



# NEWS from the FOUNDATION



## **The Fellowship Experience at El Pomar Foundation: At the Nexus of a Changing World**

*Joan Shields – Senior Vice President of Leadership and Director of the Fellowship*

Since El Pomar Foundation's Fellowship was founded in 1991, it has strived to prepare young leaders to enter the professional world and make immediate impact on the communities of Colorado and beyond. As the 30-year anniversary of the Fellowship approaches, we at the Foundation have taken time to reflect on and celebrate the many things that have made the program successful over the years. The 30-year mark — intersecting with a global pandemic — is also a perfect opportunity to examine how the shifting tides of an increasingly digital and interconnected workplace inform our work in preparing Fellows to be highly effective leaders in their future endeavors.

Over the past year, in partnership with White River Strategy, we completed a strategic analysis of the Fellowship program. In conversations with Foundation staff, Trustees, Fellowship alumni, community stakeholders and future employers, it was made remarkably clear that the program has achieved and continues to achieve its core tenets. Fellows leave the program with heightened sensibilities in project management, professionalism, resourcefulness, creating strong working relationships and a much deeper knowledge of the diverse communities around Colorado. The continual opportunities for learning and growth, in a real-world setting, are what make the program so impactful. As a Fellowship leadership team, we have taken this analysis as an opportunity to grow and apply learnings in order to remain a premier postgraduate opportunity.

Perhaps the most important shift taking place in the Fellowship is a transition from a focus on nonprofit management to community leadership. Fellows have always come from diverse backgrounds and go on to work in a broad array of fields, and we believe that applying a lens of community leadership will allow current and future Fellows to more broadly apply their learnings regardless of whether they choose to stay in the nonprofit sector.

In conjunction with this new framing, we continue to intentionally adapt the professional development curriculum to explore the meaning of community leadership. Fellows will have the opportunity to obtain professional certifications in the “hard skills” many employers seek in the 21st century workplace to go along with the ample training in interpersonal “soft skills” embedded in the program. Over the coming years, we aim to foster relationships with other young professional groups to expand Fellows’ understanding of what entering different sectors will entail after their time at the Foundation. Though the pandemic has separated many of us physically, it has provided occasion to re-explore partnerships and re-think the way that mission-minded organizations can collaborate for a collective learning experience.

Finally, with nearly 300 Fellowship alumni in Colorado and around the country and world, we hope to continue strengthening Fellows’ exposure to networking and mentorship structures. Developing relationships with alumni has long been an integral part of the Fellowship and keeping those connections involved in our professional development structure is a top priority.

Coming to the Foundation last June has been a wonderful step in my own professional journey. After a career in the healthcare world and executive leadership development, it has been refreshing to step into the philanthropic world and work closely with early career leaders as they begin taking steps to be dynamic community leaders. I feel very fortunate to be a part of a program and a Foundation that has long balanced an appreciation for tradition and excellence with an eye on the future. I am confident that El Pomar's Fellowship will continue to grow and provide Fellows with an unmatched experiential learning environment for years to come.