



2026 Advanced Leadership Academy Fellowship

FINAL PROGRAM REPORT

Prepared by Kweli Kitwana and Ruby Rodriguez

Honoring elder leadership as active, evolving, strategic, and vital to housing and economic justice.

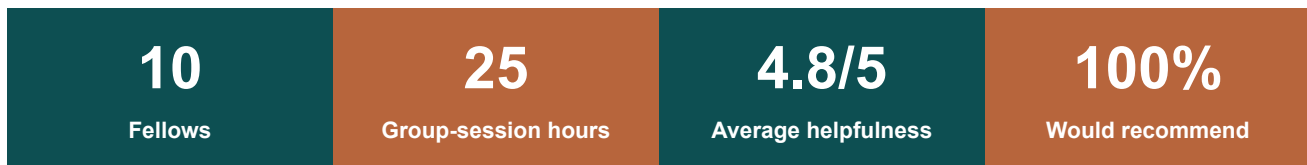
St. Mary's Center | August 2026

Prepared from the graduation presentation, program records, and Fellow evaluation interviews.

Executive summary

The 2026 Advanced Leadership Fellowship marked an important evolution in St. Mary's Center's approach to developing elders as community power-building leaders. As the fifth group of leaders completed this journey, the program grew in response to the leadership the Fellows already carried. Participants were not beginning to discover their voices. They entered with lived experience, community wisdom, established relationships, and a history of showing up. The Fellowship was designed to recognize that foundation and challenge them to take their leadership further.

Over six months, ten elder leaders moved beyond classroom learning into sustained practice, relationship-building, public participation, reflection, and individualized leadership planning. Across five full-day group sessions, a real-time city hearing observation and analysis experience, and the Leadership Studio, Fellows strengthened their ability to connect lived experience to organized community action and policy change.



What the evidence shows

- All ten evaluation respondents reported stronger understanding of their own leadership and stronger connections to community power, organizing, policy, accountability, and collective action.
- Across 13 skill areas, respondents selected 128 of 130 opportunities for growth, a 98.5 percent positive response rate.
- All respondents reported clearer leadership identity, greater comfort using their voices, and stronger readiness to participate in community and advocacy settings.
- The city hearing transformed an abstract lesson about power into a direct view of how decisions are framed, who holds authority, and how community voices enter public processes. They conducted real-time observation, assigned specific roles, and mapped who was in the room and why (including elected officials, community members, and opposition).
- The Leadership Studio helped Fellows name their strengths, reflect on accomplishments, identify areas for growth, and create pathways for continued leadership. Including journaling, creating a leadership bio, and developing a leadership plan for the next 6 months.

Central conclusion

The Fellowship's greatest contribution was not simply transferring leadership knowledge. It created conditions for elder leaders to recognize the authority already present in their lived experience, practice using that authority with others, and connect it to specific opportunities for action. Facilitator observations and Fellow interviews together indicate meaningful movement from personal experience toward a clearer understanding of policy, organizing, power-building, decision-makers, specific demands, collective action, and public accountability. The next phase can protect that momentum by housing the Fellows' continued growth within Senior Advocates for Hope and Justice and expanding their ownership of its organizing strategy.

Program purpose and design

By its fifth iteration, the Leadership Academy needed to expand because its participants' leadership had grown. The 2026 program was therefore reframed as a six-month Advanced Leadership Fellowship, a deeper continuation of the Academy that recognized participants as experienced leaders rather than as recipients of a series of training sessions. The program treated their lived knowledge, relationships, judgment, and commitment as essential resources for building community power.

Program purpose

The Fellowship sought to help elder leaders understand how power is built, recognize the leadership embedded in lived experience, strengthen practical public-leadership skills, and take more coordinated action on housing and economic justice issues.

What changed in 2026

The Fellowship expanded shorter monthly sessions into full-day, highly interactive learning experiences. Facilitated discussion, role-playing, hands-on practice, reflection, and shared learning gave Fellows time to examine leadership identity, power, systems, collective action, communication, facilitation, storytelling, and policy advocacy in greater depth. In addition, the program used the newly designed on-site St. Mary's Center training space and facilities staff.

Design at a glance

Program element	Documented scope
Cohort	10 Fellows
Duration	Six-month leadership progression
Group learning	25 hours of Fellowship sessions
Applied practice	Approximately 20 hours of engaging role-play
Individual development	Three individual coaching sessions per Fellow
Public-process learning	One city hearing examined in real time
Leadership planning	Ten written personal leadership plans

Core learning approach

Practice before performance. Fellows rehearsed testimony, meetings, difficult conversations, facilitation, and other public leadership moments.

Power analysis grounded in real issues. Fellows identified decision-makers, allies, organized communities, and forces shaping housing and economic justice.

Story connected to strategy. Personal experience became a source of public meaning when linked to an issue, a target, and a call to action.

Collective learning. Dialogue and reflection allowed Fellows to learn across differences and turn shared insight into stronger action.

Individual pathways. Coaching and action planning connected each Fellow's purpose, strengths, and interests to a practical next step.

Leadership progression

The Fellowship journey moved step by step from personal reflection to stronger, more coordinated leadership action. Each session added a new layer of skill and clarity while reinforcing the central idea that leadership becomes power when people act together with purpose.

Date	Learning focus	Progression
March 18	Proactive Leadership Shift and Community Power	Recognize leadership identity and move from individual concern toward collective power.
April 14	Collective Leadership and Prep-Attend Oakland City Council hearing on the encampment abatement	Fellows to develop personalized public comments. This includes shaping their stories, grounding their message in the policy issue, and building confidence in delivering testimony. We also prepare the full group for what to expect in a public hearing and what to observe. Each Fellow identified a specific learning objective for the day and engaged the hearing with purpose tied to their growth as leaders.
May 12	Facilitation and Collective Leadership Building Community and Community Power Through Meetings	Identify where meetings happen and how they shape decisions. Power-Building Meetings vs Other Meetings Designing a Power-Building Meeting Shared Leadership Roles, Practice Running a Meeting.
June 17	Power Mapping and Advocacy That Moves Policy	Analyze authority, allies, opposition, and opportunities for strategic public action.
July 15	Sustaining Leadership- Leadership Studio	Name growth, journal, 1:1 personal coaching, clarify priorities, and carry leadership into a one-year action pathway.
July 22	Graduation and Celebration	Family and friends

The shift the curriculum was designed to support

Earlier frame	Stronger, actionable frame
Officials or institutions hold most power.	Power is also built through lived experience, organized relationships, shared purpose, and collective action.
Housing and economic hardship are mainly personal struggles.	Policies, systems, budgets, and public decisions shape people's daily lives.
Concern about an issue is enough to begin.	Effective action requires identifying the decision-maker, the opportunity to engage, and one's specific role.

Learning through participation

Participation was the Fellowship's central teaching method. Fellows practiced leadership, observed power in operation, and reflected on what those experiences meant for future action.

Applied learning methods

Role-playing: Rehearsed testimony, meetings, difficult conversations, and public leadership moments in a supportive environment.

Power analysis: Identified who makes decisions, who influences them, where community power exists, and what can shift an issue.

Facilitation: Practiced guiding group learning, listening across differences, keeping purpose visible, and moving toward shared action.

Story and strategy: Connected lived experience to a public issue, target, audience, and request.

Collective reflection: Used peer insight to strengthen judgment, courage, accountability, and next steps.

Learning power in real time

Fellows prepared for, attended, and debriefed a city hearing on Encampment Abatement. Before the hearing, they entered with context, questions, and an understanding of what to watch for. During the hearing, they observed how public decisions were framed, who spoke, whose voices were heard and whose were absent, and where authority lay. The debrief connected those observations directly to organizing, advocacy, accountability, and policy change.

PREPARE	ATTEND	DEBRIEF
Build context, questions, roles, and a strategic lens.	Observe authority, participation, framing, and public voice.	Translate observation into lessons on organizing and advocacy.

"I learned that I have inherent leadership qualities that draw people to me. I do not need a title to be a leader."

Ninita S. Best



The Leadership Studio

The Fellowship concluded with a full-day Leadership Studio and focused one-on-one coaching. Each Fellow participated in three individual coaching sessions that helped them retrieve the full arc of their experience and turn it into a forward-looking leadership pathway. This individualized space honored elder leadership as both already established and still evolving.

Three Studio products

Leadership skills assessment	Personal biography	One-year action plan
Named strengths, growth, and future opportunities.	Recovered accomplishments and honored the Fellow's lived experience.	Connected purpose to a specific pathway for community power building.

Why this mattered

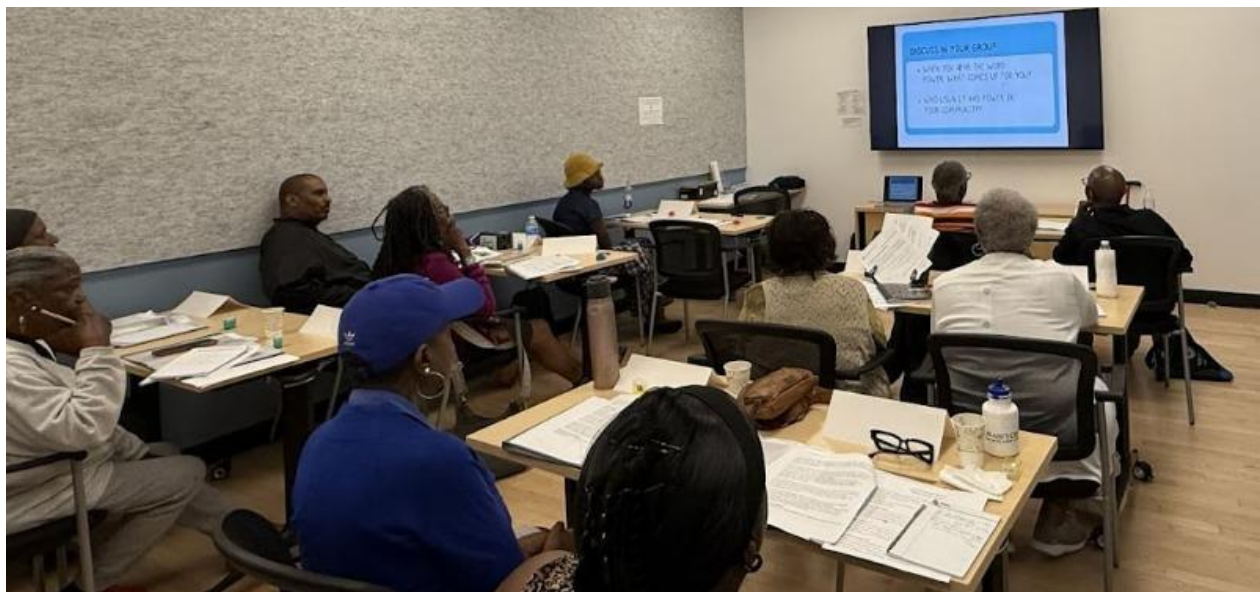
The biography process was intentionally designed to honor the full arc of each elder's lived experience while helping Fellows identify and reclaim the accomplishments, skills, and leadership contributions that brought them to this moment. Fellows' interview responses suggest that the Studio functioned as more than a planning exercise. It supported identity, pride, focus, and self-recognition. Among the nine respondents who completed the Leadership Studio section, all reported identifying strengths, recognizing accomplishments, feeling proud of their leadership journeys, identifying growth areas, and naming a specific leadership issue. Seven reported creating a one-year goal, while six reported developing a personal biography and six reported developing a one-year leadership action plan.

"I learned that it is okay to be my authentic self in public spaces. I can be myself. I am enough."

Ethel "Renee" Hayes

"I now know how to use my talents and skills to sit in meetings and rooms and participate more."

Al Raiford



Evaluation approach

The final evaluation used structured interviews that combined checklist items with open-ended reflection. The questions examined understanding, strengthened skills, leadership shifts, readiness to participate, the city hearing, the Leadership Studio, intended next actions, overall helpfulness, and likelihood of recommending the program.

Response status

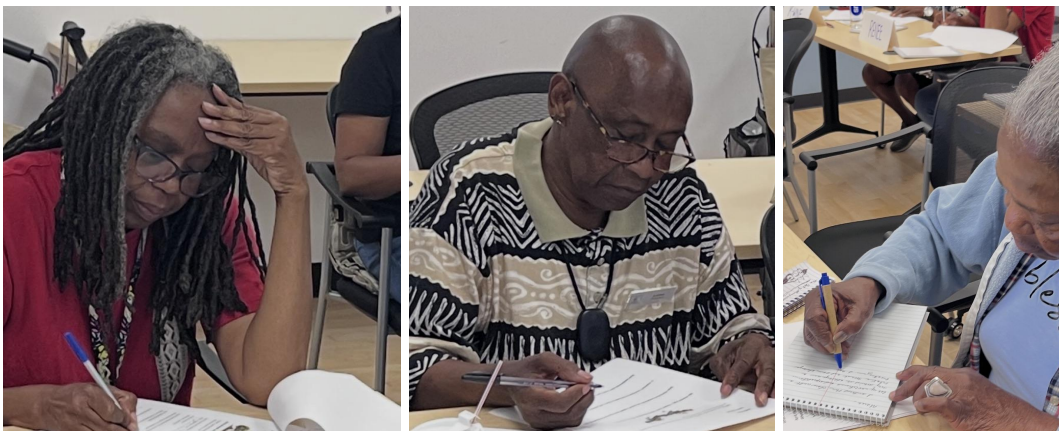
10 of 10 Interviews completed	10 Records entered	10 of 10 Permission to quote	10 of 10 Would recommend
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How to interpret the findings

- All ten Fellow interviews are complete, and the updated workbook contains response records for all ten Fellows as of August 31, 2026.
- All ten records include a helpfulness rating. The average rating is 4.8 out of 5.
- Checklist results measure the breadth of self-reported impact. They are not a standardized or independently validated outcome scale.
- Some later checklist items remain blank: one City Hearing item has 9 responses, the Leadership Studio section has 9 responses, and the Planned Actions section has 8 responses. Rates use only answered Yes and No items, and the relevant denominator is disclosed.
- The evidence captures Fellow perception shortly after the program. It does not yet show whether planned actions were completed or sustained over time.
- The tracker labels the final leadership-shift item as a major shift, while the summary sheet phrases it negatively. This report follows the response tracker's positive wording and does not use that item as evidence of "no shift."

Analytic approach

The report combines descriptive counts and item-level response rates with thematic review of Fellow comments. The report reads open-ended responses for recurring themes, including leadership identity, authentic voice, strategic focus, collective action, public participation, facilitation, and continued engagement.



Evaluation findings

4.8/5 Average of 10 ratings	100% Would recommend	100% Understanding items	98.5% Skills items
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Breadth of reported impact

Evaluation area	Positive items	Rate	Interpretation
Understanding	90 of 90	100%	All 10 responded
Skills strengthened	128 of 130	98.5%	All 10 responded
Leadership shifts	80 of 80	100%	All 10 responded
Prepared to participate	100 of 100	100%	All 10 responded
City hearing impact	79 of 79	100%	9–10 answered per item
Leadership Studio impact	64 of 72	88.9%	9 answered per item
Planned actions	90 of 96	93.8%	8 answered per item

Note: Rates are calculated as Yes ÷ (Yes + No). Blank items are excluded and disclosed in the interpretation column.

The strongest pattern: leadership became more visible and usable

Every respondent selected every understanding item and every leadership-shift item. Fellows reported stronger understanding of community power, organizing, policy, budgets, decision-making, accountability, lived experience, and working with others. They also reported seeing themselves more clearly as leaders, recognizing prior experience, feeling more comfortable using their voices, and feeling better prepared to act with and organize others.

Skill development was broad and consistent

Across thirteen skill areas, respondents selected 128 of 130 opportunities for growth. The only two No responses concerned planning and leading a meeting and guiding a group discussion. This suggests that facilitation should remain a priority for practice even when overall skill confidence is high.



What Fellows said changed

They claimed their leadership identity

Several Fellows described a stronger ability to name themselves as leaders and recognize influence they had previously overlooked. They understood leadership less as a title and more as using experience, relationships, courage, and judgment in service of community change.

"I see myself as a leader. I am starting to see that I can influence elected officials."

James Paul Hopkins

"I now have more confidence. I see that I can speak up and be heard when I work with others."

Robyn Parker

They strengthened authentic and strategic voice

Fellows did not describe voice only as speaking more. They described learning when to step forward, when to listen, how to stay on purpose, and how to connect a personal story to a larger issue and desired change.

"I learned that I can stand up and speak up in front of people. I can be my authentic self."

Cecelia Wynn

"I learned that I am a leader who can speak from my heart, but I need to be mindful of how I tell my story and connect it to issues and impactful change."

Keith "K-Wine" Arivnwine

"I am a good speaker, and I need to take notes and slow down. I enjoy speaking, but I want to make sure I keep my point clear and focused."

Sheila Gay

They connected individual leadership to collective action

Respondents consistently linked their future leadership to working with others. Their plans included attending public meetings, supporting St. Mary's Center programs, teaching youth, facilitating senior learning, participating in election activities, using music and creativity for community impact, and helping others navigate shared housing.

"Lead with intention by stepping up when my voice is needed and stepping back to listen and encourage others."

Cecelia Wynn



Intended next actions

The evaluation shows a strong appetite for continued public and community engagement. Among the eight Fellows who answered the planned-action checklist, all eight intended to attend more community meetings and public hearings, meet with elected officials, support housing and economic justice campaigns, help organize seniors, facilitate meetings, share information, invite others into action, and continue their one-year plans.

Specific pathways named by Fellows

Pathway	Examples from interviews
Public participation	Track City Council agendas; attend meetings and hearings; participate in the November 2026 election; meet with elected officials.
Community leadership	Facilitate a senior class; engage more deeply with Hope & Justice and the Council of Elders; share learning across St. Mary's Center.
Housing justice	Develop and teach others about smoother transitions into shared housing; support housing campaigns.
Creative organizing	Use music, oratory, and other creative skills to influence, inspire participation, and hold decision-makers accountable.
Intergenerational leadership	Help children and younger people recognize and embrace their own leadership qualities.
Continued development	Pursue additional leadership training and find more opportunities to speak, organize, and engage.

A useful distinction

Four of eight respondents planned to join a board, commission, committee, or advisory group. The other four identified different legitimate leadership pathways, including public testimony, facilitation, campaign participation, community education, organizing, and creative engagement. A successful alumni strategy should support multiple forms of public leadership rather than treating appointed service as the only desired outcome.



Program strengths and lessons

What worked especially well

A cohort model rooted in respect and belonging. Fellows described unity, trust, peer support, and a welcoming environment in which they could be authentic.

A progression from identity to action. The curriculum linked leadership identity, facilitation, storytelling, power analysis, public participation, and action planning.

Real-world learning. The city hearing made the structure and dynamics of public decision-making visible.

Practice-centered facilitation. Role-play and discussion gave Fellows repeated opportunities to rehearse leadership, not just discuss it.

Individualized reflection. The Leadership Studio helped translate group learning into personally meaningful goals and pathways.

A focus on lived experience as expertise. The program treated hardship, survival, service, and community relationships as leadership knowledge that can shape policy and action.

Lessons for future cohorts

- Continue pairing each concept with a real issue, a decision-maker, a venue, and an action opportunity.
- Build additional facilitation repetitions, since meeting leadership was the only skill area with a more-than-universal positive response.
- Complete biographies, goals, and action plans during scheduled program time, with a clear final review for every Fellow.
- Clarify evaluation wording and require an explicit response for each item so blanks do not become ambiguous data.
- Collect a baseline at the start of the Fellowship and follow up with evidence after the program to measure change and sustained action more confidently.

“The class was great. I appreciated the sense of unity we built and the respect everyone showed one another.”

Cecelia Wynn



Recommendation for the next phase

House continued leadership growth within Hope and Justice

Most Fellows are already leaders in Senior Advocates for Hope and Justice, St. Mary's Center's participant-led advocacy program. They entered the Fellowship with lived experience, community relationships, organizing knowledge, and histories of public action. Many have represented St. Mary's Center in housing and social justice spaces and have received recognition from local peer organizations. The Fellowship added stronger tools for facilitation, storytelling, power mapping, policy advocacy, collective action, and public accountability.

The recommended next phase is not a separate alumni engagement program. It is a transition from participation toward greater ownership of Hope and Justice organizing strategy. Participation asks Fellows to join planned activities. Strategic ownership gives Fellows a central role in deciding what the group works on, why an issue matters, what change it seeks, who has the power to act, how the campaign moves forward, and how success is evaluated.

Housing this growth within Hope and Justice protects the investment made through the Fellowship while strengthening an existing St. Mary's Center leadership structure. It also establishes a new expectation: experienced elder leaders are not only invited to participate but also to share testimony. They are trusted to shape strategy, make collective decisions, lead action, develop other leaders, and evaluate results.

What Fellows are prepared to own

1. Issue identification and priority setting

Listen to other elders, identify shared concerns, and determine which housing, economic justice, homelessness, and senior issues call for collective action.

2. Campaign goals and demands

Define the change being sought, identify the decision-maker with authority to act, and develop specific demands that reflect community needs.

3. Power analysis and strategy

Map decision-makers, allies, opposition, organized communities, relationships, timing, and leverage, then select strategies based on that analysis.

4. Leadership of action

Facilitate strategy meetings, prepare and deliver testimony, meet with elected officials, conduct outreach, lead community education, and represent St. Mary's Center in coalitions and public spaces.

5. Shared leadership and leader development

Develop campaign timelines, distribute meaningful responsibilities, welcome other elders into the work, mentor emerging leaders, and connect individual action plans to responsibilities within Hope and Justice.

6. Accountability and continued learning

Track public commitments, assess whether demands are being met, debrief actions, adjust strategy, and determine what comes next.

Structure for Fellow-led strategy

Fellow ownership does not remove the need for staff support. It changes the purpose of that support. The Hope and Justice Organizer Specialist can move from primarily coordinating elder participation to helping Fellows exercise collective strategic leadership. Fellows set direction and make organizing decisions; the Organizer Specialist strengthens the information, preparation, structure, and follow-through that make those decisions actionable.

Leadership function	Fellows' ownership	Organizer Specialist support
Set priorities	Identify shared concerns and select issues for collective action.	Bring timely policy, budget, and community information into a clear decision-making process.
Define the campaign	Set goals, targets, demands, messages, and measures of progress.	Support research and help translate priorities into a workable campaign plan.
Choose strategy	Analyze power and determine tactics, timing, relationships, and leadership roles.	Offer strategic questions and coaching without taking over decisions Fellows are prepared to make.
Lead action	Facilitate meetings, conduct outreach, give testimony, meet officials, and represent the group.	Provide technology assistance, agenda review, testimony development, rehearsal, and logistical coordination.
Review progress	Assess responses, public commitments, campaign movement, and emerging barriers.	Document decisions and commitments, maintain action records, and supply information needed for evaluation.
Adjust and continue	Debrief, learn from results, revise strategy, and determine the next action.	Create reflective space and help connect decisions to St. Mary's Center resources and responsibilities.
Develop leaders	Share responsibility, welcome other elders, and mentor new leaders.	Create structured opportunities for Fellows to co-lead, teach, mentor, and prepare future cohorts.

The Organizer Specialist remains essential, but the role focuses on organizing support, political education, research, coaching, and implementation assistance. The role is not to take over strategy or reduce Fellows to participants in staff-designed activities. This structure honors the Fellows' demonstrated growth by pairing elder ownership with the staff support needed to turn collective decisions into sustained action.

Measures for continued learning

A practical evaluation system should combine participation, action, and reflection. The measures below can indicate whether the Fellowship's immediate gains translate into sustained community leadership.

Outcome area	Example indicators	Collection point
Leadership identity	Confidence using voice; ability to name strengths; clarity of purpose.	Baseline, graduation, 6 and 12 months
Public participation	Meetings or hearings attended; testimony delivered; elected-official meetings completed.	Monthly action log
Collective leadership	Meetings facilitated; people invited into action; peers mentored; issue teams joined.	Quarterly check-in
Strategic capacity	Ability to identify target, allies, timing, leverage, and next action.	Scenario or plan review
Leadership pathways	Board or committee roles, campaign responsibilities, community education, voter engagement.	6 and 12 months
Policy and community influence	Agency response, decision-maker commitment, procedural change, campaign milestone, community knowledge shared.	Case story after major action
Sustainability	Sense of support, manageable pace, accessibility needs met, continued participation.	Quarterly reflection

Recommended immediate follow-up

- Review the remaining unanswered items in City Hearing, Leadership Studio, and Planned Actions, and fill in only those you can confirm from the original interviews.
- Confirm that every Fellow has a final biography, one-year goal, and action plan in an accessible format.
- Convene a Hope and Justice strategy session within 60 days to connect Fellow action plans with shared issue priorities and establish Fellow-led decision-making roles.
- Complete individual 90-day check-ins by October 2026 and a six-month cohort reflection by January 2027.
- Prepare a one-year outcomes addendum in July 2027 that documents actions, roles, relationships, and policy or community influence.



Class of 2026

Ten leaders. Ten histories. Ten pathways for continued contribution to community power.

Keith (K-Wine) Arivnwine	Robyn Parker
Ninita S. Best	Al Raiford
Sheila Gay	Jean Toney
Ethel (Renee) Hayes	Brenda Whitfield
James (Paul) Hopkins	Cecelia Wynn

"The literature was spot on, and I will be using the information I learned to share with youth about leadership. The information made me think critically about what kind of leader I want to be and which issues I want to focus on."

Ninita S. Best

Closing reflection

The 2026 Fellowship affirmed that elder leadership is rooted in experience and is also active, evolving, strategic, and vital to building community power. These Fellows are prepared to enter community-building spaces as authentic and well-rounded leaders. They can facilitate meetings, tell powerful stories, analyze power, organize people, and advocate for policies and budgets that reflect the real needs of seniors and their communities.

To the 2026 Fellows: your leadership is not beginning today. It is continuing with greater clarity, stronger tools, and deeper purpose. The Fellowship is complete, but the leadership it affirmed is still moving. The program's next responsibility is to keep the pathway open, accompany Fellows into real opportunities, and continue honoring elder leadership as vital to housing justice, economic justice, and community change.



Appendix A. Evaluation summary

Status as of August 31, 2026

Measure	Result	Notes
Fellows listed	10	Full cohort
Completed evaluation interviews	10	All interviews complete
Response records entered	10	All response records entered
Average helpfulness	4.8 of 5	Range: 4–5 among 10 ratings
Would recommend	10 of 10	100% of respondents
Permission to quote	10 of 10	All respondents
Understanding checklist	90 of 90 Yes	100% positive
Skills checklist	128 of 130 Yes	98.5% positive
Leadership shifts checklist	80 of 80 Yes	100% positive
Preparedness checklist	100 of 100 Yes	100% positive
City hearing checklist	79 of 79 answered Yes	One blank response on one item
Leadership Studio checklist	64 of 72 answered Yes	Nine section respondents; eight No responses
Planned actions checklist	90 of 96 answered Yes	Eight section respondents; six No responses

Appendix B.

Evaluation Raw Data

Appendix C.

Graduation Photos and Speech Quotes

[MEET THE 2026 FELLOWS - SLIDE DECK](#)

Source materials

- 2026 Advanced Leadership Fellowship Graduation and Celebration PowerPoint.
- 2026 Advanced Leadership Fellowship Evaluation workbook, including response tracker, dashboard formulas, question summary, and interview guide.
- Program information and final reflections documented through the Fellowship's graduation and evaluation process.
- Facilitator graduation remarks reflecting on the fifth cohort, the program's evolution, and observed leadership growth.