

## THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY

**DIVERSITY**

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May 5, 2013

## Program Grooms Racial and Ethnic Minorities to Lead Gay Organizations

*By Michelle Gienow*

Clarence Patton says he had selfish reasons for founding the Pipeline Project: He wanted more company at the top of the career ladder.

Mr. Patton, who is African-American, has spent his entire career working for nonprofit groups that serve lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. But he noticed that “the higher up I got, the fewer peers I had that looked like me.”

And data back up his experience.

Just 4 percent of executive directors of groups that serve lesbians and gays are black, Hispanic, Asian, or members of other ethnic and racial minority groups, according to a 2008 study he cites by the Movement Advancement Project, a group that studies such nonprofits. But that is the profile of more than one-third of those LGBT nonprofits’ members.

The lack of diversity ultimately limits the power of the gay movement, says Linda Wood, senior director of the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, one of several grant makers that support Pipeline’s efforts to build leadership skills among minorities who work for LGBT nonprofits.

Ms. Wood notes that of the 36 graduates from Pipeline’s leadership program thus far, 15 have already gone on to more senior positions and three more have become executive directors of their organizations.

“The numbers speak for themselves,” she says. “Pipeline is creating and

strengthening a community network of LGBT leaders of color.”

Haas, the Arcus Foundation, the Gill Foundation, and other grant makers together provide \$600,000 a year to pay Pipeline’s budget.

Participants don’t pay anything to participate in the yearlong leadership-training program. All of their expenses, including travel, are covered.

### **'Hungry' for Training**

Among the success stories: Rashad Robinson, a member of the first class of Pipeline’s 21st Century Fellows, who has gone on to become the executive director of ColorOfChange, a civil-rights group.

Before his fellowship, he says, “I’d always been really skilled at communications and media but had no experience putting together and managing an effective staff.”

Since nonprofit groups are typically unable to afford to send workers to leadership-development programs, Mr. Robinson says, he was “hungry” for what the program had to offer.

He particularly appreciated that each student is given a “wallet” (a cash grant of up to \$3,500) at the beginning of the class, allowing him or her to pay for additional training outside the Pipeline program.

Mr. Robinson dipped into his “wallet” to hire an executive coach to help him tackle his leadership challenges. Together, they also developed a plan for how he should allocate his time and make the most of his skills over the next 15 to 20 years as a leader of social-justice groups.

Indeed, says Mr. Patton, who used to be executive director of the New York City Anti-Violence Project, a crucial aspect of the Pipeline Project goes beyond simply identifying and nurturing aspiring leaders.

“We are very concerned with building sustainability,” he says. “There are few people of color leading LGBT organizations because they leave before they get to the top, because they see they are unlikely to get there—and so often they are not leaving

happy, well, or gratefully.”

Mr. Robinson agrees that one of the program’s most crucial functions is helping future leaders within the movement until they can claim a corner office. He has observed that board members, seeing the Pipeline Project in action in their own organizations, have grown more responsive to the fact that so few CEOs are minorities.

“More and more, people are seeing that the problem isn’t a shortage of qualified LGBT people of color,” says Mr. Robinson. “It’s that they’re not looking in our direction when filling those positions.”

### **Building a Pipeline**

The Pipeline Project was first conceived in 2006 during an annual retreat held by the New York City LGBT Executive Directors Group, when participants first discussed their movement’s critical need for more diverse leadership.

Two years later, a \$35,000 grant from the Arcus Foundation helped Pipeline get started.

The group accepted its first class of 20 fellows in 2009. To date, two classes have graduated and a third is nearing completion. Candidates are nominated by their executive directors and selected with an eye to diversity in race, gender, and geography.

Mr. Patton says the most recent group of fellows includes minorities who are not currently working at organizations that primarily serve gays and lesbians

“It’s important to be connecting with, and connecting together, folks currently outside the movement,” he says. “So they can see that there is a leadership future for them within it.”

### **Several Retreats**

Fellows participate in four to six retreats over a year to learn practical skills like communications, managing and organization, and overseeing finances.

During retreats, the fellows identify their leadership style; then everyone participates in exercises so people can learn what it's like to work with people who have other approaches to leadership.

Fellows also work to create an individual leadership-development plan so each may chart his or her trajectory of professional achievement. "So many negative portrayals are typically assigned to people of color that taking control of your own story is an incredibly empowering exercise," Mr. Patton says.

The fellows program hires faculty members to work with the fellows throughout their year and recruits specialists to teach parts of each program.

While the leadership skills the fellows learn matter most, they also appreciate something less tangible, says Ms. Wood, of Haas. Many fellows say "how much this means to them that funders are supporting them to develop their own leadership abilities while creating a network of leaders of color."

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## 21st Century Fellows Program

**Sponsor:** The Pipeline Project

**Who's eligible:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) people of color who are currently managers at human-rights, service, and advocacy organizations, with an emphasis on those working at LGBT organizations.

**Cost to participants:** Free.

**To apply:** Go to the Pipeline Project [Web site](#).

**Deadline for applications:** Application period opens in July 2013.

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