number of alumni have done so by **enacting processes to gather more feedback from youth participants**, at times, directly involving participants in programming decisions. For instance, one alum has developed and is piloting more after-school and family-oriented programs at their organization, based on feedback received from youth participants. Alumni have integrated cultural relevancy into program design and specific curricular elements, for instance, by de-centering white-dominant perspectives and introducing more asset-based language in educational materials.

Preliminary evidence suggests that in making their curricula more culturally relevant, alumni have helped to shift both how their participants engage in programming, and how their colleagues approach program design as a result. One alum made changes to their summer 2019 program because of what they learned in the Fellowship. In their words, “It completely changed the vibe of the community that we were very intentionally creating. [It changed the way] that the girls treated each other, the courage and bravery in being willing to step outside their comfort zone to try a new activity or reach out to somebody in the group that was outside of their friend group.” This alum was also able to bring new ways of thinking and planning programming to their colleagues: “The Fellowship experience gave me lots of confidence to probe in these planning situations as we were approaching summer, to ask critical questions that were inspired—or even given to me—by the Rising Leaders Fellowship and Youth Outside staff.”

Alumni have also **taken steps to increase program accessibility**, by expanding outreach efforts to communities who are underrepresented in their organization’s work, including local indigenous communities, undocumented residents, and youth residing in urban areas. To this end, alumni have sought new opportunities to partner with other programs, developed multilingual outreach materials, provided childcare and activities for families, and expanded eligibility requirements for program participation.

ALUMNI SAY...

“I conducted trainings on nonviolent communication and trauma-infused youth development for staff. I helped increase the amount of program staff of color. And I secured funding for DEIJ training for program participants.”



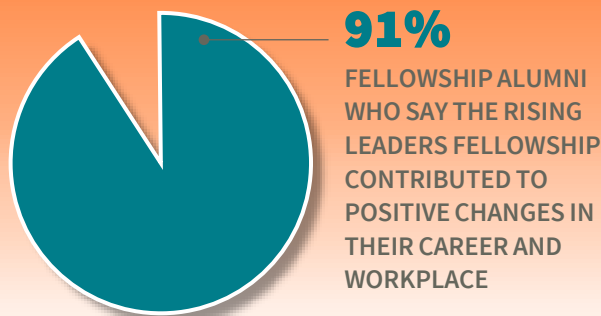
“I helped my director to address ways to build more inclusion in our department. I’ve met with other departments to discuss further outreach for our programs to reach underrepresented communities. I’ve had discussions with HR and staff about inclusive HR policies and staff support.”

“Cultural relevancy is a lens that I can never take off anymore. We’re going to constantly be scanning our curriculum... to become more culturally relevant in our language, communications and marketing.”

“[I began seeking] ways to consult or obtain feedback directly from the public, directly from the program participants, directly from the audiences we’re trying to serve. Not only the program participants, but also the people that we want to start coming. We’re working collaboratively with those organizations and trying to figure out ways to engage those communities more directly.”

Contributions to the Field

Over the past five years, the Rising Leaders Fellowship has contributed to field-level changes by building the capacity of a network of leaders in equity, inclusion, and cultural relevance. Building a network of leaders is one way to stimulate collaboration and collective action (or field building), and central to the success of field-building efforts is the acknowledgement, retention, and advancement of equity-focused leaders.

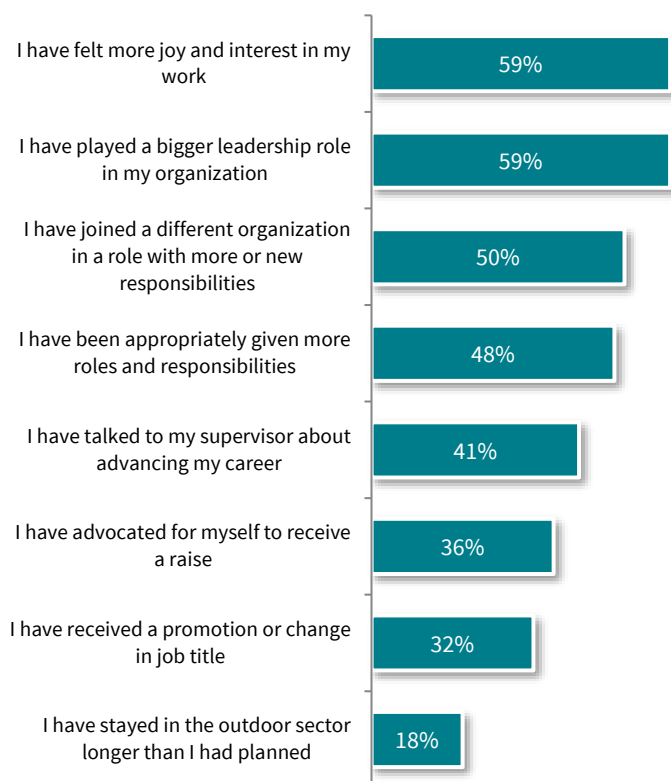


Advancing Leaders in the Field

The Rising Leaders Fellowship has contributed to the career growth of almost all alumni surveyed; nearly all of alumni (91%) say that the Fellowship contributed to positive changes in their career, and over half of these alumni say it contributed significantly. Equally important, the majority of alumni (59%) say that they've **found more joy and interest in their work following their Fellowship experience**—which has kept some in the outdoor sector longer than they had originally planned (Exhibit 4).

CAREER MOBILITY OF FELLOWSHIP ALUMNI

Exhibit 4 | n=44



Since participating in the Fellowship, **89% of alumni have been given new career opportunities**,² including playing a bigger leadership role in their organization, taking on new responsibilities, receiving promotions, and joining a new organization in a role with new responsibilities. **Alumni are also equipped with the tools to self-advocate within their workplace:** four of ten (41%) have talked to their supervisors about advancing their careers, and one-third (36%) have advocated for themselves to receive a raise.

Some alumni have continued to experience challenges in advancing their careers, even if given more job responsibilities. Often, these challenges stem from being given additional responsibilities without a pay raise, or from being asked to play the role of “DEI consultant” for their organization. In interviews, alumni said that the Fellowship helped them to better identify organizational fit with their own values and career goals—leading some to seek a better fit at a different organization. Nevertheless, these alumni shared that they would benefit from additional formal support following the Fellowship to help them in addressing these career hurdles.

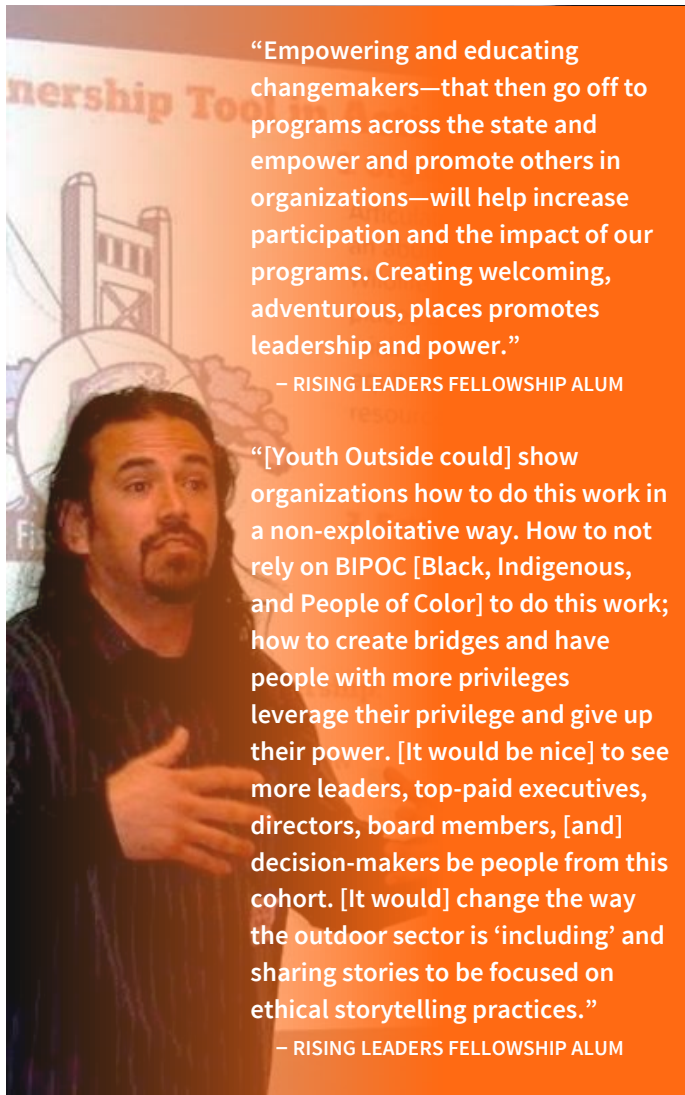
“I have been able to move forward in my career in various capacities without compromising my ideals, and not shying away from conversations around diversity, equity, and cultural relevance.”

– RISING LEADERS FELLOWSHIP ALUM

“When I was looking for jobs, [now] it was like, okay, how does this job best suit me, instead of, how can I fit into the mold that they want?” This is the person that I am, this is what my values are, and this is what I’ll be bringing. That helped lead me to what I wanted to do next.”

– RISING LEADERS FELLOWSHIP ALUM

² This includes respondents that indicated they have experienced any of the following: I have played a bigger leadership role; I have joined a different organization in a role with more or new responsibilities; I have been appropriately given more roles and responsibilities; I have received a promotion or change in job title,” or “other” write-in responses that indicate new roles or opportunities.



“Empowering and educating changemakers—that then go off to programs across the state and empower and promote others in organizations—will help increase participation and the impact of our programs. Creating welcoming, adventurous, places promotes leadership and power.”

— RISING LEADERS FELLOWSHIP ALUM

“[Youth Outside could] show organizations how to do this work in a non-exploitative way. How to not rely on BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color] to do this work; how to create bridges and have people with more privileges leverage their privilege and give up their power. [It would be nice] to see more leaders, top-paid executives, directors, board members, [and] decision-makers be people from this cohort. [It would] change the way the outdoor sector is ‘including’ and sharing stories to be focused on ethical storytelling practices.”

— RISING LEADERS FELLOWSHIP ALUM

Field-Level Changes

After five years, the ripple effects of the Fellowship are beginning to spread beyond individual growth and out to organizations. **Seventy-three percent of alumni say that they have seen or heard of other outdoor organizations taking concrete actions to integrate equity, inclusion, and cultural relevance into their work.** Unfortunately, we have little evidence about the *specific* actions other organizations in the field are taking to integrate equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy. The field-level effects are still emergent, and it may be too early to identify the direct results of the Fellowship on the field. Additionally, the lack of data about field-level changes is in part due to being unable to interview organization leaders.

Yet, many alumni believe that Youth Outside’s reputation as an equity and inclusion-focused leader in the field is gaining more attention and respect. Slightly more than half of survey respondents believe that by continuing to implement the Fellowship, Youth Outside can continue to build and strengthen leaders in the outdoor and environmental education field, thus continuing to build a network ready for collective action.

Other survey respondents believe Youth Outside could use its voice, power, and tools to model equity, inclusion, and culturally relevant practices for other organizations, which in turn may strengthen organizational and collective efforts for change.

Key Program Elements

The Fellowship has proven to be an impactful and transformative experience for the alumni. When asked to rank the various Fellowship components, many alumni in interviews and focus groups said that articulating the value of each element in isolation was challenging. While some aspects of the program were ranked more valuable than others, many alumni noted that what contributed most to their experience was the multiple components of the program working synergistically to deepen their learning.

Peer Cohort and Network Building

The cohort of peers that Fellows gained through the program emerged as one of the most consistently cited sources of growth, learning, and support from the Fellowship. Of alumni surveyed, nearly all (93%) said that the Fellowship’s opportunities for peer engagement were valuable for their growth, and the vast majority (82%) said that the Fellowship helped to increase their access to supportive peers in the field. During the Fellowship, this community of “like-minded” peers helped Fellows to expand their own perspectives, brainstorm new ideas, and find personal and professional support.

Most alumni whom we interviewed shared that they have maintained informal connections with their cohort peers—even those who haven’t mentioned strong connections with their cohort during the program. All alumni interviewed indicated interest in opportunities for alumni to (re)connect following the Fellowship. Alumni requested post-Fellowship gatherings of two types: social get-togethers, such as nature walks or alumni mixers, to rekindle or prompt new connections among alumni; and more formal follow-up meetings (virtual or in-person) for sharing professional development and career resources, providing support in self-care, and troubleshooting workplace challenges. Youth Outside’s support in organizing and facilitating these meetings would be highly appreciated by alumni.

Youth Outside Facilitators

When Fellowship alumni mentioned Fellowship facilitators, they were unanimous in their praise of Youth Outside staff’s support, compassion, and know-how. Fellowship facilitators were influential in helping the cohorts to co-create a supportive learning environment where Fellows could be candid and trusting with one another. Alumni also shared how interacting with the Facilitators helped to grow their own facilitation skills; as one alum put it, “I learned a lot from observing them.”

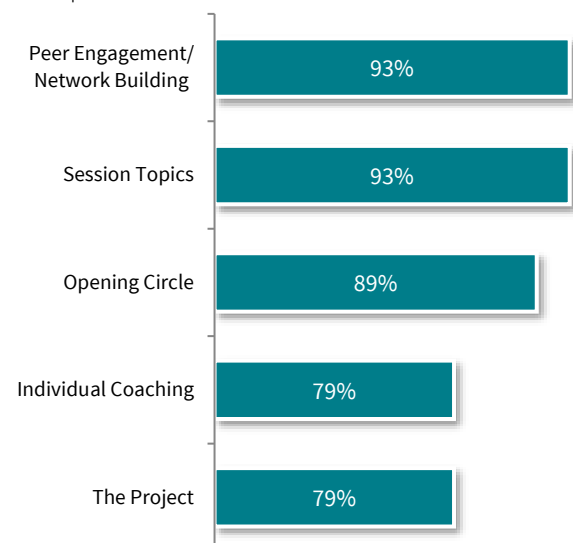
“The combination of the content, peers, and coaching were incredibly valuable for me. The session content led to increased understanding of issues that made me feel more capable. The peers made me feel seen, heard, and understood. I am not alone. And the coaching was targeted to my unique needs.”

– RISING LEADERS FELLOWSHIP ALUM

CONTRIBUTION OF PROGRAM ELEMENTS TO FELLOWS’ GROWTH

Percent of those who said the following were “valuable” or “very valuable”...

Exhibit 5 | n=43



Fellowship Activities

Alumni reported that the opening circle and the project were both valuable to their learning and growth. The opening circle was particularly important in expanding Fellows’ skills regarding equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy; those who found the opening circle valuable were more likely than others to “strongly agree” that the Fellowship was important to how they think, talk about, and integrate equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy into their work. Fellows appreciated the opportunity to “talk about provoking questions in a safe space,” as one alum put it, and found the opening circles “powerful” and well-facilitated.

The project component has also been important to improving Fellows’ ability to translate their learnings in the Fellowship into concrete actions within their workplaces. Those who found the project valuable were more likely than others to report that the Fellowship helped to improve their confidence in what they can accomplish, how they integrate equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy into their work, and how they lead in their organization. Alumni have applied their project learnings into their work by, for instance, implementing staff trainings based on their project content, conducting participant interviews for program improvements, and researching Native land acknowledgments to incorporate into presentations.

Fellowship and Session Content

Of alumni surveyed, 93% said that the session topics were valuable to their growth, among whom two-thirds (67%) found the topics “very valuable.” Those who found the session topics valuable were also more likely to report that the Fellowship was important to their confidence in what they can accomplish, how they integrate equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy into their work, and how they lead in their organization. In interviews, alumni cited a broad range of Fellowship content areas that they’ve directly applied to their work, including nonviolent communication, asset- vs. deficit-based language, trauma-informed youth development, critical questions to determine if curriculum is equitable, strategic planning, and financial management.

“As I started going to the sessions and learning, [I felt] like a new version of me every time I came back and shared what that journey was like with people in my division. I started to make connections to what they had been learning, and [I led] the conversation by saying, ‘Hey, I learned this in the Fellowship. What does that look like for us at your level, manager and vice president?’”

– RISING LEADERS FELLOWSHIP ALUM

Individual Coaching

Fellowship alumni found the individualized coaching to be especially helpful and worthwhile. Eight of ten alumni surveyed said that the coaching was important to their growth in the program, among whom two-thirds (67%) said it was “very valuable.” Coaching sessions provided Fellows with the opportunity to dive deeper into Fellowship content as it related to their individual experiences, which ultimately helped to improve alumni’s feelings of confidence and agency in their work. Alumni shared high praise of Dr. Darlene Hall, whose expertise, support, and encouragement were validating and beneficial, especially among a subset of entry- to mid-level leaders who often are not provided access to executive coaching through their own organizations.

“The coaching session with Dr. Darlene validated a lot of my feelings of ‘DEI burnout’ and gave me a lot of confidence to set boundaries.”

– RISING LEADERS FELLOWSHIP ALUM



Conclusion & Recommendations

The Rising Leadership Fellowship was a powerful and transformative experience for alumni. Data from the first five years of the Fellowship shows that the effects of the program had the most impact at the level of the individual Fellow but has begun to spread to their organizations. Below, we list out recommendations and considerations to improve the program and to attain bigger and broader field-level change.

Recommendations for Program Improvement

Further articulate the program's strategy via a theory of change. This document can serve as a "north star" and can support Youth Outside in defining and articulating strategies for building a network of leaders and promoting collaboration to achieve larger field-level change.

Fellows also noted a number of additional supports they would like to see in future programming:

- Increased communication and opportunities to go deeper with specific content. This can include more time to discuss content or hearing perspectives from other organizations on specific topics. Twenty-one percent of Fellows noted they would have preferred more depth over breadth.
- Additional support for professional and career development, including networking, career coaching, and ongoing career support. Respondents also mentioned specific work-related topics such as employee legal protections or support navigating benefits (e.g., 401K and FSA).
- More support, clarity and explanation about the project component of the Fellowship, and the related time and content expectations for it.
- One alum expressed hope that the Fellowship can integrate more self-care components, "because this [equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy work is hard, and it can get overwhelming.]"

Recommendations Beyond the Fellowship

The majority of the alumni in this study were interested in continuing to engage with the people and content from the Fellowship. More specifically, alumni would like to see Youth Outside:

- Make Fellowship content and resources accessible to alumni after the program is over.
- Continue engaging and supporting alumni by facilitating alumni reunions or gatherings. This can be a space simply for reconnection, or to help alumni continue to address career growth and hurdles.
- Create an online space for alumni to connect, learn what each other is working on, and share resources, job opportunities, and professional development opportunities.

Recommendations for Moving the Field

Train or serve as a model to other organizations about how to integrate equity, inclusion, and culturally relevant practices.

Consider expanding workshops and trainings to entire organizations in the outdoor education field (rather than at the individual level).

In an effort to build momentum for field-level change, it will be important to continue to learn from the successes of alumni and the program, including:

- Actions alumni are taking within their organizations and the field to integrate equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy and the changes that are happening as a result.
- The ripple effects of the program on organizations and the field from the perspectives of current and former organization supervisors and leaders.
- Monitoring the growth and spread of the network, tracking where alumni are employed, how long they stay, and what organizations are they moving to, if any. This will help Youth Outside get a sense of alumni density in the field.
- Track the ways, if any, cohort members are working together or collectively.

Conclusion

The Rising Leaders Fellowship has been an influential and transformational experience for many alumni in the program's first five cohorts. Alumni in this study reported tremendous growth in their knowledge, confidence, skills, and motivation to take action in support of equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy in their work and careers, and have influenced their organizations to adopt more equitable and inclusive practices. Furthermore, through the Fellowship, Youth Outside is building the capacity of a network of equity-focused leaders in the outdoor and environmental education field.

While we have clear evidence that Fellowship alumni are applying their skills and learnings within their organizations, we are just beginning to see how these actions are resulting in changes within their organizations and influencing the field more broadly. In theory, as the network of Fellowship alumni continues to increase, and connections between alumni and their organizations deepen, the potential for more systemic changes in communities and the outdoor field grows exponentially. Intentional efforts to explore the ripple effects of the Fellowship in future evaluations will help Youth Outside better understand what works in strengthening and sustaining field-level impact.

Our data shows that the Rising Leaders Fellowship has and can continue to play an important role in advancing a more equitable and inclusive outdoor and environmental sector. Now more than ever, this work is critical to the long-term health of our communities. Because crises like the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbate racial, economic, cultural, and geographic inequities, it is essential that organizations continue to deepen their understanding of, and adopt practices that center equity, inclusion, and cultural relevancy into their work.

Fellowship alumni are well equipped to lead these efforts, and with support and encouragement from their organizations, they have the potential to advance efforts that support economic fairness, access to safe and restorative environments, and an inclusive recovery response across communities.