

Fellows VII – Evaluation Findings

Final Report Executive Summary

Submitted by Jennifer Avers, January 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview of Fellows VII & The Evaluation

Fellows VII is the seventh cohort of Kansans participating in the leadership program developed by the Kansas Leadership Center (KLC) and implemented in partnership with the Kansas Health Foundation (KHF). Through the Fellows program KHF intends to increase participants' understanding of the Foundation's mission and more meaningfully connect them to its work. This cohort was convened to develop and use civic leadership competencies to increase access to healthy food.

The primary evaluation questions for Fellows VII are focused on participant and program outcomes and, more specifically, the degree to which participants:

- Developed relationships with KHF and created a network that drives policy and environmental change throughout Kansas;
- Developed skills to exercise civic leadership that will promote healthy behaviors;
- Understood the competencies necessary to enhance their capacity to engage in acts of leadership around KHF's healthy behavior focus areas, particularly in terms of increasing access to healthy food;
- Understood the context of civic leadership in Kansas to drive policy and environmental change in the state of Kansas; and
- Developed a deeper understanding of KHF's mission "to improve the health of all Kansans."

With these objectives grounding the evaluation, the evaluator interviewed 21 Fellows prior to their first Fellows VII session on July 9, 2012, and then 20 were interviewed again during November 2013, approximately six months after their graduation from the program.¹

Salient Findings

Through Fellows VII, KLC and KHF successfully convened and supported leaders dedicated to the issue of increasing access to healthy food. Fellows unanimously agree that learning about the civic leadership competencies was enlightening in terms of better understanding their personal strengths and challenges. Experimenting with different competencies allowed Fellows to practice approaches and facilitation techniques that benefit group efforts. With support from one another as well as the Leadership Center coaches and staff, the Fellows VII cohort delved into the issue and explored ways in which they can individually and collectively make positive differences throughout Kansas. At the close of the program no Fellow is less motivated than at the start of the program nor is overwhelmed by the challenge of increasing access to healthy foods. Feeling supported by one another, KLC, and KHF, Fellows believe they are making progress. To continue to support Fellows' efforts, KHF and KLC may wish to explore how Fellows are approached and convened moving forward. Findings suggest that the Fellows VII cohort appreciates hearing about additional opportunities to be in touch with one another, KHF and KLC, and, more specifically, Fellows are willing to share their insights and participate actively in KHF-directed efforts and projects around this issue.

The key findings from the evaluation follow, and each is discussed in greater detail within the full report.

¹ One Fellow left the program mid-way through due to competing responsibilities and what she said was, "a campaign to delegate, say no, and focus more." She added that her decision to leave the program "didn't have anything to do with the program" but that she "didn't have the time."

- As Fellows participated in the leadership program, their opinions of KHF remained positive and became increasingly informed.
- After participating in the Fellows VII program, all of the Fellows easily articulated KHF's mission and could comfortably reference the program areas, strategies, and various ways in which KHF currently works throughout Kansas to improve health.
- All of the Fellows reported feeling comfortable approaching KHF staff with questions, insights, and/or opportunities.
- Some of the Fellows acknowledged some difficulty in sharing openly during some activities given the presence of KHF's VP for Programs participating as a Fellow.
- Fellows expected that the program would better and more meaningfully connect them to others working to increase access to healthy food throughout Kansas. All of the Fellows believed that this expectation was met.
- Overall, Fellows thought the cohort was well balanced in terms of geographic, professional, and organizational/sector diversity, though some Fellows noted it would have been beneficial to have some additional perspectives on the issue of increasing access to healthy foods (e.g., business sector, big agriculture, those working with the poor, etc.).
- All Fellows are eager to stay engaged with the issue of increasing access to healthy foods; many are already addressing the issue, and some are doing so through working with others from their cohort. Still some are looking to KHF and KLC for additional direction on next steps.
- All 20 participants confidently reported that their skills had been improved as a result of their participation in Fellows VII.
- Most of the Fellows reported that what they saw as their strengths prior to the program remained the same; though how they use those strengths and understand those strengths in groups was informed, and they are now more effective because of their participation in Fellows VII.
- As a result of participating in Fellows VII sessions, many of the Fellows reconsidered how they exercise leadership and have made adjustments in terms of how they interact with others and in groups.
- Fellows continue to experiment with the KLC civic leadership competencies, easily citing the competencies, referencing the pocket card, and continuing to use the language of the competencies with their peers.
- Given that some Fellows shared their desires to do more and feel more focused as a cohort on some action steps, there remain opportunities for KHF and KLC to further leverage the cohort's interests and energy.
- While all of the Fellows felt that civic leadership, policy and environmental change were covered in many respects, the group remained fairly split in terms of the degree to which they felt the work of the group sufficiently considered *action steps* related to policy and environmental change related to increasing access to healthy food.
- Fellows had a lot to say about the discussion brief– many positive things as well as some concern that the discussion brief did not take the group far enough in terms of determining clear action steps for moving forward.
- After the close of the program Fellows focus less on defining the issue and more on what they are actively doing to address the issue.
- Many Fellows shared that they learned more about the different perspectives and approaches to reaching the same goal: increasing access to healthy foods.

The full report follows on page 5.

Overview of Fellows VII

Fellows VII is the seventh cohort of Kansans participating in the leadership program developed by KLC and implemented in partnership with KHF. Through the Fellows program, KHF intends to increase participants' understanding of KHF's mission and more meaningfully connect them to its work. KLC describes the Fellows VII program as follows:

The purpose of Fellows VII is to provide an intensive leadership development experience through a prestigious yearlong program. This group is convened around the topic of access to healthy food. Those selected to participate will be asked to examine, expand, and apply their capacities to exercise leadership to enhance access to healthy foods in ways that promote the health of all citizens in the organizations and communities they serve.²

While instructors and facilitators for every cohort develop participants' leadership competencies as well as raise their understanding of KHF's work, with Fellows VI and Fellows VII, these cohorts' leadership activities were intentionally focused on particular issues and leadership challenges. For Fellows VI, the issue was healthy community design and for Fellows VII, the issue was increasing access to healthy food.

Fellows VII is unique from all other cohorts, not only because of its focus on the challenge of increasing access to healthy foods, but also for the following reasons:

- KLC hired a Program Associate dedicated solely to the Fellows program. The Program Associate was hired as Fellows VI ended and Fellows VII was developed. This staff member provided additional resources for and attention to the program. For example, the Program Associate invited Fellows alumni³ to networking luncheons throughout the state and distributed a monthly electronic newsletter to all Fellows.
- KHF's VP for Programs participated as a Fellow. While other Program Officers have observed sessions in the past and interacted with cohorts, this was the first time that a KHF staff member fully participated as a Fellow in all of the activities and sessions.
- A Fellows Initiative Team was assembled with staff from KHF and KLC. This team met to debrief on Fellows sessions, helped in planning for future sessions, and considered (in partnership with KLC) the overall strategy for the Fellows program in the short and longer term.
- More time was given to orienting this Fellows cohort to the work of KHF, through an onsite orientation at KHF offices as well as through more opportunities for Fellows to meet with KHF staff (e.g., dinners, small groups, symposium interactions, peer consultation, etc.).
- Two KHF Program Officers participated in Peer Consultation with this Fellows cohort, where the KHF staff shared specific dilemmas and asked for feedback from the Fellows.
- The Fellows VII cohort participated in social network analysis as part of a Symposium experience with other Fellows alumni.
- The Fellows VII cohort developed a discussion brief entitled, "The Challenge of Increasing Access to and Consumption of Healthy Foods in Kansas: How Might More Stakeholders Work Together More Often in Pursuit of the Common Good?" While some of the earliest cohorts experimented with group projects, this was the first time a cohort addressed a specific leadership challenge collectively in this way and produced a written product.

² <http://kansasleadershipcenter.org/blog/2012/07/30/kansas-health-foundation-selects-fellows-vii>

³ including Fellows VII participants