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Samantha Guenther

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, samguenther1@gmail.com

Brooke Wells

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, bmanny2@huskers.unl.edu

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The Development and History of the Rural Futures Institute's Fellows Program

Samantha Guenther and Brooke Wells

Department of Agriculture Leadership, Education and Communication, University of Nebraska-

Lincoln

ALEC 896: Independent Research Study

Dr. Mark Balschweid

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Abstract

Rural Futures Institute (RFI) served to mobilize the resources and talents of the University of Nebraska and its partners, to create knowledge and action that support rural people and places to achieve unique paths to their desired futures. The Fellows Program was one method that RFI used to fulfil their vision by connecting college students with rural communities to create tangible results on community-defined projects and goals. As the program continues to evolve and find new leadership under Rural Prosperity Nebraska, it is important to document these changes and understand its history. The purpose of this historical research study is to describe the development and history of the Fellows Program by uncovering how the Fellows Program evolved from its inception as Serviceship and understanding the current and potential impact of the Fellows Program. This will hopefully create less ambiguity for future Fellows Program staff and partners as to why and how the program has changed.

The Development and History of the Rural Futures Institute's Fellows Program

Rural Futures Institute's Fellows Program provides the opportunity to connect collegiate students with rural Nebraskan community leaders through an inclusive leadership-based internship. This program is the development of the University of Nebraska's commitment to progressing rural Nebraska. While the program has undergone multiple redesigns, summer 2020 marked the program's eighth year. The motivating factors in establishing Rural Futures Institute and creating and sustaining what is now known as RFI Fellows Program is a reflection of the dedication to provide students with an elevated internship experience. In the latest redesign of the Fellows Program, the program has been designated to be housed under a new organization that is also dedicated to progressing rural Nebraska, Rural Prosperity Nebraska. As the program

shifts to meet ever-changing needs, its origin and defining moments are important to note as the program continues to develop.

The purpose of this historical research study was to create a written history of the Fellows Program for faculty and staff at Rural Futures Institute. Historical research “includes a critical examination of sources, interpretation of data, and analysis that focuses on the narrative, interpretation, and use of valid and reliable evidence that supports the study conclusions” (Given, 2008, p. 397). At this stage in the research, the Fellows Program will be generally defined as the advanced internship of Serviceship and subsequent evolutions of the program.

Definition of Terms

Fellows Program - A hybrid between service learning and traditional internships, the program connects rural communities or initiatives with collegiate students. Together, community mentors and student fellows participate in inclusive community leadership development training and community-defined projects over eight to ten weeks.

Rural Futures Institute (RFI) - The Rural Futures Institute, one of four interdisciplinary Institutes of the University of Nebraska (NU), leverages the talents and research-based expertise from across the four NU campuses on behalf of rural communities in Nebraska, the U.S. and around the world. Through a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, the institute encourages bold and futuristic approaches to address critical rural issues. It works collaboratively with community leaders of place and practice, students of all ages, educational, business, community, non-profit, government and foundation partners to empower rural communities and their leaders.

RFI Community Innovation Fellow - Rural community leaders who serve as mentors to the student fellows. The community innovation fellows identify needed community projects (e.g.

downtown beautification, marketing, mental health program development, etc.) and act as the point person to help student fellows accomplish these projects.

RFI Student Fellow - Pairs of collegiate students (not limited to University of Nebraska system) are designated a rural community and live and work there for a summer. These fellows are placed based on student interests and skills and community project needs. The students take ownership of the projects and work closely with the community innovation fellows as needed.

Serviceship - The precursor to RFI Fellows Program. Serviceship, a hybrid between service learning and traditional internships, was “designed using an asset-based community development approach” (Hastings et al., 2018, p. 142). Serviceship lasted from 2013-2018.

Methods

According to Given (2008), historical research is a five step process. “The first stage of a historical study is the identification of a researchable phenomenon and includes reading relevant literature, listening to present ideas about the phenomena, and even more important, reflecting on the researcher's interest” (Given, 2008, p. 397). As graduate assistants who work closely with the Fellows Program, the researchers are interested in creating a cohesive and sustainable written story of the program. As the program continues to evolve and find new leadership, it is important for the researchers to document this change. This will hopefully create less ambiguity for future Fellows Program staff and partners as to why and how the program has changed.

Next was the theoretical framework for the study. “The second stage involves developing hypotheses or research questions and identifying a theoretical perspective to guide the data collection process and interpretation of results” (Given, 2008, p. 397). This framework allows the paper's focus to be narrowed in on what is the Fellows Program and why is the program

important. To best record and highlight the program, qualitative historical research was used to answer the following research questions:

1. How has the Fellows Program evolved from the Serviceship program?
2. What is the current and potential impact of the Fellows Program?

“The third stage is the data exploration and collection stage, which can be the most time- and labor- intensive part of the research process depending on the subject and accessibility of data sources” (Given, 2008, p. 397). Obtaining relevant data proved to be the most difficult process because over the years, Rural Futures Institute kept Serviceship and Fellows Program information in various locations such as a secured Box Folder, Google Drive, RFI’s website, and hard copies in the offices. The foundational information of Serviceship was the most difficult to obtain because RFI staff did not create the project. Rather, they supported the project’s funding. Once Serviceship did transition to RFI ownership, many of those papers and logistical information were stored in the RFI office. Due to COVID-19 precautions and regulations, accessing this information became more challenging. However, to overcome this barrier, the researchers reached out to key RFI staff and partners for their knowledge and opinion of the growing Fellows Program. These interviews provided an additional layer and interpretation to the project. In total, three individuals were interviewed: Dr. Lindsay Hastings, a Serviceship Founder; Kim Peterson, RFI’s Director of Competitive Awards & Finance; and Dr. Helen Fagan, RFI’s Director of Leadership Engagement.

“The fourth stage, following data collection, includes fact-checking, evaluation of the validity and reliability of data, and the analysis of evidence from each source. During this stage, the researcher evaluates the data, including the analysis and meaning of missing data, and forms generalizations” (Given, 2008, p. 397). Because the Fellows Program has evolved quickly in the

last seven years, the researchers had to be careful about the data analysis. For example, what is the difference between one of the Serviceship's founders and the current Fellows Program Director's explanation of the program's impact. While neither may be a wrong answer, how do these interpretations relate to one another? At this stage, the researchers were able to revisit the research questions (Given, 2008, p. 397) and decide if the questions were adequately answered or if more data was needed.

Given (2008) identifies that the "final stage of historical research involves the writing of the report in which findings are described along with their interpretation and which provides detailed supportive evidence in defense of the conclusions" (p. 397). To best answer the first research question, "how has the Fellows Program evolved from the Serviceship program?", we identified the purpose of RFI's creation, Serviceship, and the transition to the current Fellows Program structure. As university interests developed, so did the Fellows Program. Alongside the program's evolution, the structure changed to be more meaningful and impactful for participants, rural communities, and the university's support. As these changes are addressed throughout the paper, the second research question, "What is the current and potential impact of the Fellows Program?", was also addressed.

Rural Futures Institute Creation

Stemming from an external review from the Rural Initiative in 2008, it became apparent to University of Nebraska administrators and staff that the university system needed to address growing challenges in rural Nebraska. For example, access to technology, health care, and education was not advancing in rural Nebraska as fast as urban/city Nebraska. A 2012 University of Nebraska Board of Regent proposal argued this need to assist rural Nebraska:

If the University of Nebraska truly holds rural issues up as a priority, and wants to be recognized for its commitment to rural Nebraska, then this effort needs a highly visible presence and stature within the NU system. That will help enable it to become a vehicle for transformative change across all four campuses (p. 1-2).

This review called for systematic change within the NU system which focused on new ways of thinking that addressed needs across rural areas. Consequently, President J.B. Milliken charged Vice President Ronnie Green with addressing this pressing need to assist rural Nebraska. Over the next several years, the University of Nebraska held 17 focus groups which included over 350 individuals with the intent to identify underlying rural needs and compile an initial guide for designing the framework for Rural Futures Institute (University of Nebraska, 2012).

By July 2012, individuals from all 4 NU campuses, the Board of Regents, other land-grant universities, non-profit organizations, Nebraska communities, USDA Rural Development, private universities and community colleges were prepared to join together to draft a framework for a new organization called Rural Futures Institute to accomplish President Milliken's charge. This framework defined (Rural Futures Institute, 2012b):

- RFI would be a university-wide institute housed on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus.
- RFI's vision included being an internationally recognized leader for increasing community capacity as well as the confidence of rural people to address their challenges and opportunities, resulting in resilient and sustainable rural futures.
- RFI, through a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, would mobilize the resources and talents of the University of Nebraska and its partners, to create knowledge and action

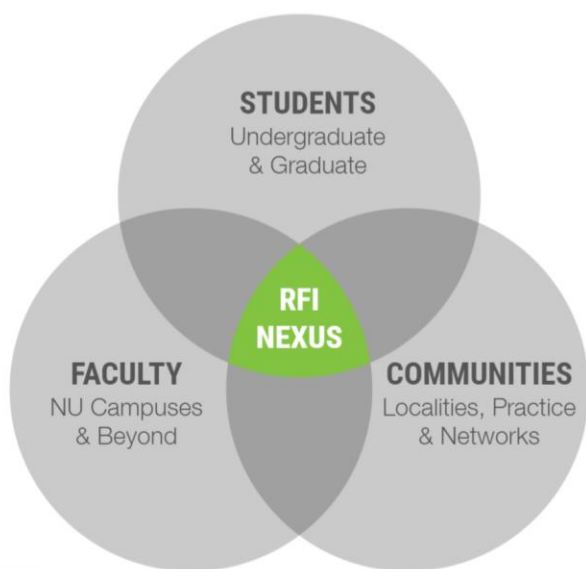
that supports rural people and places to achieve unique paths to their desired futures (see Figure 1 for the RFI Nexus).

- Eleven core values would guide RFI work: inclusion, transdisciplinary, creative, reflective and collaborative, bold, opportunistic and resilient, capacity building, all serving, and sustainable.

On October 26th, 2012, the Rural Futures Institute at the University of Nebraska was formally approved by the Board of Regents with the intent to “address the broader challenges and opportunities facing rural people and places” (Rural Futures Institute, n.d.). One of the first projects RFI initiated to meet this framework was Competitive Awards.

Figure 1

RFI Nexus



Note. The RFI Nexus shows that RFI will serve as a connection between the university system, students, and communities. Reprinted from RFI 2017 Strategic Plan.

Competitive Awards and Serviceship

Competitive Awards grant proposals required applicants to involve students in one or more of the following areas: undergraduate and graduate service learning, undergraduate and graduate student research, and community engagement (Rural Futures Institute, 2012a). Recipients were eligible for funding “ranging from \$15,000 - \$25,000 per award” and were required to operate the project between 24–36 months. In 2013, Dr. Tom Field, Dr. Lindsay Hastings, and Reshell Ray of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, were granted one of the first competitive awards. See Appendix A for a list of other Serviceship and Fellows Program partners and staff members. This “Serviceship” project was a hybrid between service learning and traditional internships. Dr. Hastings et al. (2018) explained, “utilizing an asset-based community development framework, undergraduate students serve as interns for a community rather than a company and are matched with rural communities whose local leaders have self-identified a community development project” (p. 143). This program stemmed from a need to build community and help communities see a new perspective. Serviceship strived to harness college students to create innovation within rural communities in Nebraska and beyond.

Students involved in the Serviceship program spent 10 weeks in a rural Nebraska community where they worked for their paid internship for 400 hours and service learning for a minimum of 10 hours. Serviceship provided rural communities with tangible results on important self-defined projects while giving students resume-building work and insight into the career and life opportunities in rural places. In this unique experience, students directly support community efforts as a whole, often serving as the link between many entities. In the early years of Serviceship, some communities had pairs of students while other communities had only one Serviceship student. Today, each partnering community has a minimum of two students.

In our interview with Dr. Hastings (personal communication, August 14, 2020), she noted the uniqueness of placing students in communities. “What I love about Serviceship is that it provides a student the chance to be an intern for a community rather than a company where they get to execute a locally-identified community development project alongside community leaders,” (L. Hastings, personal communication, August 14, 2020). From the inception of Serviceship to the present day Fellows Program, the community emphasis has always been important. In thinking about the legacy of Serviceship, Dr. Hastings (personal communication, August 14, 2020) said, "a student learns that no matter what they become....doctor, lawyer, CEO...they learn that their *job* is to build community.” The impacts such as this were important to Rural Futures Institute.

After the third year, the Serviceship program was operated by Rural Futures Institute. This transition to separate the program from the Competitive Awards ensured that the impact Serviceship made in rural communities could continue. This transition happened as a result of the Competitive Awards fundings running out and the desire to continue the unique impact RFI saw from the program. Each community identified specific needs (marketing, entrepreneurship, workforce development, education, etc.) and the RFI team selected students that had the skill sets to best help progress these rural communities or organizations with direct rural initiatives (i.e. Omaha National Land Bank). Oftentimes, not every project can be completed in the 10-week timeframe. However, it is RFI’s intention that students set up the community’s long term plan as best as possible. A 2016 community leader supported this idea when she noted, “the students planted a seed to give us a vision and then opened our eyes to see that we can do it” (Rural Futures Institute, 2016b). Not only was the RFI team dedicated to supporting the core values, many Serviceship participants were able to do so as well.

In 2018, Vice Chancellor, Mike Boehm, requested Impact Reports to communicate the tasks accomplished and financial outcomes from the successful RFI Serviceship communities (Rural Futures Institute, 2018c). These reports were intended to better demonstrate to community partners and University of Nebraska administrators the impact Serviceship had created. Created as one-page documents, this information outlined the context, players, and outcomes, primarily in the form of economic impact, from the work of RFI students in rural communities across Nebraska. Two RFI communities were reviewed that summer. Cozad, Nebraska, saw an estimated \$30,865 impact and Alliance, Nebraska, saw an estimated \$28,996 impact on the community as a result of the RFI projects and students (Rural Futures Institute, 2018b). While the 2018 impact reports were unable to include each RFI community, this was a great step to looking at individual impacts as opposed to the grouped impacts of 2016 and 2017. The first two years' impact reports looked at the combined impact of all RFI projects those summers.

Fellows Program

Upon seeing success of the Serviceship program over several years, the RFI staff recognized the opportunity to develop the program further. As Kim Peterson (personal communication, August 18, 2020) noted in her interview, there had already been more emphasis placed on “working with community leaders to serve in a strong mentoring role” after RFI took ownership of the Serviceship program. However, more work was needed to advance the program. Specifically, the team wanted to create multiple layers of leadership development such as strategic foresight, communications, technology, and evaluation. During this time, the Director of Leadership Engagement joined the RFI team. Through her passion for diversity and inclusion, in 2019, Dr. Fagan identified transitioning the Serviceship program to an inclusive leadership development program as a beginning piece to the larger conversation of developing

the Serviceship program. As Dr. Fagan (personal communication, August 13, 2020) noted in her interview that, with this transition, the RFI team renamed the original Competitive Awards “Serviceship” project to RFI “Fellows Program” to better reflect the new capacity building model using an inclusive leadership development framework. This framework brings together Community Innovation Fellows (community mentors and leaders) and Student Fellows to better understand pressing issues in rural communities.

An emphasis on inclusive leadership was appropriate as rural Nebraska is experiencing a shortage of resources and community capitals to respond to the increasing diversity and the challenges that come with it. Research indicates that communities are increasingly facing new and complex challenges due to globalization, international migration and increasing participation of ethnic minority groups in the labor market. Influenced by the following data, the Fellows Program was redesigned to equip rural communities with the resources and skills to tackle these changes:

- Nebraska is made up of mostly rural communities. And according to the Center for Public Affairs Research (2018), one of the trends affecting Nebraska's population is, “the majority of growth is coming from an increase in ethnically and racially diverse populations.”
- It is predicted that by 2030, Nebraska will be 40% non-White (Center for Public Affairs Research, 2018)
- By 2030, one in five Americans is projected to be 65 and over (Colby & Ortman, 2015)
- By 2044, more than half of all Americans are projected to belong to a minority group (any group other than non-Hispanic White alone) (Colby & Ortman, 2015)

- By 2060, nearly one in five of the nation's total population is projected to be foreign born (Colby & Ortman, 2015).

The RFI Fellows Program developed to address these needs by incorporating an inclusive leadership development framework, individual leadership coaching, and further engagement with the community leaders where students are placed.

Inclusive Leadership Development Framework

Completed by all community and student fellows, the multifaceted inclusive leadership development process has three key components: Pre-Academy (online training), Academy (2 ½ days in person training), and Fellowship (experiential learning). Pre-Academy provides foundational concepts that prepare fellows to actively participate in the Academy and during the fellowship experience in the community. Topics include: community capitals, group dynamics, authentic leadership, strengths, personality differences, intercultural mindset development, entrepreneurship, and more. Learning this content early enables participants to reflect and grow throughout the experience. Kirk and Shutte (2004, p. 238) indicate “it is through learning that people may come to see themselves and their situations in different ways.” Pre-Academy is a leader development intervention and a catalyst for change that capacity building calls for.

A pillar of the inclusive leadership development is the opportunity for participants to complete the Intercultural Development Inventory. This inventory assesses intercultural competency. Completing the IDI and engaging in a confidential IDI consultation with a qualified administrator allows the participant to better understand how they both perceive and actually interact when trying to bridge across cultures. Participants then complete the Intercultural Development Plan which allows reflection on cultural experience and goal planning to either improve or sustain their intercultural competency. The IDI and IDP have been useful for the

Fellows Program because it is a reliable document to review throughout the summer when conflict or miscommunication arises involving diversity or inclusion in the rural communities. Instead of hitting roadblocks on development goals and giving up, the IDP allows individuals to predict and work through these issues in hope to persevere and accomplish various intercultural competency goals. In a 2020 anonymous program survey, one fellow highlighted how the IDI and IDP is a useful resource for the RFI Fellows Program, “It is very important to have this and with the hopeful changes that are happening in our country, it is important for us all to get a deeper look into ourselves and how we hinder progress.” The RFI team cannot expect our fellows to make rural communities more inclusive if the fellows themselves are unaware of their own relationship to inclusive leadership.

Academy, the second component, is hands-on and interactive. Participants spend time in their teams (students together with their assigned community mentors) engaging in team-building activities using content from *Emotional Intelligence for Managing Diverse Teams* (Gardenswartz, Rowe, & Cheborsque, 2013). This content is particularly suited for developing trust, cohesion, and how to best tap into each member’s skills, talents, and passions. The objectives of the Academy are to:

1. Develop key emotional intelligence competencies for team functioning
2. Gain knowledge and tools to develop emotionally intelligent team environments that leverage diversity and create inclusion
3. Apply tools that build affirmative introspection, self-governance, intercultural literacy, and social architecting to enhance team interactions and team success.

Academy is an important leadership intervention in the capacity building model of the Fellows Program. This is the first time the fellows are engaging in leadership development as opposed to leader development (Day, 2000). Pre-Academy works to develop individual leader capacity

through learning and reflection on the participants' individual attributes (strengths, personality, etc.). Academy's intervention brings the student fellows together to work on the relational and social capital with community mentors. The enhanced leader development from Pre-Academy maximizes the leadership development of the Academy. Kim Peterson (personal communication, August 18, 2020) noted, "the current format has really jump-started the activity that occurs when the students get to the community. I feel that much more gets accomplished because the team already knows quite a bit about each other." Prior to the transition to the Fellows Program, student participants and community mentors would only meet over the phone with each other.

The final Fellows Program component is the in-community experience. The time the student fellows spend in the community is the experiential part of the capacity building leadership development. The fellows head to their Fellows Program community for the summer and begin working on various projects. During this time, the student and community fellows work together to innovate, and accomplish projects that will have positive and lasting impacts on the communities. Depending on the needs of the community and interests of the fellows, projects are determined. The projects range from economic development to youth mental health to marketing development. Often more projects are added to the fellows' timelines throughout the summer. Depending on the scope and intention of the projects, fellows may or may not see the completion of all projects. For example, one 2020 fellows group spent the summer creating a social marketing strategy but was still awaiting board approval from their sponsors by the time their in-community experience ended. To support the students during their experiences, RFI staff and faculty conduct bi-weekly zoom conversations, and travel to each community for a visit about half way through the 10 weeks to support and encourage participants. Furthermore, each

person participates in two one-hour confidential leadership coaching sessions. The coaching is done by RFI faculty and graduate students trained in leadership coaching.

Between the eight to ten weeks of the in-community experience, all fellows have the opportunity to engage in two leadership coaching sessions, regular RFI check-ins, a RFI community interview and more. The two leadership coaching sessions provide the opportunity for fellows to reflect on the type of leader they are and their relationship to inclusion. The coaches help facilitate this reflection and goal planning of how the fellows would like to develop as inclusive community leaders. The RFI check-ins are separated into two groups: student and community fellows. RFI staff has recognized that the experiences of both groups of fellows are unique and allowing fellows to meet with their peers from other communities may provide support and develop another level of identity of participating in the Fellows Program. For example, some community fellows would like to see certain projects such as marketing or video promotions implemented but have limited knowledge about the skills needed to accomplish the task. By creating a space for all RFI student fellows to meet regularly, students are able to ask for advice and expertise on how to complete the tasks that the community fellows may not be able to provide. To get a more in-depth understanding of the Fellows Program community experience than the check-ins, the RFI staff visits the communities once a summer and interviews each fellow. These interviews ask how the fellows are engaging in inclusive leadership as well as the successes and areas needed for improvement of the community experience.

Program Evaluations

Program evaluations (surveys, reflections, and interviews) identified the importance of the inclusive leadership development as a capacity building model. Specifically, the 2019 evaluation indicated that Pre-Academy helped fellows prepare for Academy. One participant

noted, “[Pre-Academy] really helped us see our differences and similarities as a team when we discussed the results during Academy.” Furthermore, evaluations indicated the importance of the Academy for student fellows before entering the community. The time students and community fellows spend together in Academy affects the comfort level and ability of the students to “hit the ground running”. Several community mentors stated, “this is the best practice any organization could embark on when bringing on new employees.” Capacity building is an ongoing process meaning the multifaceted approach to team development enables fellows to move through the stages of team development (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977) and get to performing more quickly. We find the content of the Pre-Academy and Academy does exactly that in the majority of the teams.

The 2018 and 2019 program evaluation indicate there are benefits to this program design. Multiple community leaders commented that this was the best team development they had ever experienced. A 2019 community innovation fellow had this to say about Academy, “the content and everything was great, but the people are what left an impact on me. I will never forget the academy experience. I can honestly say it was the best professional development that I have been to.” Students commented that they felt less anxious about going into the community and more comfortable about the role they would be playing in the team. Student and community fellows indicated the significance of learning inclusion originates within them, and is the antecedent to embracing each other’s perspective before creating inclusion with others in the community. Giving fellows the opportunity to utilize skills and knowledge learned in Pre-Academy, Academy, and leadership coaching, combined with the support of RFI staff and faculty, is central to successfully building capacity. Many ongoing leadership development programs fail because they consist of unconnected events (Day & Liu, 2019).

Measures of Success

The economic impact reports have been one of the largest indicators that the Serviceship and Fellows Program has been successful at helping rural communities financially. In addition to economic impact as a measure of success, there has been an increase in participants. The first year, there were six student participants with no community mentors who attended Serviceship's asset based community development training. This last year, the program had 17 students and 15 community mentors participate in the Fellows Program's inclusive community leadership development training. Please see Appendix B for more details from each year. The growing number of participants is important because as Kim Peterson (personal communication, August 18, 2020) mentioned in her interview, "students are allowed to contribute to projects that would likely not get done in a community." The greater the amount of people, the greater amount of potential impact, both economically and otherwise.

As Dr. Fagan (personal communication, August 13, 2020) emphasized in her interview, inclusive leadership is the central focus of the Fellows Program. To see if Pre-Academy, Academy, coaching, IDI consults, and more have a positive impact on community inclusion, IRB approved research began in 2020. This grounded theory research utilizes the Fellows Program as a case study for what inclusive leadership looks like outside of the traditional business office, something inclusive leadership scholars have fallen short on doing. The goal of this research is to create a theory-driven approach to help bridge across differences in communities. The impact of this research and the Fellows Program will span far greater than the communities the fellows are physically located in. For rural communities too small to find the funds, housing, time, or even available mentors for the program, these communities will be able to try to increase community inclusion--in their own way, on their own time.

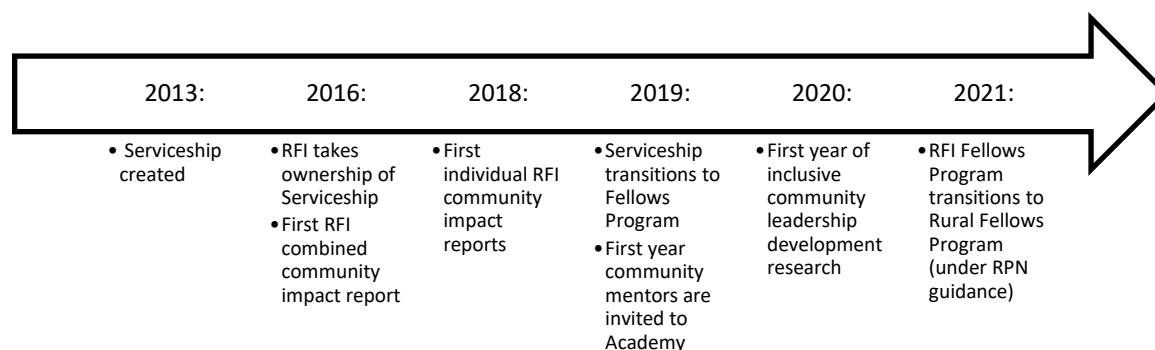
Fellows Program Moving Forward

While Rural Futures Institute had proven their success through the Fellows Program and other ongoing projects for rural Nebraska, leaders at the University of Nebraska strived to change direction in order to strengthen its connection with rural Nebraska. Therefore in the fall of 2019, university leadership determined the best way to do so would be consolidating organizations that have worked toward this mission into one central organization called Rural Prosperity Nebraska (RPN). RPN launched in August of 2020, officially marking the retirement of Rural Futures Institute as an organization. However, the legacy of Rural Futures Institute will carry on through the Fellows Program which has been arranged to move forward under Rural Prosperity Nebraska.

RPN brought together Nebraska Extension's statewide team of Community Vitality Initiative educators with NU's Rural Futures Institute. "Merging these two programs will allow NU to be more strategic, focused and holistic in engaging with Nebraska's rural community leaders to advance their communities in ways that are important to them" (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2020). In addition to this change, the Fellows Program has been renamed "Rural Fellows" to better identify the rural connection of the program. A timeline of important steps leading up to the now Rural Fellows can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 2

Fellows Program Timeline



Note. Many achievements with the Serviceship project and Fellows Program have been made since 2013. This timeline shows important advancement for the program.

This history of the Fellows Program is only a snapshot of what has led to the moment and the impact of the program on the university, rural communities, and all participants. Appendix C includes many of the individuals, organizations, and presentations which have positively impacted Rural Futures Institute and the Fellows Program. The primary documents and interviews with RFI partners and staff helped answer the research questions.

1. How has the Fellows Program evolved from the Serviceship program?
2. What is the current and potential impact of the Fellows Program?

One of the key differences in successfully transitioning from the Serviceship program to Fellows Program was the inclusion of community mentors into the inclusive community leadership development training. Not only has the training itself changed the theoretical focus of the

program, it allowed relationships to develop faster and more authentically between community innovation and student fellows.

The impact of the Fellows Program, from the viewpoint of Dr. Hastings, Dr. Fagan, and Kim Peterson, centered around the community. Student fellows and community fellows learn that inclusion is not restricted to their business office. Rather, when inclusion is emphasized and acted upon, projects are able to be accomplished. Student fellows learn from a transformational experience that their duty goes further than their job position. Their duty is to the community and how their job can better help others. As the Fellows Program staff start to plan for the next year as Rural Fellows, this impact is expected to continue and grow deeper as the inclusive community leadership development research continues.

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Appendix A

RFI Serviceship and Other Partners

RFI Partners

Serviceship

Key partners in the formation of Serviceship included Linda Major, Linda Moody, Engler Entrepreneurship, Nebraska Human Resources Institute (NHRI), College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR), Milan Wall, and Kurt Mantoya.

Businesses

Allied Health

Blue Cross Blue Shield

Cargill

DuPoint Pioneer

HyVee

Nebraska Enterprise Fund

Nemaha County Hospital

RMC Laboratory at Mazeno

Rocky Mountain Laboratories

Xpanxion Technologies, LLC

Government Agencies

Buffalo Economic Development

Cherry County Economic Development

Health & Human Services

McCook Economic Development

Nebraska Commission on Law

Enforcement

Nebraska Department of Economic
Development

Nebraska Department of Education

Nebraska Department of Labor

Nebraska Energy Office

Nebraska Game & Parks

Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association

Nebraska Juvenile Services Division

Nebraska Public Power District

Nebraska State Bar Association

Nebraska Tourism Commission

Ogallala Economic Development

Public Health Department

South Central Economic Development

Urban Development Department

USDA Rural Development

Valley County Economic Development

Organizations

Art Farm

Asian Cultural and Community Center

Box Butte Development Center

Cedar Point Biological Station

Center for Great Plains Studies

Center for Leadership Development

Center for Public Affairs Research

Center for Research & Development

Center for Rural Affairs

Center for Rural Entrepreneurship

El Comite Latino

Everyday Democracy

Foster Grandparent Program

Great Plains Ecotourism Coalition

GROW Nebraska

Habitat for Humanity

Hartley Neighborhood Association

Heartland Center for Leadership
Development

League of Nebraska Municipalities

Lied Center for Performing Arts

Main Street Beatrice

Midlands Mentoring Partnership

Midwest Theater

NamibRand Nature Reserve

Nebraska Alumni Association

Nebraska Art Teachers Association

Nebraska Association of County
Officials

Nebraska Campus Compact

Nebraska Center For Applied Rural
Innovation

Nebraska Community Foundation
Nebraskans for Civic Reform
Neighbor Works
North Central Regional Center for Rural
Development
North Platte Chamber of Commerce
North Platte Concert Association
Petrified Wood Art Museum
Phelps County Development Corporation
Platte Valley Literacy Association
RUPRI
Salina Art Center
Senior Corps of America
Sheldon Art Museum
Southern Heights Food Forest
The Aspen Institute
The St. Francis Hospital Foundation

University and College

Central Community College
Chadron State College
Doane University
Duke University
Grand Canyon University
Iowa State University
Louisiana State University
Michigan State University
Mount Empire Community College
North Dakota State University
Peru State College
Purdue University
Sinte Gleska University
South Dakota State University
University of Colorado
University of Missouri
University of Montana
University of Virginia-Wise
Wayne State College

Appendix B

Table of Serviceship and Fellows Program Logistics

Year	Program Name	Communities/ communities of practice	Students	Community Leaders	Program Length	Training	Pay Per Student
2013	Serviceship	3	6	N/A			\$1600 (Community: \$1200, RFI: \$400)
2014	Serviceship	4	8	N/A	8 weeks		\$2100 (Community: \$1200, RFI: \$900)
2015	Serviceship	4	7	N/A			\$2000 (Community: \$1200, RFI: \$800)
2016	Serviceship	5	9	N/A	9 weeks	2-week class preparation?	\$3,200 (Community: \$1200, RFI: \$2000)
2017	Serviceship	5	10	N/A	9 weeks	Synchronous 5 day in-person Academy	\$3,500 (Community: \$2500, RFI: \$1000)
2018	Serviceship	13	25	N/A			\$4000 (Community)
2019	Fellows Program	5	12	9	10 weeks	Asynchronous online Pre- Academy,	\$5000 (Community)

						synchronous in-person 3-day Academy	
2020	Fellows Program	7	17	15	8 weeks	Asynchronous online Pre-Academy, synchronous & asynchronous 3-day virtual Academy	\$4,000 (Community)

Appendix C

Staff, Organization Recognition, Related Organizations

RFI Staff Members

Name	Position	Period Served
Andrea Gebhart	Graduate Assistant of Multimedia Content	May 2012 - May 2013
Kim Peterson	Outreach Specialist/Director of Awards and Finance	September 2012 - Present
Mark Gustafson	Executive Director	September 2012 - December 2013
Kayla Schnuelle	Leadership Engagement Director & Network Weaver	September 2012 - March 2018
Rachael Herpel	Water Education/Outreach Specialist, 25%	September 2012 - June 2018
Andrea Gebhart	Multimedia Design Specialist	May 2013 - June 2014
Charles “Chuck” Schroeder	Executive Director	December 2013 - June 2018
Jordyn Bader	Graduate Research Assistant	August 2014 - July 2016
Matt Bryant	Graphic Design/Electronic Media Specialist	September 2014 - August 2015
Connie Reimers-Hild	Associate Director	May 2015 - July 2018
Lauren Simonsen	Graphic Design Specialist	September 2015 - September 2017
Theresa Klein	Administrative Associate/Director of Community Engagement	February 2016 - November 2019
Shawn Kaskie	Outreach Program Coordinator	May 2016 - June 2019
Katelyn Ideus	Director of Communications and Public Relations	August 2016 - August 2020
Connie Reimers-Hild	Interim Executive Director	July 2018 - June 2019

Mark Balschweid	Interim Executive Director	July 2019 - Present
Helen Fagan	Director of Leadership Engagement	April 2018 - Present
Samantha Guenther	Senior Fellow	April 2019 - August 2019
Samantha Guenther	Graduate Assistant, Lead on Fellows Programmatic	August 2019 - Present
Brooke Manny	Graduate Assistant, Lead on Fellows Program Research	August 2019 - Present
Gina Matkin	RFI Faculty Fellow	October 2019 - Present
Ferial Pearson	RFI Faculty Fellow	October 2019 - Present

Staff/Organization Recognition

Over the several years that Serviceship and the Fellows Program operated, both faculty and staff were invited to a number of conferences and presentations to discuss the program. These events were significant in building connections and sharing how a successful program operates with faculty, scholars, community leaders and others. Those include, but are not limited to:

Rural Futures Conference: These conferences were designed to bring stakeholders and rural community leaders together to bolster innovation in rural places. The conferences collectively brought over 1,000 national attendees to discuss how to engage rural places through conference sessions, keynote speakers, poster sessions, rural career fairs, and more.

- May 8-10, 2012 in Lincoln, Nebraska
- November 3-5, 2013 in Lincoln, Nebraska
- October 2015 in Curtis and Lincoln, Nebraska

Regional Forums: The RFI Regional Forums each included a regional tour that showcased regional development successes that emphasize growing economies, RFI-funded projects energizing leadership and enhancing community vitality. Forum participants also heard from local leaders on how their collaborative efforts have paid off in business growth, downtown redevelopment, expanded opportunities for further education and increasing quality of life for all generations, including youth and young adults.

- September and October 2014 in Broken Bow, Nebraska City, and Scottsbluff, Nebraska
- September 2016 in Chadron, North Platte and West Point, Nebraska

Rural Futures Webinars: These webinars provided attendees insight on rural communities in the United Kingdom and Australia.

- “What more do we need to know?” with Professor Richard Wakeford of the United Kingdom (November 2015)
- “Civic Health Webinar” with Dr. Jim Cavaye of Australia (July 2015)

Visiting Presenter, Paul Genho, PhD: Agricultural systems expert Paul Genho offered his thoughts on the changes to come of the beef industry during the 2016 Leu Distinguished Lecture

- October 31, 2016

Panel Discussion with Rural Japanese Entrepreneurs and Community Leaders: In partnership with New York City-based Japan Society, the Rural Futures Institute (RFI) at the University of Nebraska will hosted five Japanese entrepreneurs and community leaders for a panel discussion entitled, “A Thriving Rural Future in Japan and the United States.” Rural communities in Japan and the United States face similar challenges such as recruitment and retention of young people, decline of primary and local industries, and sustainability of natural resources. Panelists and guests explored alternative models, best practices and strategies for creating resilient and vibrant rural communities of the future.

- October 17, 2017 in Lincoln, Nebraska

Rural Futures Institute Podcast: Connie Reimers-Hild, Ph.D., hosted a weekly podcast which encouraged listeners to expand their perspective for social justice, economic growth and leadership through the lenses of exponential change, disruptive leadership and the evolution of humanity. Guests included futurists, researchers, rural mavericks and students who are smashing barriers for the sake of a thriving rural-urban future.

- 3 seasons from 2018-2019. A total of 31 episodes.

Microsoft GM with Shelley McKinley: The General Manager of Microsoft’s Technology and Corporate Responsibility Group presented “Let’s Connect The World To Change The World,” where she shared how the company is connecting people, so everyone has access to the opportunities that technology provides. She expanded on the use of technology, such as artificial intelligence, to create environmental sustainability, connect 1 billion people around the world with disabilities and prepare the workforce of the future.

- March 28, 2018 at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Friedman Seminar Series: Chuck Schroeder and Connie Reimers-Hild presented on how the Rural Futures Institute worked to overcome the major disruptions and exponential transformations that create new challenges and opportunities in rural places. April 4, 2018 at Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts

Great Plains Symposium: The conference will feature sessions for business leaders, ranchers, and community partners as well as wider discussions about how to preserve the stunning bounty of Great Plains ecology. It will examine local and global models of conservation and tourism, including speakers from southern Africa where tourism has had stunning success in supporting conservation. Katelyn Ideus, Director of Communications & Public Relations at RFI, presented, “Create a Bold Story,” which explained how rural needs to tell its story “better.”

- April 18-20, 2018 in Kearney, Nebraska

Keynote at Omaha World-Herald, Nebraska Press Association Annual Banquet: In her keynote address at the banquet during the Nebraska Press Association annual conference, RFI Associate Executive Director and Chief Futurist Connie Reimers-Hild, Ph.D., shared personal stories of delivering the newspaper in West Point, Neb., every Wednesday at age 9, bold

methodologies around strategic foresight and the state of exponential change we are currently experiencing as an intertwined and combined society.

- April 20, 2018 in Lincoln, Nebraska

Rural Japan Immersion through Japan Society Presentation: During a 10-day immersion throughout Japan, primarily in rural communities, Connie Reimers-Hild, Ph.D., shared her framework of strategic foresight and emphasized the empowerment of women as a key focus for rural communities in both countries. Reimers-Hild first presented at the forum, “When Local Wisdom Goes Global,” which focused on the dissemination of information, emphasizing that it is now possible for an organization in a small town, a village, or even a hamlet to disseminate information that ends up having a global reach, and receive direct feedback from individuals and organizations anywhere in the world. She also presented with her U.S. counterparts at the forum, “Challenges in Regional Revitalization: Insights from American and Japanese Rural Innovators,” which addressed the common challenges of depopulation, low-birth rate and declining local economies in both rural U.S. and rural Japan.

- October 2018 at Ehime University in Matsuyama, Japan

Women’s Forum Global Meeting: Bringing a distinctly female perspective to defining strategies to create the conditions for action, global leaders from society and economy convened at this year’s meeting to bridge divides and move towards more inclusive progress for all of humanity. During the “Designing Cities and Economies for the Future” panel Connie Reimers-Hild, Ph.D., contributed her futurist lens and rural perspective to the conversation that addressed the expected shift of the majority of the global population to cities by 2050.

- November 16, 2018 in Paris, France

Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference: This conference provided a holistic look at how to foster a supportive entrepreneurial culture in communities and how a community can develop its sense of place. Shawn Kaskie, Outreach Project Coordinator, presented “Community Fellows – It’s a Transformational Experience!”

- April 24, 2019 in Beatrice, Nebraska

Pre-Academy: Pre-Academy provided Fellows Program participants an asynchronous virtual training introduction to inclusive community leadership development and topics relevant to the upcoming summer’s fellowship experience. Topics included intercultural mindset, inclusive leadership, entrepreneurship, group dynamics, strengths, Myers-Briggs personalities, facilitation, and more.

- May 2019
- May 2020

Academy: The synchronous Academy training provided Fellows Program participants opportunities to meet with their community team, set goals for the summer, and learn about emotional intelligence over several days.

- May 2019 in Kearney, Nebraska
- June 2020 Online

Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute Conference: Theresa Klein and Samantha Guenther presented about rural community diversity and inclusion, as well as the opportunity to engage in the Fellows Program, to Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute students from across Nebraska.

- July 2019 at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Nebraska Thriving Index Presentations & Publication: The first economic and quality of life benchmarking tool for rural Nebraska. The Index provides context and general summaries of patterns and trends for eight regions in rural Nebraska.

- First annual report published fall 2019
- September 16, 2019 in Kearney, Nebraska at the 2019 Thriving Children, Families and Communities Conference
- Second annual report to be published 2020

Leadership Tomorrow: Samantha Guenther and former student fellow, Megan Coan, presented about the opportunity to engage in the Fellows Program to a leadership development group in Aurora, Nebraska, called Leadership Tomorrow. The purpose of this presentation was to share the impact that Rural Futures Institute was making across the state, share the new Thriving Index tool, and encourage Aurora to participate.

- September 2019 in Aurora, Nebraska

Inclusive Leadership Development: Advancing High-Quality Early Childhood Education: Presented by Dr. Helen Fagan, Terri Haynes, Sandy Roes, and Rachel Sissel, attendees learned about the Fellows Program and the recent shift to inclusive community leadership development.

- September 16, 2019 in Kearney, Nebraska at the 2019 Thriving Children, Families and Communities Conference

International Leadership Association Global Conference Presentation

- “Bringing inclusive leadership to the classroom: The impact of merging co-curricular and curricular experiences” will be presented by Dr. Helen Fagan, Samantha Guenther, and Brooke (Manny) Wells in November 2020

Related Organizations

UNL Extension

Nebraska’s Extension program was designed to provide and maintain educational materials, events, and programs designed to help all Nebraskans better their communities and workplaces. Extension agents located across Nebraska target areas of the state to bring those residents the resources and educational materials needed.

Community Vitality Initiative

As a sector of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Extension organization, the Community Vitality Initiative’s mission is to engage with communities and the resource providers within to help grow and improve current community and business practices. The purpose behind this is to help grow local businesses, create vibrant communities, and engage the future generation within their community.