

# Fellows VI Evaluation Report

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Submitted by Jennifer Avers to the Kansas Health Foundation

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### OVERVIEW

The Kansas Leadership Center presented five key evaluation questions in the Fellows VI proposal approved by the Kansas Health Foundation. These questions center on the degree to which the Fellows VI cohort (Fellows) came together as a network and developed skills that may be effectively applied in acts of leadership throughout Fellows' local communities and statewide (e.g., healthy community design efforts and policy that shapes healthy community design). Further, the evaluation questions pose whether Fellows have a better understanding of and connection to the Kansas Health Foundation's mission and healthy behavior focus area because of their participation. The evaluator added two questions related to the Fellows' working definitions of *healthy community design* and *civic leadership* and the degree to which these were informed (if at all) by their participation in Fellows VI. These seven questions frame the interview findings and are explored in greater detail in the full report.

Fifteen Fellows VI participants<sup>1</sup> were interviewed prior to their first session on July 12, 2010, and were interviewed again approximately nine months after their final session, throughout the month of February 2012. Individual and collective responses were compared to assess the effects of Fellows VI per the Fellows' self reports over time.

### FINDINGS

Across the Fellows VI cohort, whether they were individuals with less or more experience with leadership training or less or more familiar with the Foundation's work, all of the them found the Fellows VI content, format and activities to be meaningful, relevant and applicable. Fellows praised the Kansas Leadership Center's (KLC) civic leadership competencies as profound and credited the KLC framework as transforming the ways in which they engage with others in their work places and also within various community spheres. Those who received coaching (individual or peer based) found it instrumental to their continued personal growth and "the glue" for keeping the cohort meaningfully connected beyond the Fellows VI sessions. Fellows VI staff and resources equipped already engaged and impressive individuals with a framework, language and network for exercising civic leadership in the area of healthy community design. The cohort remains committed to supporting healthy community design in their communities. As one Fellow shared: "The trick is always sustaining the learning and sustaining the relationships. I think the Foundation has done some really good things here, and I just encourage them to keep thinking about this and keep it stronger."

The following offers a quick summary of progress made on meeting the desired outcomes reflected in the guiding evaluation questions. More detail is provided in the full report. Outcomes are assessed as follows:

*Requires Reflection:* Additional reflection on the outcome area will lead to greater clarity as to the degree to which the outcome has been met and whether or not the outcome should be adjusted.

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<sup>1</sup> Eighteen Fellows participated in the first round of interviews. For the follow-up interviews held in February 2012, three Fellows did not confirm interview appointments with the evaluator after multiple emails and voice messages. Thus, the evaluator compared interview notes for the fifteen Fellows for which there were both pre-program and post-program data.

*On Target:* Evidence supports that there is positive movement in reaching the desired outcome. Sustained efforts should increase and enhance outcome attainment.

*Outcome Met:* All evidence suggests that the outcome has been met.

**1. Have Fellows developed relationships with the Foundation -- and among current and former Fellows – resulting in a network of influential individuals able to help drive policy and environmental change in the state of Kansas around healthy behaviors?**

**ON TARGET:** Fellows report developing solid relationships as a cohort, forging their strongest relationships within subgroups of the cohort, and some are beginning to form relationships with former Fellows. This group came to Fellows with impressive potential for driving policy and environmental change in the state of Kansas. Many were, at the time of their recruitment, already actively participating in their professional and community spheres in a number of projects related to healthy community design, physical fitness and overall community health. As Fellows were asked to reflect on their engagement with the issues nearly nine months after their final Fellows VI session, they reported being as involved in and, in some cases, more so and more effectively so than at the time of their recruitment. That noted, not all Fellows are comfortable purporting that their efforts drive policy and environmental change, though Fellows are hopeful that their efforts in some ways *contribute* to sound policy and positive environmental change. Moreover, Fellows' comfort levels with the Foundation are mixed, in terms of the cohort's understanding of the Foundation's mission, program areas and potential partnership opportunities.

**2. Have Fellows developed the skills to exercise civic leadership that will contribute to their role as catalysts for change by promoting the healthy behaviors of Kansas's children [i.e., ensuring proper nutrition (local food access) and increasing physical activity (healthy community design)]?**

**OUTCOME MET:** All Fellows reported having meaningful experiences within the Fellows VI sessions that positively developed their skills to exercise civic leadership. In the pre-program interview, all were asked to identify leadership areas in which they hoped to grow. Fellows identified things like better delegating work, better separating themselves from issues, getting to decision points more efficiently, etc. When reminded of these areas in their post interviews, most Fellows were struck by what they had identified because they attributed Fellows VI, and particularly the KLC Civic Leadership Competencies, with freeing them up from these former concerns. While many shared being naturally predisposed to think or respond in certain ways when addressing civic issues, they reported being more comfortable with their own characteristics than they were prior to the program. They recognized that what they formerly saw as weaknesses were not so much weaknesses as opportunities to rethink an adaptive challenge and/or observe group dynamics differently and respond accordingly.

**3. Do Fellows understand the competencies necessary to enhance their capacity for civic leadership and will they engage more frequently and effectively in acts of leadership around the Foundation’s healthy behavior focus areas, nutrition (access to local foods) and physical activity (healthy community design)?**

**ON TARGET:** Fellows are competent and sophisticated within their professional arenas and are actively engaged in making positive differences in their communities. The KLC competencies resonated with all fifteen interviewees and all were able to articulate the varying ways in which they are applying these competencies. Fellows reported the value of having a shared language to talk about and experiment with exercising leadership. All were as engaged if not more so in exercising civic leadership in the broad area of healthy community design – both through their professional and community spheres. As far as the degree to which Fellows are exercising leadership as representatives of or advocates for the Kansas Health Foundation’s healthy behavior focus area, this is less certain.

**4. Do Fellows understand the context of civic leadership in Kansas to help drive policy and environmental change in the state of Kansas around these health behaviors?**

**REQUIRES REFLECTION:** Fellows reported getting a lot out of the KLC competencies and are already applying the four competencies professionally and in their local communities (e.g., volunteering and/or as board or committee appointments). Moreover, Fellows see themselves as managing groups more adeptly and challenges more effectively because of their experience in Fellows VI, knowing when to “raise the heat,” and also being more comfortable with the scope of challenges changing based on group efforts and the contextual variables of a particular challenge. As such, Fellows confidently reported how they are engaging with tough issues related to healthy community design, and all are eager to stay in contact with their cohort, the Leadership Center, and the Kansas Health Foundation as they do so. When asked to speak to how their efforts drive policy and environmental change in the state of Kansas, however, most Fellows did not feel comfortable stating their efforts affected policy change (at least directly), and even for those who could link their efforts to informing policy, they still questioned whether their efforts informed policy to the degree that the Kansas Health Foundation might be expecting.

**5. Have Fellows gained a deeper understanding of the Kansas Health Foundation’s work and mission “to improve the health of all Kansans”?**

**REQUIRES REFLECTION:** Most Fellows reported having a better understanding of the Foundation after their Fellows VI sessions than they did prior to the program. Overall, there appears to be positive progress made in terms of orienting all Fellows VI participants to the Foundation. However, the depth of understanding about the Foundation and the Fellows’ sense of their ongoing connections with the Foundation are uneven across this cohort. There are a number of Fellows for whom this outcome was fully met, while there were others for whom it was not.

**6. How do Fellows define healthy community design?**

**ON TARGET:** This question is worded less as a desired outcome than the other questions but intends to get at the degree to which Fellows' understanding of the subject and what is required to develop and implement healthy community design were positively impacted because of Fellows VI. Fellows reported that their initial sense of healthy community design was affirmed through their participation in Fellows VI. They appreciated being able to think about this topic and hear from people with diverse perspectives and "real life" examples. The group was mutually appreciative of each other's professional backgrounds, exploring healthy community design challenges and opportunities with insight from architects, engineers, civic leaders, community volunteers, and those more directly involved in public health. Some commented that representation from the business side would have been beneficial to these discussions. All agreed that the discussions were difficult because of some of their initial expectations for Fellows VI and the nature of the subject. Some were more comfortable than others with how the group discussed and tackled healthy community design as a topic and potential focus area for future collective efforts.

## 7. How do Fellows define civic leadership?

**OUTCOME MET:** This question was also worded less as a desired outcome than the other questions but intends to get at the degree to which Fellows' understanding of civic leadership and what is required to engage effectively with civic challenges were positively impacted because of Fellows VI. Fellows shared that their sense of civic leadership, what it entailed and when it was effective was affirmed throughout their Fellows VI experience and was also expanded. Fellows shared that sessions emphasized some aspects of civic leadership that they found critical to their understanding and application of the KLC civic leadership competencies: the engagement of many and diverse voices; taking time to diagnose the situation; exercising leadership in less than just authoritative or positional ways; and recognizing an adaptive versus a technical challenge. All Fellows reported actively applying the KLC civic leadership competencies in their professional and community arenas. They are confident, skilled and actively engaged in acts of civic leadership.

### CONSIDERATIONS

Fellows VI appears to have been a sound investment for the Foundation and the Leadership Center. In the spirit of continuous learning and program improvement, there are some areas to consider, particularly in terms of the Foundation finding its appropriate level of engagement, in terms of orienting individuals to the Foundation, potentially engaging them more directly with its healthy behavior focus area, and fostering Fellows' ongoing efforts related to policy and environmental change across the state. The following questions are offered as fodder for future discussions.

- Is the Foundation comfortable with the nature of the relationships developed within the Fellows VI cohort? Are the subgroups' activities within the cohort as well as the other more organic connections between various Fellows' cohorts sufficient for forming the sort of network envisioned by the Foundation?
- Is the Foundation comfortable with the cohort's awareness of the Foundation's work? How else might the Foundation inform individuals of its work during and outside of Fellows' sessions?
- How does the Foundation currently engage Fellows' alumni with its healthy behavior focus areas? Are there other opportunities for Fellows to contribute to

the Foundation's efforts? How might the Foundation communicate these opportunities?

- What are the Foundation's expectations for Fellows with regard to "driving policy and environmental change in the state of Kansas"? Are current levels of Fellows' engagement with issues at a largely local community level sufficient?
- Are the Kansas Leadership Center and Kansas Health Foundation satisfied with how "healthy community design" was explored by the cohort? What are the benefits and drawbacks for providing greater structure and/or expectations for the Fellows' exploration of these topics in the future?

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