



# Fellowships Alumni Network Study (FANS)

A photograph of three young people, two men and one woman, looking towards the right. The man in the foreground is wearing a black and white striped sweater. The woman in the center is wearing a yellow blazer over a black top. The woman on the right is wearing a grey sweater and glasses. The background is a solid blue color.

A study on the positive social impact of fellowship program alumni at all levels of society and the role of networks in the process

# Acknowledgements

## Abstract

This study is a collaborative research initiative that explores the changes alumni make in their work, activities that contribute to those changes, and the role that networks play in the process. To conduct the study, a consortium of partner organizations facilitated by IREX and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation designed and launched surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions that reached 17 distinct fellowship networks and engaged with over 1,000 alumni from around the world. Broadly, this study highlights the type of impact fellowship networks can have on alumni and the common elements of a network that alumni value in improving their work. The findings highlight the different ways alumni contribute to changes at every level of society; the importance of personal friendships in building sustained relationships with other alumni; motivations for engaging in network activities; and desired support strategies that support alumni in their work. This report aims to inform opportunities to strengthen fellowship networks and alumni programming across the sector.

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## About IREX

IREX is a global development and education organization. We strive for a more just, prosperous, and inclusive world in which individuals reach their full potential, governments serve their people, and communities thrive. We work with partners in more than 100 countries in four areas essential to progress: cultivating leaders, empowering youth, strengthening institutions, and increasing access to quality education and information. Learn more: [www.irex.org](http://www.irex.org).

## About WKKF

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal innovator and entrepreneur Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work, and life. Learn more: [www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org).

The FANS initiative would not have been possible without the thoughtful collaboration of our consortium partners who volunteered their time and opened their alumni networks to this study. These partners represent 24 distinct fellowship programs. IREX and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation extend our sincere appreciation to the following individuals from these partner organizations, as well as the 1,025 fellowship alumni who participated in this study.

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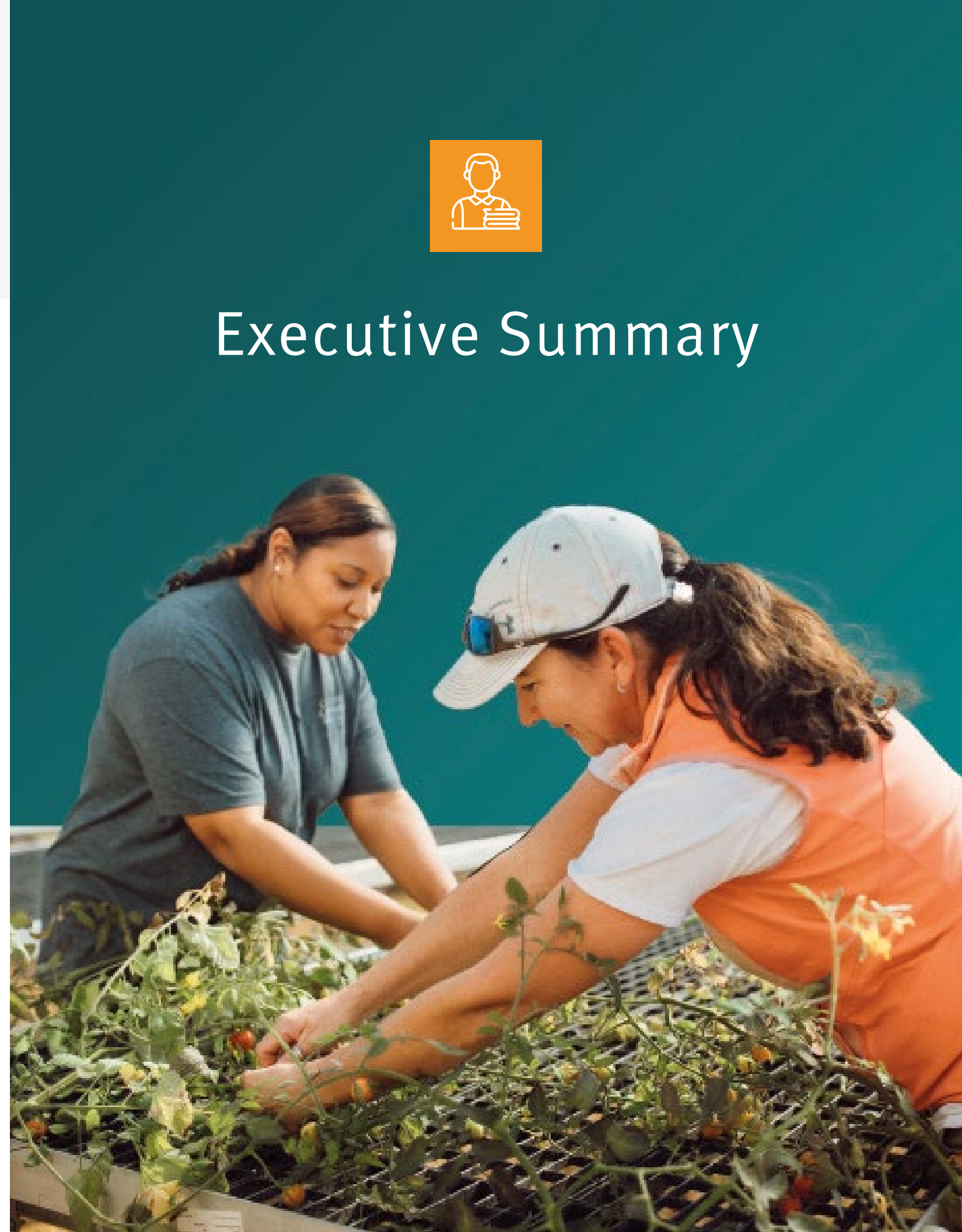
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For decades, fellowship alumni networks have invested in individual members to create positive social change. Yet across the fellowship industry, research and learning that provides an understanding of the changes that alumni make, activities that contribute to changes, and the role that networks play in the process is scant and often not relevant or replicable to other programs. Research and learning that reflects the broad fellowship industry through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion — a common value among fellowship programs — is needed to inform meaningful advancements across the sector and support potential contributions to social change for growing alumni networks.

The Fellowship Alumni Network Study (FANS) is a collaborative research initiative that began in February 2022 by convening a consortium of over 20 partner organizations to understand how fellowship programs can support their alumni to drive positive social change. Facilitated by IREX and supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the consortium co-designed survey, interview, and focus group templates to facilitate data collection around the following research questions:

1

**To what extent do alumni who are part of a fellowship network contribute to changes at different levels of society (e.g., individual, institutions, community, and systems)?**

2

**How do networks support alumni to contribute to changes at different levels of society?**

Contributions to changes at different levels of society refer to a change in an environment that an alum directly credits (whether fully or in part) to their fellowship experience or network engagement. The individual level refers to a change in their direct professional and personal experiences; the institutional level refers to a change in their associated organizations, government, or other entities with structures and norms; the community level refers to a change in the experiences of groups of people within the larger society; and the systems level refers to a change in underlying influences that shape how larger networks of individuals, groups, and institutions in a society function.

To explore these research questions, the data collection activities focused on gathering alumni perceptions of their fellowship experience and the potential influences the fellowship network has had on their ability to contribute to positive social change.

From June to November 2022, the FANS consortium launched 14 survey campaigns to distinct alumni networks, facilitated 79 interviews, and conducted 13 focus group discussions that brought together alumni from multiple fellowship programs. Ultimately, over 1,000 fellowship alumni from 102 countries and 17 fellowship programs contributed to data collection activities coordinated by the FANS initiative. It is important to note that except for the time since joining the fellowship program, no meaningful differences were identified between the several demographic categories analyzed in this study. These categories included gender identity, racial or ethnic identity, geographic representation, age, and career level. This is a limitation in the findings and an area that would benefit from continued research.

# Key findings

## 1. Alumni contributions to change

In focus group discussions and interviews, alumni shared 183 distinct instances of contributions to changes in their environment at every level of society. Notably, **instances at the community and systems level were mostly shared by alumni who finished their fellowships before 2018, with the inclusion of sustained fellowship network connections commonly referenced as a factor in achieving change.** This suggests that the impact of a fellowship network towards changes at advanced levels of society often takes several years to recognize, and relationships within the network are an important contribution to that process. The following is a breakdown of all 183 instances alumni shared within each level of society, the main types of changes they identified, and associated contributing factors from their fellowship network experience.



### Individual – 42% (77):

Career advancement and access to new professional opportunities through participation in fellowship network activities.



### Institutional – 23% (42):

Increased funding and access to partnership opportunities (either directly or indirectly) through connection to the fellowship network.



### Community – 27% (49):

New programs or community mobilization efforts to address local challenges supported by funding opportunities and knowledge gained from others in their fellowship network.



### Systems – 8% (15):

Efforts to leverage technical skills to address diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues by scaling up programs, informing policy development, and developing thought leadership resources. The main influences cited were encouragement from other fellowship alumni working on similar issues, and opportunities to discuss and improve awareness of these issues in fellowship activities. Four common objectives stood out in the change alumni make in their work at the systems level, including:

- Developing the next generation of leaders
- Building cross-cultural understanding and connections
- Improving policies through citizen engagement and feedback loops
- Addressing issues that disproportionately affect marginalized communities





## 2. Fellowship network support

While alumni priorities are distinct and may change over time, participants highlighted three common fellowship network experiences they viewed as valuable and that contributed to improvement in their work. These included **building relationships, advancing professional development, and sharing and learning from diverse perspectives**. Access to one or more of these experiences were common justifications for their current and desired engagement with the network. The following findings expand on each of these experiences and the desired support strategies alumni value in advancing their work.

**Personal friendships were identified as an important component of building sustained relationships and engagement within a fellowship network.** In focus groups and interview discussions, building relationships was often associated with distinct experiences of personal support and professional growth. Professional topics were identified as common entry points for building connections; however, there was a consistent emphasis on the value of those relationships maturing and being sustained by personal friendships, offering a stable point of connection as lives and careers change over time. Among 942 survey responses, 87% indicated building a meaningful connection with other alumni in their fellowship network, and of those respondents, 82% characterized at least one connection as a personal friendship.

**Improving access to professional opportunities was the most-cited impact of the fellowship network experience and motivation for continued engagement** in interview and focus group discussions among alumni. 95% (899) of survey respondents indicating advancing at least one career readiness skill, with career and self-development and leadership development cited the most at 74% (699) and 72% (677) respectively<sup>1</sup>.

**The fellowship network offers a meaningful space for alumni to share approaches in common technical areas and increase their awareness of the lived experiences of others.** In addition to the technical relevance of knowledge sharing, alumni also cited the personal challenges others would share relevant to DEI issues as meaningful. This

exposure improved their awareness of the topics, and they felt more inclined to consider it in their work. Further, 84% (791) survey respondents indicated that their experience with their fellowship network improved their awareness of DEI issues. When analyzing the open-ended responses in the survey, the following themes stood out:

- Exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences broadened alumni's awareness of DEI issues.
- Discussions with others helped improve alumni's understanding of DEI practices and how to incorporate them in work and life.
- The fellowship experience increased how alumni value and prioritize DEI considerations in their work and lives.

**Alumni shared support strategies from their fellowship network that they identified would increase their engagement.** The following reflect the most-cited support strategies alumni value in advancing their work, common justifications associated with them, and direct examples shared.

- Taking part in **leadership opportunities** that place alumni in an influential role within the network and allow them to contribute to its dynamic. Examples include being part of the fellowship selection process, joining an alumni board, engaging in a mentorship or peer-learning role, and sharing experiences or technical skills in formal activities.
- Participating in **knowledge sharing and networking** opportunities to connect with other alumni across cohorts and share practices around common problems. Examples include workshops, webinars, informal networking events, and digital resources to learn about the work of other alumni.
- Joining **regional or local networks** to build stronger relationships with alumni in the same country or region and allow for direct coordination that is less dependent on program administrators. Examples included formal regional advisory groups and informal network directories or events to help facilitate more proactive connections.

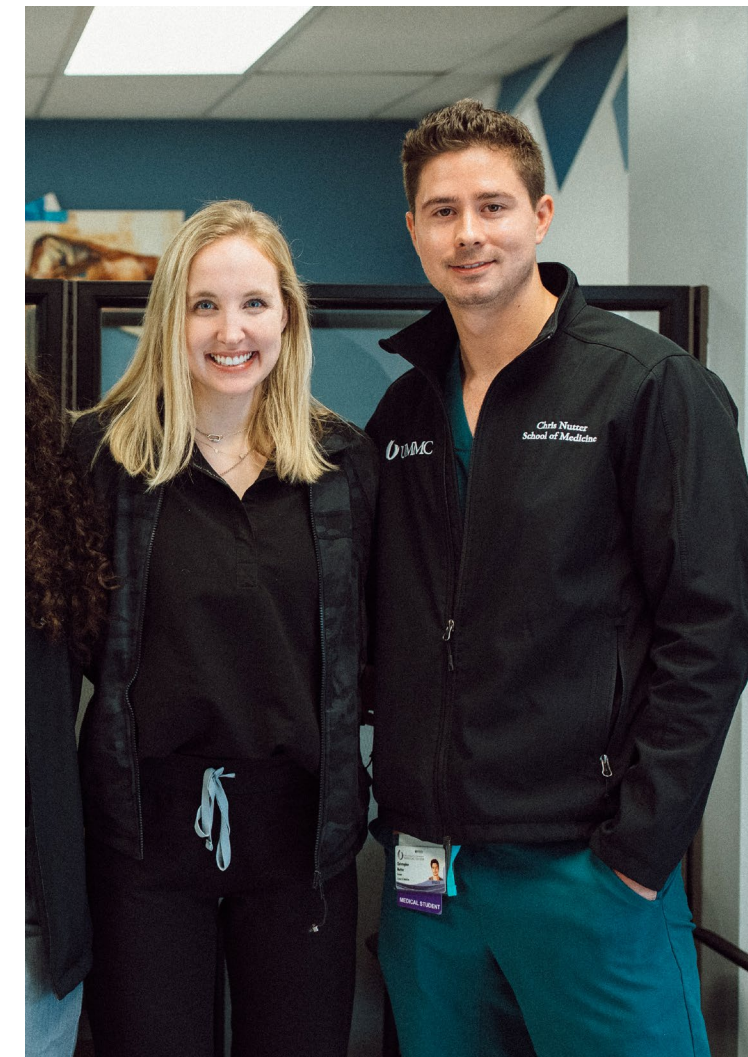
1. The common skills explored in this question were defined by the [NACE community](#) career readiness skills.

# Next steps and considerations

Broadly, this study highlights the type of impact fellowship networks can have on alumni and the common elements of a network that alumni value in improving their work. When considering the design and development of fellowship networks to foster meaningful engagement, donors and implementers should consider the following questions that align with these elements:

Practically, fellowship networks are diverse in function and dynamic. Providing spaces for fellowship programs to share successful practices and the impact of those practices is an essential next step to inform meaningful advancements across the sector.

- How can we build or strengthen relationships between alumni and provide space to develop friendships?
- How can we elevate alumni experiences to support sharing and learning from one another?
- How can we improve alumni access to professional development opportunities?





# Introduction



The last two decades have seen a dramatic increase in the number of fellowship programs around the world, particularly ones with a mission of contributing to positive social change.

Alumni networks are often an essential part of that mission. Yet across the fellowship industry, research and learning that provides an understanding of the changes that alumni make, activities that contribute to changes, and the role that networks play in the process is scant and often not relevant to or replicable by other programs. Key barriers for many fellowship programs in exploring these topics include limitations in staff capacity, funding sources, and practical resources for research and learning outside of existing program activities. In addition, spaces for organizations to share their work on these topics and learn about the impact of diverse fellowship programs are limited across the sector. Research and learning that reflects the broad fellowship industry through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)<sup>2</sup> — a common value among fellowship programs — is needed to inform meaningful advancements in the sector and support potential contributions to social change for growing alumni networks.

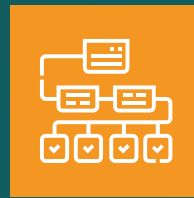
Driven by the fellowship industry's growing demand for spaces to share experiences and resources, IREX facilitated the Impact Fellowships Summit (IFS), a forum for leaders and managers of fellowship programs driving positive change in their communities. Founded in 2016 by Atlas Corps, ProInspire, and Public Allies, IFS fostered an inclusive

learning and sharing community for individuals who work on social impact fellowship programs; identified and acted on opportunities for collective action; and facilitated ongoing collaboration and support among community members. **Social impact fellowships are programs that support emerging and experienced leaders to increase their effectiveness as changemakers.** These types of fellowships build participants' confidence, enhance their abilities, increase their access to opportunities, and strengthen their networks. In 2018, building on the great work of the founding organizations, IREX took on the convening role for the summit. IREX's experience managing fellowship programs with participants from over 100 countries for more than 50 years brought a unique perspective to the broader fellowship community. Since taking over the convening role, IREX has focused on opportunities that contribute to advancing the sector as a whole.

The Fellowship Alumni Network Study (FANS) takes this engagement further by facilitating a collaborative research initiative with a consortium of over 20 partner organizations. Drawing from members of the IFS community and the broader social impact fellowship industry, IREX identified diverse partners to form a research consortium consisting of donors and implementers that share a common interest in understanding how fellowship programs can support their alumni to drive positive social change. Facilitated by IREX, the consortium collaborated over a one-year period to advance the FANS research design, coordinate data collection activities, guide analysis, and develop this report. The data and learning from this study will provide information that all fellowship donors and implementers can draw on to inform how they design their programming and facilitate network engagement with alumni. Finally, this report will be shared widely with the IFS community that is committed to building a space for reciprocal learning and sharing across the growing fellowship industry. In doing so, this study seeks to inform continued learning on how fellowship programs can support their alumni to drive positive social change.

2. DEI issues encompass a range of concerns related to social justice and equity, including promoting diversity in hiring and leadership, ensuring equal access to essential resources, combating discrimination and bias, and creating inclusive policies and practices that support diverse individuals and communities.





# Methodology



Collaboration is at the heart of IREX's approach to FANS. Drawing from diverse members across the fellowship industry that include both donors and implementers, a consortium of over 20 partner organizations came together to contribute to and advance each component of this initiative. This included designing data collection tools, facilitating data collection activities with their alumni networks, and contributing to the data analysis process. With IREX as the facilitator of each discussion and activity, the FANS research team worked with consortium partners to 1) identify common priorities across diverse fellowship programs; 2) develop data collection tools and resources that are relevant and replicable for evaluating diverse alumni networks; and 3) identify clear next steps for each consortium member based on feedback from the analysis and report development process.

The following sections provide details on how the FANS research team executed this methodology. This includes how the consortium was recruited and engaged with the FANS research team across activities; the data collection design and framework that was applied to the study; the analysis process used by the FANS research team; key limitations identified from this process; and the representation of fellowship alumni that contributed to this study.

## Consortium recruitment

To ensure equitable collaboration, IREX approached the consortium recruitment and engagement process with the understanding that members have a diverse range of needs and limitations that influence how they can contribute to activities. One key consideration was that fellowship programs often operate on a recurring cohort cycle — whether annually or multiple times a year — with peak periods of engagement that make certain times of the year challenging for teams to participate in external activities. This required transparency from the FANS team on the engagement process and flexibility in how consortium members can contribute to activities. Another key consideration was that most fellowship programs do not have designated research personnel on their teams or the space to proactively evaluate their alumni network. This required clear discussion frameworks on the process and how they can contribute, resources to reference as they shared information with their team, and direct support from the FANS research team to ensure that all consortium members were able to meaningfully contribute to the study. With these considerations in mind, IREX promoted FANS to fellowship programs that met the following eligibility criteria:

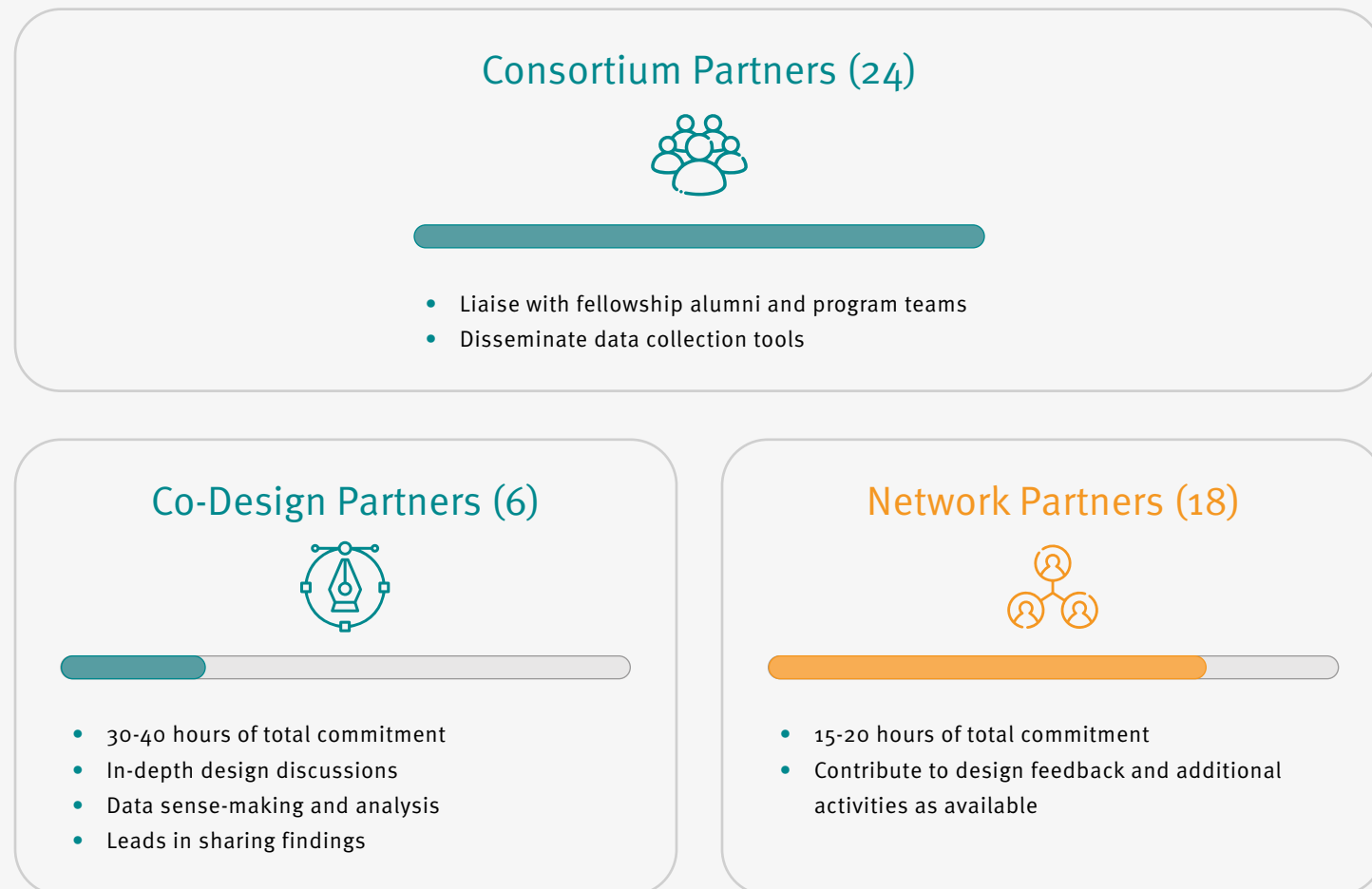
- Must have implemented a fellowship with alumni for at least three (3) years
- Must have cohorts of domestic U.S. or international alumni
- Fellowship experience must have included in-person and/or virtual engagement(s)
- Fellowship programs must have a focus on creating positive social change
- Fellowship must be currently active



In addition to the above criteria, applicants could select one of two engagement options based on their availability and interest over the research period. **Figure 1** illustrates the engagement expectations of these two options — the standard engagement option being the Network Partner, and the more involved option being the Co-design Partner. All partners contributed their experiences and feedback to each consortium activities and engaged with their network

of alumni to support this study; however, Co-Design Partners volunteered additional time to support shaping the focus of discussions and activities more closely with the FANS research team. In total, IREX selected 24 fellowship programs from 21 distinct organizations that reflected the wide range of donors, implementers, and educational institutions that facilitate impact fellowships.

**FIGURE 1: CONSORTIUM ENGAGEMENT TRACKS**



# Engagement

IREX facilitated a total of seven (7) convenings across each phase of the initiative. Some convenings were open to the full consortium (i.e., Co-Design and Network Partners) and some were exclusive to Co-Design Partners. During the Data Collection phase, the FANS research team also conducted one-on-one consultations with each partner as needed to provide direct support and guidance. The table below highlights the various phases of the FANS initiative.

Phases of Research	Phase Details and Objectives
<p><b>Design Phase</b> March – June 2022</p>	<p>Consortium partners convened five (5) times to inform the design framework and implementation process of the study. This phase concluded with the development templates for data collection tools.</p>
<p><b>Data Collection Phase</b> June – November 2022</p>	<p>Consortium partners engaged in one-on-one consultations with the FANS research team as needed to inform adaptation and dissemination of data collection tools to their alumni network. This was complemented by a series of self-paced learning resources designed by the FANS research team, and one convening to support partners’ onboarding of relevant program staff to data collection activities. Towards the end of this phase the consortium convened one (1) time to reflect on the data collection process and identify lessons learned.</p>
<p><b>Data Analysis &amp; Sense-Making Phase</b> December 2022 – March 2023</p>	<p>The consortium convened one (1) time for the FANS research team to reports findings, recommendations, and conclusions for feedback and reflection. This phase concluded with lessons learned from the consortium research process and practical resources for fellowship organizations to consider.</p>
<p><b>Promotion and Community Building</b> April – December 2023</p>	<p>Following the publication of the study, IREX and consortium partners will promote findings from across their networks and professional spaces to encourage continued learning and discussion among fellowship funders and implementers.</p>



FANS consortium partners volunteered their time to join discussions and facilitate data collection activities with their alumni networks. Therefore, it was important for the FANS research team to ensure partner engagement was not burdensome to their existing program commitments, both for administrators attending FANS activities and program teams disseminating data collection tools. The FANS research team worked closely with each partner throughout the design and data collection periods to ensure an open line of communication and support. This flexibility was important to facilitate meaningful research that did not conflict with their existing approach of alumni engagement. For most, this included consultations on adapting and launching their data collection tools and sharing standard training resources for their teams. However, in some cases, modest stipends were provided for program teams to facilitate in-person data collection with alumni that had limited access to the internet. This was particularly important to ensure each partner had what they needed to equitably reach alumni to participate in the study. Further, any data collection activities facilitated directly by the FANS research team with partner alumni (i.e. focus group discussions) provided participants with a modest honorarium for their contributions. The continuous communication and flexible support provided a mutually beneficial experience for FANS partners that could justify the time their program teams and participants contributed to the study.

## Data collection design and approach

The following research questions and learning objectives guided the co-design and development of the data collection instruments. This co-design process was important in ensuring that the data collected was relevant to the priorities of consortium members, and the tools were replicable to their unique alumni network.

1

### FANS research questions

**To what extent do alumni who are part of a fellowship network contribute to changes at different levels of society (e.g., individual, institutions, community, and systems)?**

- a. What value have alumni gained from participating in a fellowship network?

2

**How do networks support alumni to contribute to changes at different levels of society?**

- b. To what extent do alumni have equitable opportunities within the network to make change?
- c. What strategies support alumni in a network to create change?

By exploring each of these research questions over multiple convenings, the consortium identified the following learning objectives that guided the design of the data collection tools.

### Learning objectives

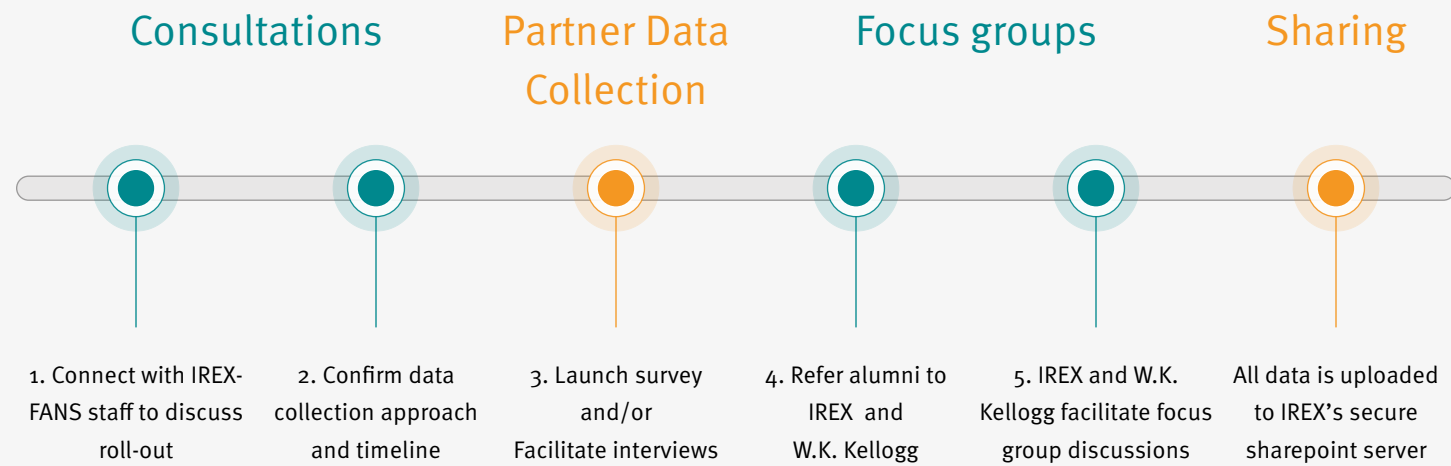
- > **Understand**  
the ways alumni contribute to changes at each level of society and how they associate those changes with their experience in their fellowship network.
- > **Identify**  
the value alumni gained from their experience in their fellowship network.
- > **Understand**  
how and why alumni engage in their fellowship network by exploring how meaningful relationships were developed, their motivations for staying engaged in the network, and barriers they experienced in the process.
- > **Identify**  
support strategies that would increase alumni engagement and their contributions to change.
- > **Identify**  
meaningful distinctions among groups of alumni based on gender identity, geographic representation, race and ethnicity, age, career level, and time since their initial fellowship experience.



All data collection tools explored these five learning objectives with a standardized demographic questionnaire to ensure consistency in participant details collected. While all partners were invited to facilitate data collection with each tool, they were only required to conduct either the survey or interviews. Separately, however, the IREX and W.K. Kellogg teams facilitated focus group discussions with participants across different fellowship programs represented in the consortium. To meaningfully explore potential distinctions between alumni based on the time since their initial fellowship, IREX separated focus group participants between alumni who joined their fellowship network before 2018 and those who have joined since 2018.

**Figure 2** illustrates the activities and key milestones of the data collection coordination process from June through November 2022 with consortium partners.

FIGURE 2: FANS DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITY PHASES



## Key limitations

The key limitations in this study include the following:

- The data collected for this study is limited to the **perceptions of alumni** based on responses to surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. Respondents may have their own biases or misperceptions that could affect the accuracy of their individual responses. Further, many respondents' perceptions may not consider additional factors that influenced their experience. The FANS research team aimed to mitigate this limitation with the scale and mixed-method approach of the data collection process.
- Each partner had discretion on how they disseminated their data collection tools and non-probability sampling<sup>3</sup> methods were used across all programs that contributed data to this study. Most partners applied convenience sampling<sup>4</sup> while some partners applied purposive sampling<sup>5</sup>. In either case, non-probability sampling **cannot test a hypothesis or infer causation**. Rather, it is limited to exploratory use to understand under-researched populations — the common purpose of this study: directories or events to help facilitate more proactive connections.

3. Non-probability sampling is a type of sampling method where the probability of any particular member of a population being chosen for inclusion in a sample is unknown and cannot be calculated.
4. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling method where participants are chosen based on their availability and accessibility to the researcher.
5. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method where the researcher selects participants based on specific criteria, with the goal of including individuals who are knowledgeable or representative of the population being studied.

## Study participants and representation

From June to November 2022, the FANS consortium launched 14 survey campaigns to distinct alumni networks, facilitated 79 interviews, and conducted 13 focus group discussions that brought together alumni from multiple fellowship programs. Ultimately, 1,025 fellowship alumni from 102 countries and 17 programs contributed to data collection activities coordinated by the FANS initiative. Among these participants, 928 contributed to one data collection activity (i.e., survey, interview, or focus groups) and the remaining 97 contributed to both the survey and either an interview or focus group discussion. The following is a breakdown of each of the key demographic details collected from participants that inform the reach and representation of the subsequent findings.

### Program participation

The 17 programs that contributed data to this study reflect a diverse range of social impact fellowships. In function, they facilitate the four common fellowship types that exist in the sector<sup>6</sup> — Match Maker<sup>7</sup>, Launchpad<sup>8</sup>, People Accelerator<sup>9</sup>, and Strategic Employer<sup>10</sup>. In participation, their programs range from connecting individuals at the global level, (e.g. Community Solutions Program, Atlas Corps,) regional level, (e.g. Library AID Africa, Balal Public Library), and national level (e.g. Cleveland Foundation, MescrripsVoices) individuals at global, regional and national levels.

**Figure 3** shows the distributions of participants across the different programs within the consortium that facilitated data collection activities with a plurality of participants from the Global Health Corps program (35%) and a large percentage from the Community Solutions Program (19%). The remaining 46% of participants were distributed across 15 other fellowship programs.

The high representation from the Global Health Corps and Community Solutions Program are likely a result of their data collection tools being an online survey, and the program teams recently facilitating advanced evaluation efforts with their alumni networks. While many consortium partners have a strong engagement with their alumni networks, the recent research initiatives were familiar to their networks, establishing a strong response rate.

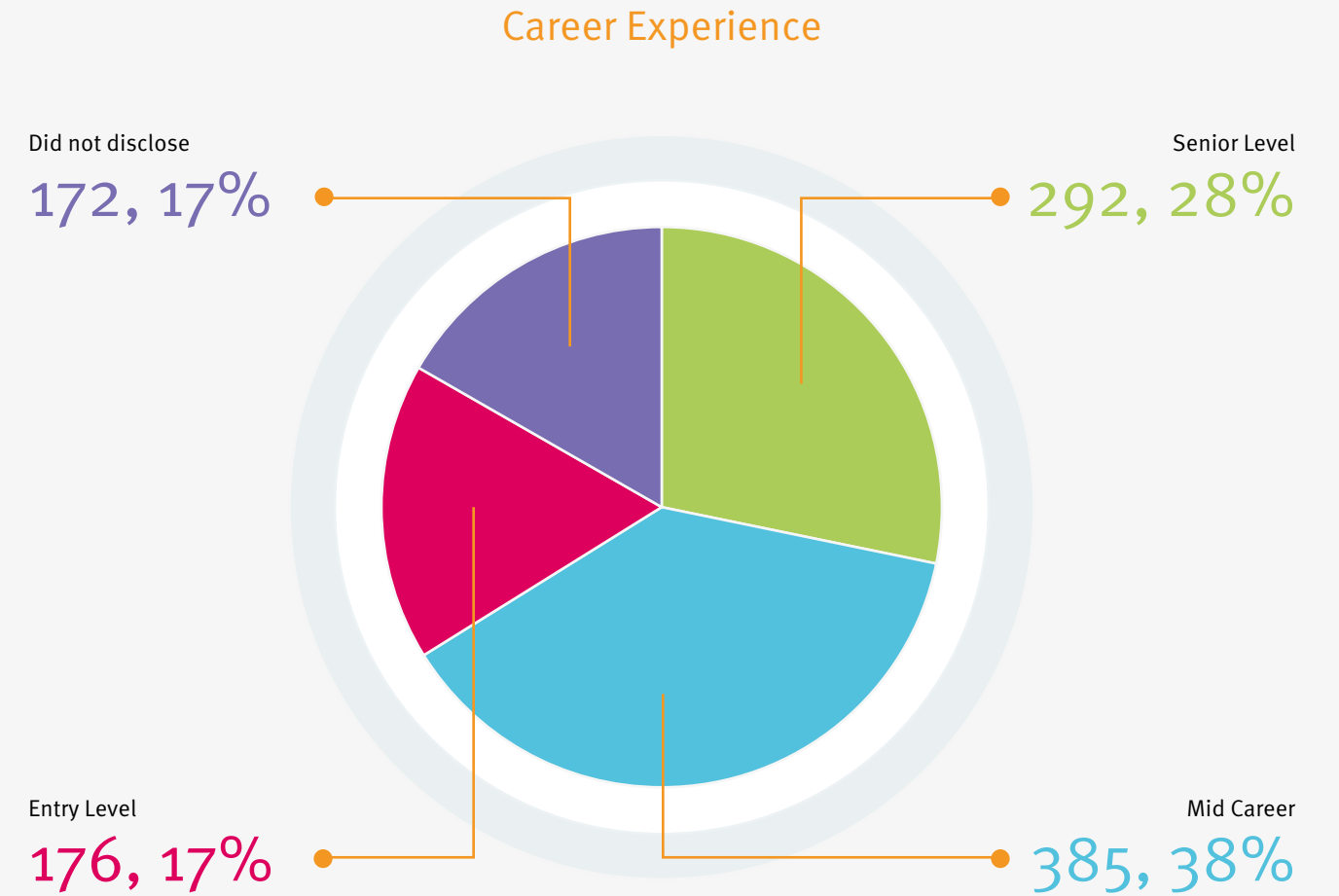
6. [2020 Fellowship Industry Report \(profellow.com\)](https://profellow.com)
7. Match Makers: Fellowships that facilitate the matching of fellows with public and social sector employers to serve in meaningful full-time roles.
8. Launchpad: Fellowships that bring new organizations and models to the world by helping fellows launch new ventures.
9. People Accelerator: Fellowships that amplify the impact of existing leaders through leadership and professional development.
10. Strategic Employer: Fellowships that advance the mission of their own organization through the work of fellows in a structured program offering exposure and sector experience.



FIGURE 3: TOTAL PARTICIPANTS BY PROGRAM

Program	Count	Percentage
Global Health Corps	360	35%
Community Solutions Program	191	19%
Fulbright Nepal	82	8%
Schusterman	60	6%
Mescripts Voices - Smart Girls Fellowship	51	5%
Princeton AlumniCorps	50	5%
W.K. Kellogg	42	4%
Salzburg	34	3%
Atlas Corps	30	3%
Cleveland Foundation	30	3%
YLAI	22	2%
Foster America	21	2%
Balal Public Library	19	2%
Library Aid Africa	11	1%
United Nations Association of the National Capital Area Graduate Fellows Program	10	1%
Mandela Washington Fellowship	6	1%
Princeton in Africa	6	1%

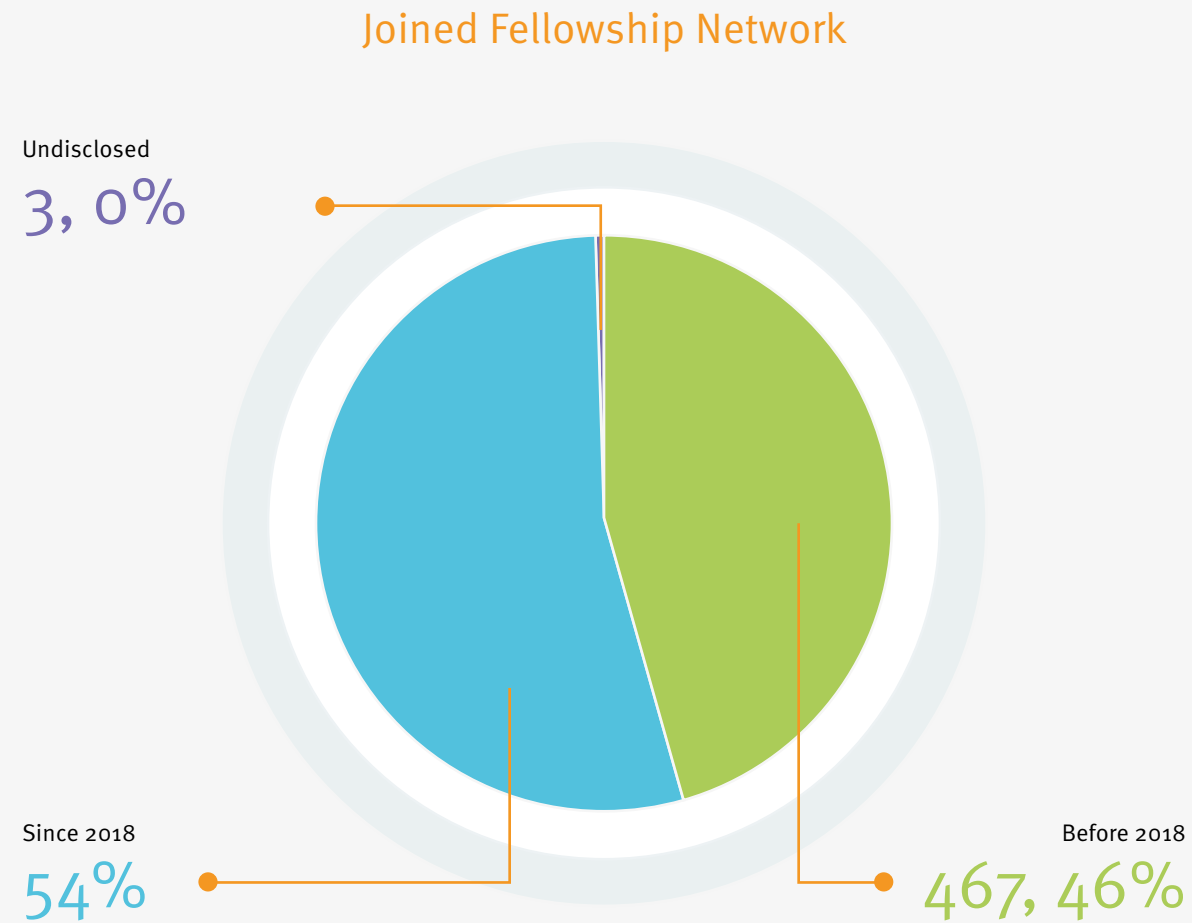
FIGURE 4: PARTICIPANT CAREER EXPERIENCE DISTRIBUTION



**Career experience by years in current sector**

A plurality of participants identified as having a mid-career level of professional experience (38%), which was defined in this study as 5–10 years of work experience in their current professional sector. This is followed by senior-level professionals (28%) who indicated over ten (10) years of work experience, and entry-level professionals (17%) who indicated less than five (5) years of work experience.

**FIGURE 5: PARTICIPANT TIME SINCE FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE**



**Time since completing the fellowship**

The year that participants completed their fellowship program ranges from as far back as 1990 to as recently as 2022. Based on the distinction made for focus group discussions, we see a slight majority in representation of recent alumni (those that completed their program in the last four years) versus older alumni (those that completed their program before 2018). Among older alumni, however, 84% completed their fellowship between 2010 and 2017.

**Gender identity**

The majority of participants identified as female (56%) with a minority identifying as male (36%), non-binary (2%) and the remaining preferring not to disclose (6%). Even with the large group of undisclosed participants, this is consistent representation of most fellowship programs represented in the consortium.

**Living with a disability**

4% of participants identified as living with a disability. 12% of participants did not disclose.

**Indigenous or ethnic minorities**

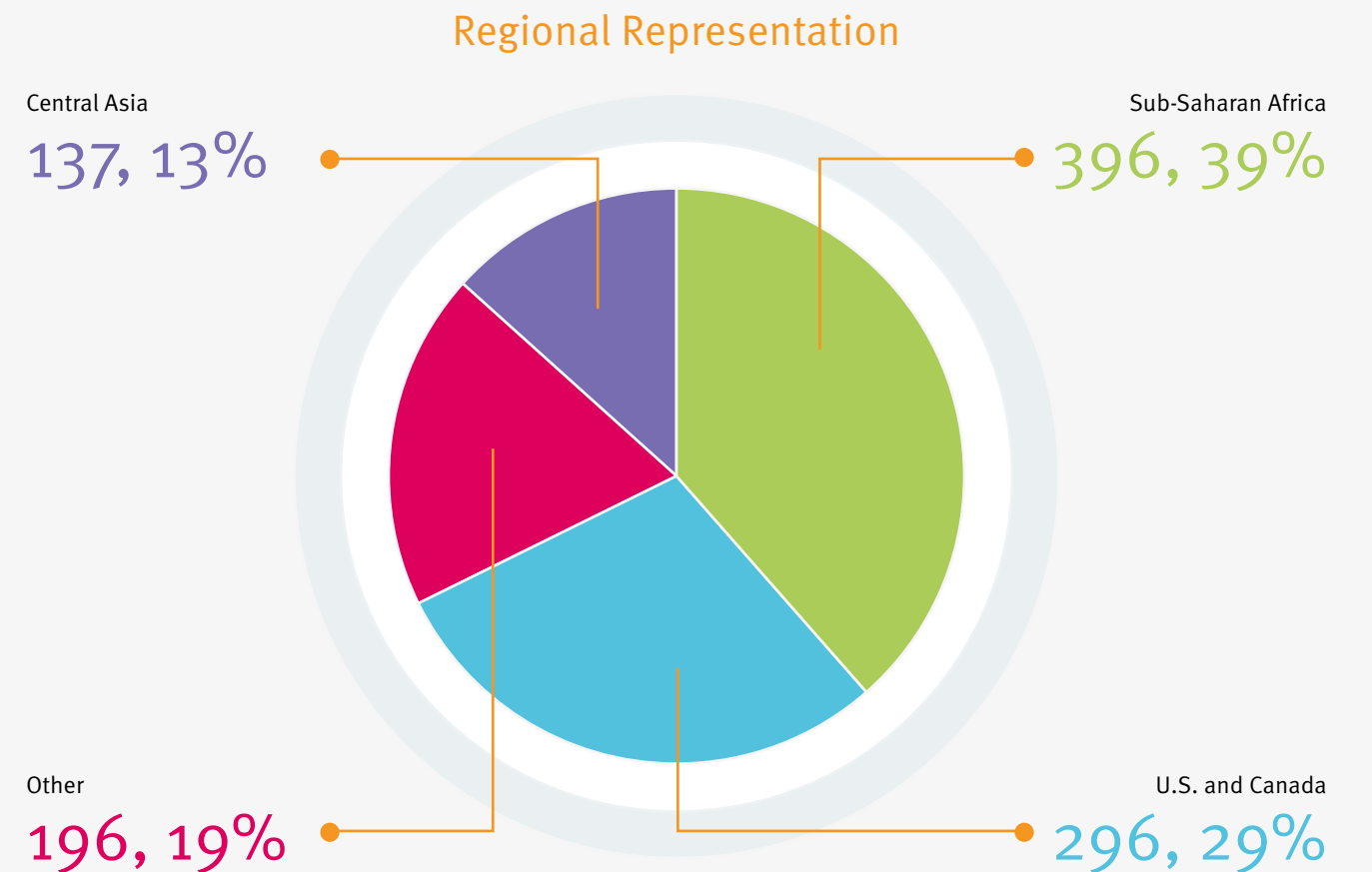
Most participants (59%) did not identify with an indigenous or ethnic minority. Among the remaining participants, 26%

identified as an indigenous or ethnic minority and there was no meaningful plurality of an individual ethnicity. Common occurrences included African American, Latinx, and Native African; however, multiple ethnicities were frequently cited. 15% did not disclose their ethnicity.

**Regional representation**

Figure 6 shows the regional representation of participants, with a plurality from countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (39%) and large portions from U.S. and Canada (29%) and Central Asia (13%). The regions represented in the "Other" category include Latin America and the Caribbean (7%), Europe (4%), Middle East and North Africa (4%), East Asia (3%), and the Pacific Islands and Australia (1%).

**FIGURE 6: PARTICIPANT REGIONAL REPRESENTATION**



11. No ethnicity was cited more than 9% among those who identified as an indigenous or ethnic minority, and the difference between the common occurrences was less than half a percentage.





# Findings

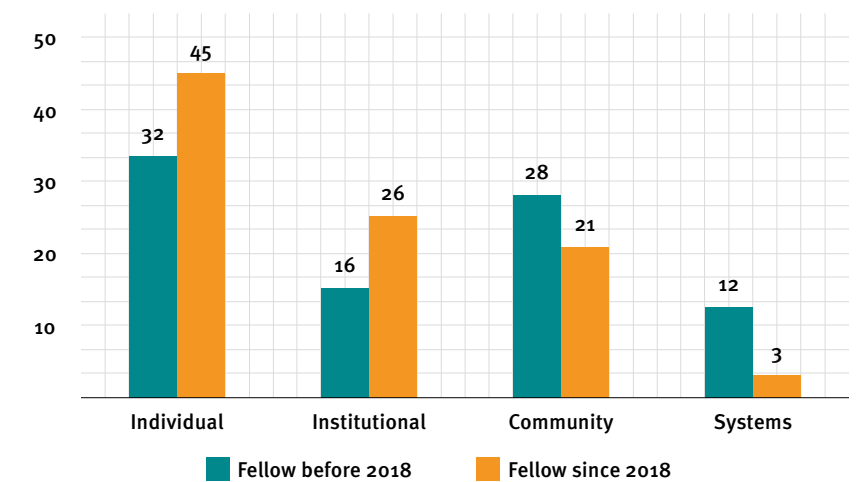
## Alumni contributions to changes at different levels of society

Contributions to changes at different levels of society (individual, institutional, community, and systems) refer to a change in an environment that alumni contributed to and directly credit (whether fully or in part) to their engagement in their fellowship network. In this study, these instances were identified through interviews and focus group discussions that provided an opportunity for alumni to add context about the change they contributed to, why it was meaningful, and how their engagement in the fellowship contributed to it. In total, alumni shared 183 distinct instances of their contributions to changes at every level of society. References to the individual level were highest with 77 instances (42%); 42 instances at the institutional level (23%); 49 at the community level (27%); and 15 at the systems level (8%). When analyzing these instances against the several demographic categories explored in this study, respondents' time since joining their fellowship network stood out.

**Figure 7** illustrates the number of references of alumni contributions to change in each level of society, separating the references of those who joined their fellowship network before 2018 from those who have joined since 2018 (consistent with the structure of the focus group discussions). The frequency of references at the individual and institutional levels between these two groups were generally even and aligned with the representation of alumni that participated in focus groups and interview discussions, with fellows who joined before 2018 making up about

**FIGURE 7: REFERENCES OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHANGE BY LEVEL OF SOCIETY AND TIME SINCE FELLOWSHIP**

### References of Contributions to Change



40%. However, the number of instances at the community and systems level were mostly shared by alumni who finished their fellowship before 2018. This is compelling because it supports the consideration that it may take several years for alumni to achieve or recognize the spread of their work beyond themselves or their institutions. Further, the instances shared at the community and systems levels commonly referenced contributions from others in their fellowship network with whom they built stronger relationships with over time.

This suggests that sustained relationships in a fellowship network support alumni's contributions to changes at more advanced levels of society (i.e. community and systems).



**Illustrative quotes**

*“I collaborated with one of my colleagues to create the Youth Alliance movement that supports people who would want to take up political positions to prioritize youth issues... So, through those relationships that I created during the fellowship, we are able to do all these things.”*

MADALITSO PHIRI, GLOBAL HEALTH CORPS, 2017

*“Creating a concrete violence prevention program for young people in Latvia, with the support of my host organization and other organizations I got in contact during my fellowship.”*

MADARA MAZJANE, COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PROGRAM, 2017

The following subsections explore references to changes at each level of society in more detail and highlight the contributing factors that were commonly associated with them from their fellowship network experience.

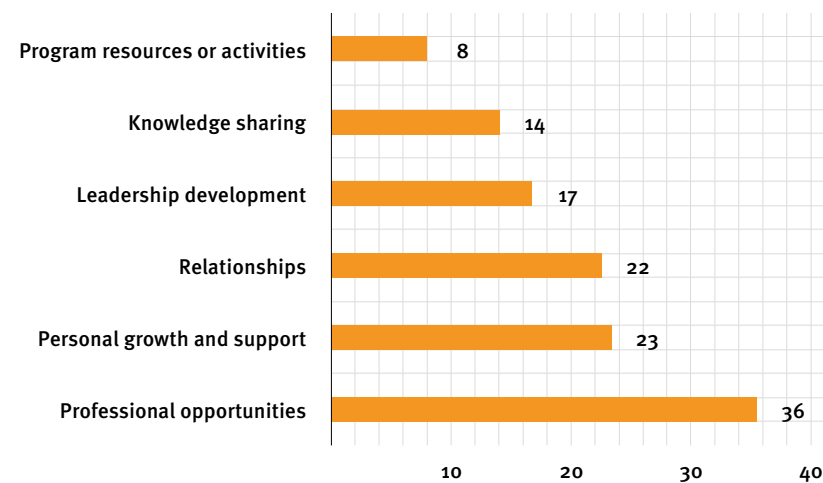
**Individual level**

Changes at the individual level refer to an alum sharing instances of a change in their individual environment. This could include career advancement, achieving a personal milestone, overcoming a meaningful challenge, or other individual accomplishments.

Seventy-seven (77) instances of change were identified at the individual level and commonly referenced career advancement and access to professional opportunities as the outcomes. **Figure 8** illustrates the frequency of different contributing factors from their fellowship network experience associated with each instance of change. Professional opportunities were cited in the plurality of instances (47%), but personal growth and support and relationships with other alumni were cited frequently and often together.

**FIGURE 8: CONTRIBUTING VALUES TO CHANGES AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL**

**Contribution from Fellowship Network Associated with Reference of Change**



This trend suggests that meaningful relationships alumni make with others in the networks that impact them on an individual level often provide a lens of personal support and growth.

Experiences shared included an increase in confidence, reengaged enthusiasm in their work, and encouragement to accomplish a personal or professional goal.

**Illustrative quotes**

*“I had never thought of doing a PhD. It was my friends from the Fulbright Network and my mentor who inspired me to get one.”*

AASMA DAHAL, FULBRIGHT NEPAL, 2021

*“Through my fellowship, I was able to complete a Women in Entrepreneurship Certificate Course at Cornell University and receive coaching through the network I built in Charlotte, N.C. This experience has helped me tremendously in approaching and overcoming challenges that I meet while running my business.”*

TALLIA MEDA ROGERS, YOUNG LEADERS OF THE AMERICAS INITIATIVE, 2022

**Institutional level**

Changes at the institutional level refer to alumni sharing instances of a change in their organization, government, or other entities with structures and norms. This could include improving processes, developing new solutions, changing the institution’s workplace culture or approaches, or other specific examples of influencing their institution or advancing its work.

Forty-two (42) instances were identified at the institutional level and commonly referenced increased funding and partnership opportunities from their engagement in the fellowship network. Unlike the individual level, contributing factors cited for changes at the institutional level were more diverse with no individual one having a meaningful plurality. Common themes included benefiting from the positive reputation of the fellowship program, incorporating new approaches and partners to improve processes, finding leadership development opportunities through mentorship programs, and reaching out to other alumni as sources of information.





**Illustrative quotes**

*“The technology that was shared during the fellowship, I believe, is one solution that will not only change how we do things at our library, but also brings down our costs.”*

NAOMY MWAURAH, LIBRARY AID AFRICA, 2020

*“Our Mentor has helped us grow and see other opportunities to formalize our business and change our mindset in terms of how we view our growth and our business.”*

CAMILA CORTÍNEZ, YOUNG LEADERS OF THE AMERICA INITIATIVE, 2021

**Community level**

Changes at the institutional level refer to alumni sharing instances of a change in their organization, government, or other entities with structures and norms. This could include improving processes, developing new solutions, changing the institution’s workplace culture or approaches, or other specific examples of influencing their institution or advancing its work.

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**Illustrative quotes**

*“Prior to the end of the fellowship, my co-fellow and I organized a cervical cancer screening in two rural communities and screened about 68 women. 17 were found with signs of cervical cancer and were transferred to the hospital...I think that passion for health care was reinvigorated in me [from this experience] to pursue a Master of Public Health...and I would just give credit to the Global Health Fellowship for that.”*

MADALITSO PHIRI, GLOBAL HEALTH CORPS, 2017

*[The fellowship program] provided me with the instruments that were oriented towards community practices. In my case, it was focusing on the native communities from the Andes. We work on how we can create alliances and projects that would benefit these communities.”*

ZENÓN PORFIDIO GOMEL APAZA, KELLOGG FOUNDATION FELLOWSHIP, 2007

**Systems level**

Changes at the systems level refer to alumni sharing instances of a change in underlying influences that shape how larger networks of individuals, groups, and institutions in a society function. These could include influencing policies, advancing thought leadership, scaling a solution to address a wider challenge, or other specific examples of efforts to address systemic challenges.

Fifteen (15) instances were identified at the systems level and commonly reference efforts of leveraging technical skills to address DEI issues by scaling up programs, informing policy development, and developing thought leadership resources. The main influences alumni cited as contributing factors from their fellowship network was encouragement received from others in the network working on similar issues, and opportunities to discuss and improve their awareness of these issues in fellowship activities. While each instance is distinct, four common objectives stood out in the change alumni are making in their work. They include the following:





## Developing the next generation of leaders.

This included improving access to leadership development resources in marginalized communities and bringing DEI considerations into that process.



## Building cross-cultural understanding and connections.

This included opportunities to share diverse lived experiences and facilitate spaces for network development around common challenges and values.



## Improving policies through citizen engagement and feedback loops.

This included opportunities to meaningfully elevate the voices of marginalized groups in the decision-making process and provide a space for continuous feedback.



## Addressing issues that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

This included using their technical skills to develop innovative approaches to addressing issues like HIV/AIDS prevention, water quality, and racial justice.

### Illustrative quotes

*“Upon my arrival [from the fellowship] I founded my own nonprofit organization which is the Federation of Sign Language Interpreters and Translators of Zambia. The goal of this organization is to improve interpreting standards in Zambia because, like many African countries, we don’t have interpreter training in Zambia.”*

OBED MAMBWE, MANDELA WASHINGTON FELLOWSHIP, 2019

*“Making sure that people who would want to work on the continent or in anything related to international affairs, are actively thinking about impacts of colonialism and social issues in Africa. As they grow in their career and may eventually become change makers and influential people, they keep these considerations in mind. And that is kind of the foundation of why Princeton in Africa was formed – to create that intercultural understanding.”*

WALTER LOHMAN, PRINCETON IN AFRICA, 2019

# Values and gains from engaging in a fellowship network

This study explored the benefits alumni perceive to have gained from engagement in their fellowship network. These include 1) what alumni valued most from their experiences — e.g., leadership development, professional opportunities, new relationships or connections, knowledge sharing, personal growth and support from the fellowship community, or anything else alumni see as beneficial from their experience — and 2) improvements in areas commonly referenced across fellowship networks, like the number of connections built, awareness of DEI issues, improvement or amplification of their work, and career development skills<sup>12</sup>.

The findings suggest that there are common experiences alumni value and recognize improvement in from engaging in their fellowship network. These include building relationships, advancing their professional development, and sharing and learning from diverse perspectives.

The following findings balance insights from survey data, interviews, and focus group discussions to identify what alumni commonly valued and improved from their experience in their fellowship network.

### Values from fellowship network experience

Changes at the systems level refer to alumni sharing instances of a change in underlying influences that shape how larger networks of individuals, groups, and institutions in a society function. These could include influencing policies, advancing thought leadership, scaling a solution to address a wider challenge, or other specific examples of efforts to address systemic challenges.

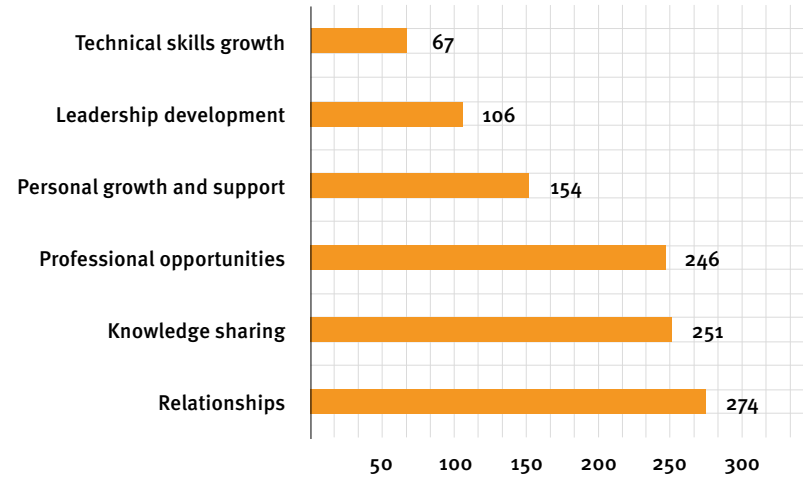
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12. This study referenced the [NACE Career Readiness](#) skills in data collection activities. These skills include career and self-development, communication, critical thinking, equity and inclusion, leadership, professionalism, teamwork, and technology.



**FIGURE 9: FREQUENCY OF CITED VALUES FROM FELLOWSHIP NETWORK EXPERIENCE**

**Values from Network Engagement**



- **Building relationships** supports personal and professional growth. Alumni valued the sense of community among individuals in the network and the common values they shared. Most relationships were referenced as being personal and professional in nature — valuing the opportunity to build friendships with professional counterparts.
- Improved **access to professional opportunities** supports development and growth. Alumni valued formal opportunities coordinated through the fellowship network as well as indirect opportunities like the reputation and reference of their fellowship experience to other professionals. Most alumni referenced professional development or advancement opportunities (e.g., access to new jobs or careers, certifications, education development, etc.), but some also referenced funding opportunities (e.g., access to grants, partnerships, business investments, etc.).
- **Sharing knowledge and experiences** on common challenges with a diverse group of individuals helps improve their work. Alumni value sharing innovative approaches in common technical areas as well as an increased awareness of the lived experiences and accomplishments of others and their communities. In many instances, alumni cited valuing the personal challenges others would share relevant to DEI issues. This improved their awareness of the topics, and they felt more inclined to consider it in their work.

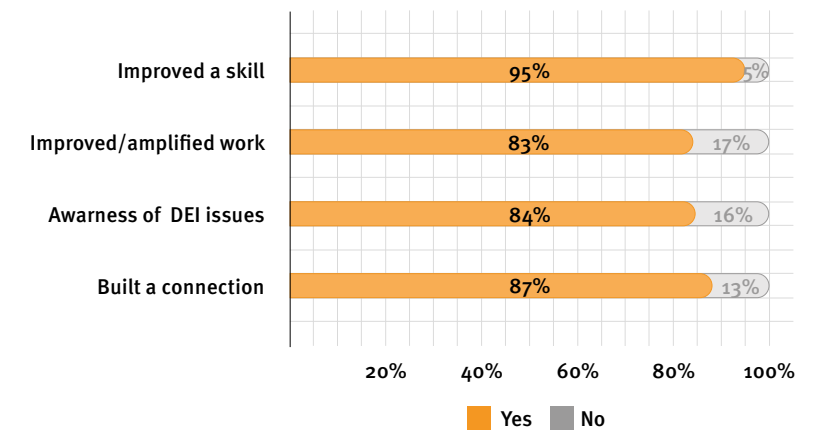


**Improvements from fellowship network experience**

The findings suggest that most alumni see improvement in their professional development, awareness of DEI issues, and network as a result of their fellowship experience. **Figure 10** highlights the survey responses received from 942 alumni that included the same standardized questions to each of these categories. Overall, the findings suggest some common trends in fellowship network experiences among alumni.

**FIGURE 10: SURVEY RESPONSES TO SELECT AREAS OF GROWTH**

**Improvement from Fellowship Engagement**



Among those who improved a skill, career and self-development and leadership development were cited the most at 74% (699) and 72% (677), respectively. Additionally, 83% of respondents agree that the experience improved or amplified their work, inferring a positive contribution to their professional development.

Considering the diversity in the types of programs represented in this study, this suggests the fellowship industry as a whole having a positive impact in advancing professional development opportunities for their alumni



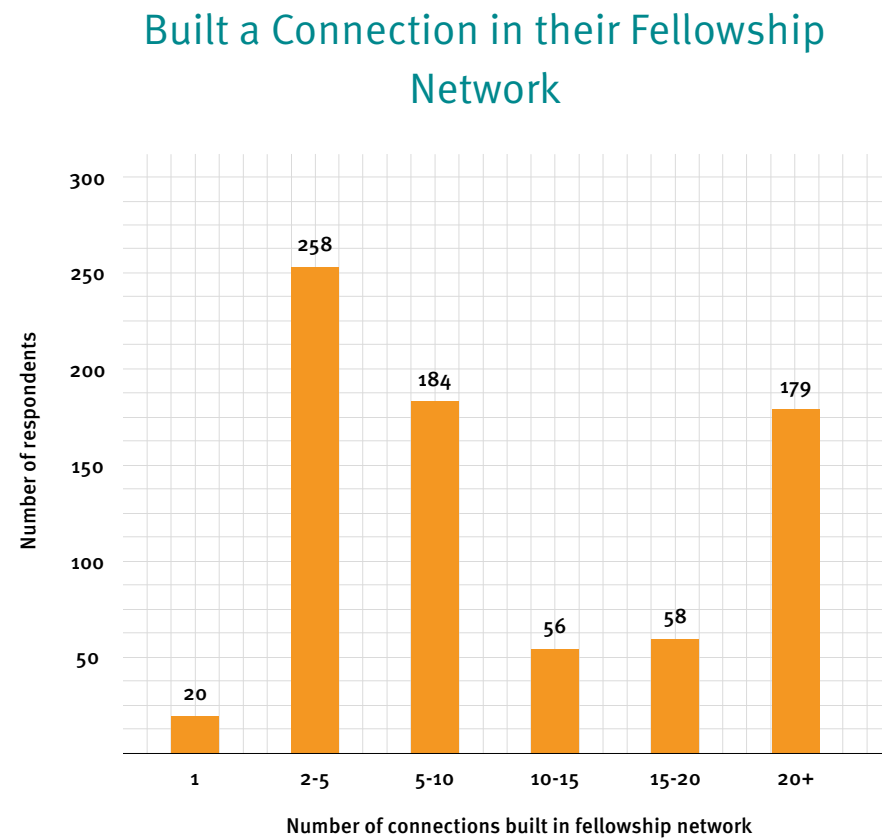
Among those who indicated building a connection with other alumni in their fellowship network, 82% characterized at least one as a personal friendship. **Figure 11** illustrates the distribution of the number of connections each respondent indicated building, the majority of which are between two (2) and ten (10) connections. This suggests that most alumni build multiple connections in their fellowship network experience, and personal friendships prominently exist within those networks.

This finding highlights the value of personal friendships in the development and growth of a fellowship network.

Finally, the overwhelming agreement that the fellowship network experience improved alumni awareness of DEI issues stands out. Past research has highlighted that the fellowship industry is in the early stages of actively incorporating DEI considerations and activities into their programs<sup>13</sup>. Despite this, alumni credit meaningful experiences in the fellowship network that contributed to improved awareness. When analyzing the open-ended responses in the survey, the following major themes were identified:

- Exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences broadened alumni's awareness of DEI issues.
- Discussions with others helped improve alumni's understanding of DEI practices and how to incorporate them in their work and life.

**FIGURE 11: DISTRIBUTION OF NUMBER OF CONNECTIONS BUILT BY RESPONDENT**



- The fellowship experience increased how alumni value and prioritize DEI considerations in their work and lives.

These themes were complemented with contributions in interviews and focus group discussions that acknowledged the value of fellowship networks being a space of diverse lived experiences, even when in the same local or national networks. These findings suggest that, while the fellowship industry may still be in the early stages of incorporating DEI considerations and activities into their programs, **the fellowship network experience — regardless of the type of fellowship — provides a natural space for fellows to improve their own awareness on DEI issues.** Further, elevating alumni experiences in the network may be a natural way for DEI considerations to develop within a program and activities.

13. [2020 Fellowship Industry Report \(profellow.com\)](https://www.profellow.com/)

## Fellowship network dynamics

In this study, network engagement refers to how alumni describe their past, current, or future engagement in a fellowship network and the factors that influence that engagement. This includes how they may have developed meaningful relationships in the network, motivations for continued engagement, changes in their engagement over time, barriers to meaningful engagement, and potential negative effects from their engagement.

Broadly, the findings suggest that alumni engagement in their fellowship network is influenced by the sustained relationships they have at any point in time and access to the commonly valued experiences identified earlier in this report —

building meaningful relationships that support their personal and professional growth; improved access to professional opportunities for development and growth; and sharing knowledge and experience on common challenges with a diverse group of individuals. The following findings were largely identified from interview and focus group discussions, with the exception of exploring barriers that was also incorporated into open-ended survey responses.

### Relationship development

Participants shared 132 instances of activities and influences which helped them develop meaningful relationships with others in their network. These included factors like common geographic location, cohort groups, common interests, and other considerations they credit to how they built meaningful relationships with others. The common factors cited in these instances and the associated themes of each include the following:





- Spaces in program activities to **share knowledge and lived experiences**, both professional and personal. These instances cited having a better awareness of the common interests and values among diverse participants, and made follow-up discussions more approachable.
- Program elements that build a **shared or relatable experience** among a smaller group within the network, like being in a common cohort, having a similar site or host institution, or other elements that bring fellows together over an extended period of time. In these instances, alumni cited overcoming challenges together and being in a reliable support system in a new and vulnerable environment.
- **Mentorship programs** (both as the mentor and mentee) that offered an informal space to connect

around a common issue and more intimately share about each other's background and experiences. In these instances, alumni cited their respective mentor/mentee being reliable points within the fellowship network that motivated and helped them to stay engaged.

- **Collaboration** on a specific project or activity that was then sustained by common personal interests and values. In these instances, alumni cited collaboration opportunities as a key milestone in how a relationship developed; however, the personal elements that were built from those opportunities were often referenced as the reason they are still meaningful and sustained.

### Illustrative quotes

*“Cohort friends became life-long relationships. There were inroads into professional opportunities at the beginning, but the personal realm was much more impactful and sustainable. It evolved into an emotional support network.”*

ARTURO GONZALEZ, ATLAS CORPS FELLOWSHIP, 2015

*“I think the fellow learning groups were a huge part of why this program was so successful for me. We could go through the different processes of the program together and really reflect...that also helped to establish not only professional connections, but build personal relationships*

MADARA MAZJANE, COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PROGRAM, 2017

*“The moment I really felt connected to the network was during the leadership workshop organized in May 2019. The five days we were there we weren't working 24/7, but we spent many hours listening to each other. It was precisely in those moments that my perception expanded, and I realized not only the reach, but also the connections of the foundation plus the support of the organization.”*

CELINA SOLÍS, KELLOGG FOUNDATION FELLOWSHIP, 2022

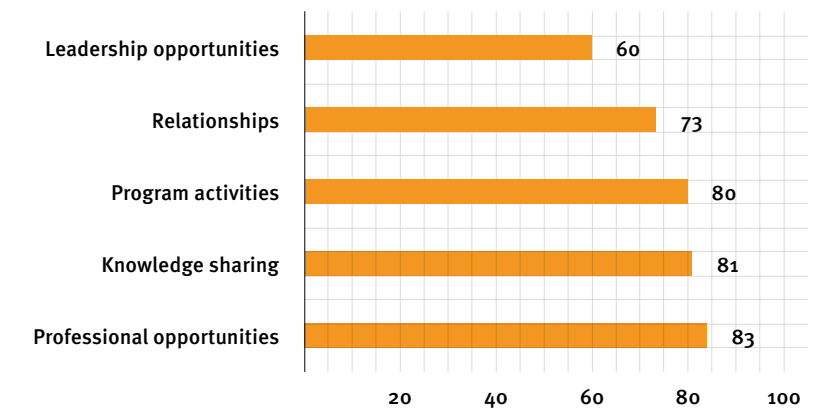
### Motivations for continued engagement and changes over time

How and why alumni engage in their fellowship network, and in turn the support they receive or seek from that network, changes as their lives and careers develop. Alumni shared 281 instances of their motivations for continuing to engage in their fellowship network and forty-nine (49) instances of factors that changed their engagement over time. Notably, while individual motivations are distinct to each fellow and were sometimes referenced as changing over time, the findings did not reveal any motivations that were more or less referenced by a particular group of fellows (i.e., age, race or ethnicity, gender identity, regional representation, time since completing the fellowship, etc.). Further, there was no meaningful consistency in the types of motivations that would change over time among the instances cited. This infers that, while alumni experiences do change over time, the following motivations exist widely across a fellowship network. **Figure 12** illustrates the most frequently cited motivations for engagement in a fellowship network as access to professional opportunities, knowledge sharing opportunities, and program activities. When cited, each of these categories were commonly justified as being immediately relevant to alumni work or interests and being mutually beneficial to their professional development. However, relationships and leadership opportunities — the next-most frequently cited motivations — had more nuanced and personal justifications that emphasized sustained engagement despite changes in their work or life.

**Relationships**, both personal and professional, were commonly cited as a motivation; however, personal relationships were often credited as being more sustainable connections. While careers and lives changed, strong personal friendships remained a consistent entry point to the network that many fellows valued maintaining. Further, some alumni cited personal relationships as an approachable group of fellows they could re-engage in network activities with if they had not been as involved.

FIGURE 12: CITED MOTIVATIONS FOR CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT

### Motivations for Engagement



**Leadership opportunities** that place alumni in perceived influential roles in network activities (i.e., mentorship program, alumni board, reviewing fellowship applications, etc.) were commonly referenced as a motivation for “giving back” to the fellowship. Fellows that had positive experiences in their program or as alumni felt eager to help the network grow.

Among the instances of alumni citing changes in their engagement over time, below are the common factors identified:

- Changes in network dynamics, particularly among older alumni in rapidly growing networks, were cited as fostering a feeling that they are less familiar with the network's members and opportunities. The common factor among these instances is the perception alumni have of their ability to meaningfully contribute to network activities when the scale or priorities of that network significantly changes over time.
- Relevance to network activities with changing priorities and availability to engage in formal activities. These instances were often cited as being temporary shifts that would change based on the relevance of activities to their work or interests at any point in time.
- Transitioning to alumni and returning home from their fellowship experience was often cited as a period of figuring out how they can stay engaged with their fellowship network. This was commonly referenced as a period of declining interest/engagement among those that did not have many formal structures or opportunities to connect with others in their network.



### Illustrative quotes

*“Initially, it was more about learning and helping to build a career. It’s changing to think more about how I can use the knowledge and experience I have, collaborate and work with my network to solve different development issues in my country and the world.”*

SHWETA DHOUBHADEL, FULBRIGHT NEPAL, 2014

*“I think having people who were very much about systems change and not just going in and trying to get X, Y, and Z task accomplished, but rather were focused on how we are making an impact in our community. Having those people to continue to bounce off of has been really huge for my career so far, and I’m sure will continue to be.”*

KATIE BRENNAN, CLEVELAND FOUNDATION, 2017

*“I think the ‘what’s in it for me’ question always comes up. A lot of the volunteering and engagement done with the program is strong right after the Fellowship ends, but it begins to fade as you root back in your country.”*

ARTURO GONZALEZ, ATLAS CORPS FELLOWSHIP, 2015



### Barriers to engagement and negative effects

In this study, barriers to engagement and negative effects were explored across surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. Barriers to engagement refer to alumni sharing factors and justifications for why they are not as involved in their fellowship network as they would like to be. Negative effects refer to challenges alumni experience because of their participation.

**Limited time** stood out as the most cited barrier to engaging in opportunities within the network, commonly referring to work and life commitments as the justification. A common theme that surfaced in focus group discussions around this barrier was the perception that fellowship opportunities, generally seen as equitably accessible across the network, tended to be awarded to those who were proactive in staying engaged with program administrators and participate in multiple activities — a further disincentive to reengage when available. Other common barriers and disincentives shared across surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions included the following:

- **Limited opportunities** (both in variety and frequency) to connect with other alumni working on common issues. This was often cited among alumni in rapidly growing networks that were interested in connecting with new fellows across cohorts.
- **Physical distance from a major network hub** was a challenge to stay engaged when opportunities were more available to those who could meet in-person or in a common time/zone. This also noted the concentration of topics and professional opportunities limited to specific areas with large alumni groups that were not accessible or relevant to them.

Among those that cited instances of negative effects from participating in program activities, the following two themes surfaced as common challenges:

- **Challenges with readjustment** following their fellowship experience. This period was commonly referred to as a vulnerable time when many fellows valued mental health and other resources. Spaces to share how they can apply what they learned from the fellowship experience were particularly valued. Fellows also referenced the personal relationships built during the fellowship as having a strong positive impact in navigating their readjustment period because they provided a sustained sense of community and support with others that shared a common experience.
- **Lack of compensation or mutual benefit** from engaging in program activities was a strong disincentive for future engagement. Some program activities, particularly data collection activities like routine surveys or group discussions, felt extractive with the alumni not having access to the insights gathered from the process. Other activities were cited as not having a clear mutual benefit to participating with the fellowship gaining more from the experience than the participants.
- **Relationships in a virtual setting** were challenging to build and sustain. While the accessibility in virtual engagement was meaningful to share ideas and learn from others, it became a barrier to building relationships and, in turn, a disincentive to engaging in future network activities.





# Desired alumni support

In this study, support strategies refer to programmatic elements and activities that alumni perceive as effective in supporting their engagement within the network and, in turn, contributing to potential changes at every level of society. Broadly, these could include being a participant in activities coordinated or facilitated by the fellowship; accessing resources curated or developed by the fellowship; receiving a grant or independent funding from the fellowship; and leadership opportunities facilitated by the fellowship that place alumni in more influential roles within the network. This topic was sourced across every data collection activity and all 1,025 participants of this study provided feedback.

FIGURE 13: DESIRED ALUMNI SUPPORT ACTIVITIES.



The findings suggest that desired alumni support from the fellowship network is grounded in improving their access to the commonly valued experiences identified earlier in this report —

building meaningful relationships that support their personal and professional growth; improved access to professional opportunities for development and growth; and sharing knowledge and experience on common challenges with a diverse group of individuals. Notably, no meaningful changes based on age, gender identity, career level, or time since their fellowship were identified, suggesting that while individual interests and motivations are distinct and change over time, alumni support interest across a network may be consistent.

Figure 13 highlights the survey responses of 904 alumni that were asked which kinds of support strategies currently being offered in their fellowship network were valuable in improving their work. Most indicated workshops or conferences (62%), particularly ones that were in-person. Networking events (43%) and leadership opportunities (42%) were the next-most indicated support strategies; however, mentorship programs (34%) stood out as a specific activity that was frequently cited. This is notable because the mentorship program category exclusively refers to being a mentee versus a



mentor, the latter falling within the leadership opportunity category. This is complemented by interviews and focus group discussions that frequently cited the mentorship experience as being a valuable and meaningful way to stay engaged in the network. The following reflect the types of support strategies alumni cited most as being valued in advancing their work and the common themes around why they value them.

- Leadership opportunities that place alumni in influential roles within the network and allow them to contribute to its dynamic. Examples include being part of the fellowship selection process, joining an alumni board, engaging in a mentorship or peer-learning role, and sharing their experiences or technical skills in formal activities.
- Knowledge sharing and networking opportunities that provide an opportunity for alumni to connect with others across cohorts and share practices around common problems. Examples include workshops, webinars, informal networking events, and digital resources to learn about what other alumni are doing in their work.
- Regional or local networks that can build stronger relationships with alumni in the same country or region and allow for more direct coordination that is not as dependent on program administrators. Examples included formal regional advisory groups and informal network directories or events to help facilitate more proactive connections.





# Conclusion and next steps



Fellowship alumni contribute to changes at every level of society, and networks play an influential role in that process. Findings from this study suggest that sustained relationships from fellowship networks offer meaningful contributions to the positive change alumni make at advanced levels of society (i.e., community and systems). Further, personal friendships were highlighted as an important part of building sustained relationships, offering a stable point of connection as lives and careers change over time. Alumni also highlighted the direct impact of their fellowship network on themselves and institutions, acknowledging improvements in network connections, advancing their skills and professional development, and increased awareness of DEI issues. When exploring what alumni valued from participating in their fellowship network, three common themes stood out: opportunities to build relationships, advance their professional development, and share and learn from diverse perspectives. These themes also served as common justifications for how and why alumni engage in their fellowship network, and the types of support they desire from their program administrators. Broadly, this study highlights the type of impact fellowship networks can have on alumni, and the common elements of a network that alumni identified as meaningful.

Each fellowship network is distinct in its function and dynamic, however, based on the findings from this study, there are common elements of most alumni networks that foster meaningful engagement. When considering the design and development of fellowship networks, donors and implementers should consider the following questions:



**How can we build or strengthen relationships between alumni and provide space to develop friendships?**



**How can we elevate alumni experiences to support sharing and learning from each other?**



**How can we improve alumni access to professional development opportunities?**

Reflecting on these questions, however, is just the start! Spaces to share experiences and approaches that work (and don't work) with the broader fellowship community are essential in meaningfully advancing how the sector supports alumni engagement. Further, the findings from this research are limited to the broad trends of diverse fellowship networks and the perception of alumni in those networks.

**More research exploring specific areas of fellowship network experiences would add meaningful value to this space.**

This could include a deeper look at the factors that influence how alumni contribute to changes at advanced levels of society (i.e., community and systems); how alumni engagement and experiences may be different between demographic groups or fellowship types; and the influence of fellowship networks in advancing awareness of DEI issues. In doing so, we can inform continued learning in this emerging space of research, and improve how social impact fellowships support their alumni to drive positive social change.



# Fellowships Alumni Network Study (FANS)

A study on the positive social impact of fellowship program alumni at all levels of society and the role of networks in the process