



ProInspire

SOCIAL IMPACT FELLOWSHIPS:

Building Talent in the Social Impact Sector

By Monisha Kapila and Nicolas Takamine

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BizCorps

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*Respondents submitted separate responses for the organization's different fellowship programs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite exponential growth in fellowship programs in the social impact sector¹, little data exists about this rapidly evolving field. In 2014, Prolnspire and ProFellow conducted a survey and analysis of fellowship programs to gather the first benchmarking dataset in the field. In total, 46 fellowship programs participated in the survey, including well-known programs like Acumen Fellows, Ashoka, Atlas Corps, Broad Residency, Code for America, Echoing Green, NGen Fellows, Prolnspire, and Public Allies.

Our research revealed that fellowship programs have emerged to address gaps in how the social impact sector recruits, develops, and supports talent. The social impact sector, particularly the nonprofit sector, has struggled with creating effective mechanisms for expanding talent pipelines and growing talent across the career life stage. The resulting gaps have created demand for structures to support the social impact sector around talent, resulting in rapid growth of the fellowship industry over the past 15 years. In fact, 76% of programs in our survey were started in 2000 or later.

This research effort resulted in the first common definition of a social impact fellowship:

A social impact fellowship enhances the value created by talent in the social impact sector, as a structured, professionally-oriented, time-bound and selective program in which talent enrolls.

With this definition, we can better distinguish social impact fellowships from other offerings. A social impact fellowship excludes, for example, research focused fellowships, university programs that use the term 'fellowship' to describe extracurricular activities, university professorships including the title 'fellow', and post-residency medical fellowships.

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¹ In our research, we defined social impact organizations as those with a mission to create value that accrues to society as a whole, as opposed to organizations whose purpose is to create private wealth. The social impact sector may include nonprofits, non-governmental organizations, public agencies, foundations, social enterprises, and organizations classified as being in the 'fourth sector.'

Fellowship Types

We developed a framework for understanding the characteristics of the fellowship industry and the different types of programs available. The framework identifies four main fellowship types, each distinguished by its value proposition to talent and to the sectors:

- **MATCH MAKERS** facilitate matching of fellows with public and social sector employers to serve in substantial full-time roles.
- **LAUNCHPADS** bring new organizations and models to the world by helping fellows launch new ventures.
- **PEOPLE ACCELERATORS** amplify the impact of existing leaders through leadership and professional development.
- **STRATEGIC EMPLOYERS** advance their own mission through the work of fellows in a structured program offering exposure and sector experience.

Key Survey Findings

- 1. Fellowships focus primarily on emerging leaders.** Our survey found that fellowship programs focus mainly on 'emerging leaders,' which we define as individuals under the age of 40.
- 2. Few fellowship programs have reached large scale.** Only six fellowships of the 46 respondents had greater than 100 fellows in 2014. Two key factors seem to impact the ability for fellowship programs to scale: high per person costs of fellowship programs, and lack of funding for fellowship programs.
- 3. Fellowships can enhance diversity in the sector.** Over half of programs that track diversity metrics indicate that 50% or more of Fellows in their program are non-white.
- 4. The fellowship industry approaches metrics and evaluation with inconsistency.** Only 26% of respondents have performed a program evaluation. In addition, there is little consistency in metrics being tracked by programs in each category.
- 5. Fellowships desire more industry collaboration.** Nearly 100% of respondents indicated they would like to find more ways to collaborate with other fellowship programs.

Opportunities and Next Steps for the Industry

- 1. Pursue collaboration at the program level and development of the field overall.** Fellowships can pursue tactical programmatic collaboration by planning joint activities, establishing referral networks, and sharing resources. The fellowship industry can also formalize itself by establishing industry structures such as a conference, learning communities, and collaboration mechanisms.
- 2. Tap into alumni networks.** In total, over 26,000 fellows have participated over the lifetime of the programs represented in our survey response set. This figure does not include alumni of very large fellowship programs that did not participate in the survey. Tremendous potential exists if the sector can leverage alumni of these programs as a collective force for impact.
- 3. Better understand the value and cost of fellowships.** This survey marked the first collection of benchmarking data on both the costs of fellowship programs (to fellowship providers and organizations hosting fellows) and the value created by the programs (for fellows and host organizations). Benchmarking data will grow in value and reliability with a consistent approach to estimating fellowship value and cost figures.
- 4. Gain a deeper understanding of customer needs.** Further research is required to validate the value propositions laid out in our framework for different types of fellowship programs. This research should solicit the input of current, past, and prospective fellows, as well as social impact organizations that benefit from fellowships. Potential areas for further research include developing a deeper understanding of how each fellowship type can better meet the career and talent development goals of its target population, and identifying how fellowships are addressing the needs of social impact organizations and playing a role in their talent strategies.

ABOUT PROINSPIRE

ProInspire is a nonprofit that develops leaders at all levels for organizations addressing the world's greatest challenges. Through fellowships, leadership development, and research, ProInspire strengthens individuals and organizations to catalyze social sector performance.

Founded in 2009, with offices in Washington, DC and the San Francisco Bay Area, ProInspire partners include Accion, Community Housing Partnership, Global Giving, National 4-H Council, Share Our Strength, Tipping Point Community, and Year Up, among others.

The Chronicle of Philanthropy named ProInspire as one of 7 Nonprofits to Watch in 2015. For more information about ProInspire, including information on program applications, please visit www.proinspire.org.

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