



**Fund the
People Toolkit**

Field Stories
Bush Foundation





Bush Foundation

bushfoundation.org

At a Glance



Type:	Private foundation
Service Area:	Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, 23 Native nations
Assets:	\$883 million
Founded:	1953 by 3M executive Archibald Bush and his wife, Edith
Recent Talent Investments:	Bush Fellowships; Leadership Ecosystem Grants; Native Nation Rebuilders

The Bush Foundation has a strong reputation for building leaders, going back to 1964 when it created the Bush Fellows program, which still continues today. Given the scope, reach, and impact of the Bush Fellows program and the depth of its other investments in non-profit talent and leadership development, one might assume that the Bush Foundation is a national funder. However, this St. Paul-based foundation is solidly focused on Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and the 23 Native nations that share that geography.

“We’re place based, and, as such, we are fundamentally limited by the ambitions and skills of the people here. That’s both our biggest strategic constraint and our biggest opportunity,” explains Jennifer Ford Reedy, Foundation president. “If we’re not thinking about capacity and growing it, we’re missing a fundamental

issue. We talk and think about ‘great ideas and the people who power them.’ We want people here to be inspired, equipped, and connected to get that work done.”

That’s a sentiment shared by Bush Foundation Board Chair Pam Moret, who served as a senior executive in two Fortune 500 companies and as a start-up company CEO. “There are a lot of similarities between the business and nonprofit sectors, in that you are trying to help people gain a better understanding of how to have impact through leadership. I think of leadership as a means of leverage. It’s how you multiply the impact of one person by having him or her be an effective leader and translate their own philosophy and impact to others. I think that’s considerably more difficult in the nonprofit world.”



Over the years, the Bush Foundation has explored leadership development from many different angles. The Bush Fellowship is highly individualized and allows fellows to completely design their own experience. On the other hand, the Native Nation Rebuilders program is cohort based, with the specific purpose of developing new leaders for tribal governance. And a two-year pilot series of Leadership Network Grants, which supported individual organizations in their work to develop leaders, has now evolved into the just-launched Leadership Ecosystem Grants that will support organizations that are building and maintaining networks of leaders.

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Bush Fellows

The Bush Fellowship program has taken different forms over the years, depending on the criteria and approaches that are deemed most likely to resonate in the community and create a transformational experience for the fellows. Currently, the fellowship is extremely flexible, allowing applicants to propose just about any plan imaginable for improving their own leadership skills, from pursuing a graduate degree to traveling abroad to study indigenous cultures to mastering meditation and mindfulness.

Former Bush Fellows, community members, and Foundation board members are all involved in the selection process. They look for applicants who are active learners

“The Bush Fellowship is a constant. It’s probably the one thing board members would never be willing to discard.”

and inspiring individuals with a sense of purpose. The process itself is intense, since applicants must present a thoroughly considered plan for development and then interview with eight community leaders. “The Foundation grants fellowships to up to 24 people a year, which is about a 3.5 percent acceptance rate.”

“Because the fellowships are so individualized, the experience is different for every person”, says Anita Patel, leadership programs director. To kick off the beginning of their 12–24 month \$100,000 fellowship, fellows gather for a launch retreat to work through the elements and logistics of their fellowships. “We work with fellows to solidify their plans and budgets. We ask if they are thinking big enough, and how they are creating space for the work they want to do. In order to ensure a solid link between leadership development and skills around equity and inclusion, they take the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to help them learn how they perceive themselves, where their strengths and opportunities lie, and how they can incorporate that knowledge into their plan.”



Fellows also start connecting with one another in ways that mutually support and challenge each of them. All are assigned a fellowship coach who asks tough questions, pushes when needed, helps to celebrate milestones, and serves as a touch point throughout the experience.

Even the experience of being turned down for a Bush Fellowship is a leadership development opportunity. Those who don't make it receive coaching on how they might strengthen their applications and when they should apply again. In some cases, former Bush Fellows help coach them through the improvement process.

"As years go by and the world changes, some programs come and go. But the Bush Fellowship is one constant—

it is the thing we always want to measure better and look at in a contemporary way," says Moret. "It's probably the one thing board members would never be willing to discard."

Reedy admits that she questioned the investment when she first took the reins. "When I got this job, I thought investing in individuals was a really expensive way to do philanthropy, and very hard to measure. Then, over and over, I heard from Bush Fellows about how the experience really made a difference and changed what they thought was possible in their lives. That was a giant 'aha' for me. I realized that when we invested in people in a way that changed their capacity, it's affected everything they've done since. That's very valuable."

Native Nation Rebuilders

Jaime Pinkham (Nez Perce), senior advisor to the Native Governance Center (funded by the Bush Foundation), traces the roots of the Native Nation Rebuilders program back to a conversation with a tribal leader who made a case for creating a strong connection between leadership development and community engagement.

"He told me, 'There are a lot of people who want to be leaders, but the kind of change you're talking about requires community change. They expect tribal leaders to carry that effort, but the community has to participate. We need leaders who can work alongside political institutions,'" Pinkham recalls. "He wasn't talking about elected leaders, but community leaders who could provide a bridge between the government and the people. That became the premise of the Rebuilders program."

In 2008, the Bush Foundation identified creating Native nation leaders as a "goal for the decade." "We decided to get on it and build as we go," says Pinkham. "We'd put together seminars, learn from the cohort, and take our

cue from them." The Native Nations Rebuilders program officially launched in 2009.

Bush chose the Native Nations Institute (NNI) at the University of Arizona to create a nation-building curriculum and handle the scheduling and logistics for each cohort. The Foundation selected participants and approved the framework for the two-year program. Participants gather at quarterly seminars co led by NNI and Bush Foundation staff, and the Foundation covers all of their travel, lodging, and food expenses. (Recently, the Bush Foundation transferred operations of the program to the Native Governance Center, which works with NNI to deliver the program.)

The first year of the program, participants learn the tenets of nation building, leadership skills, interpersonal skills, and grassroots organizing. In the second year, they create action plans to begin and sustain a nation-building dialog in their communities. As of 2016, 122 people from 20 of the 23 eligible nations had



completed or were enrolled in the program, and they were formulating or executing plans to engage their communities in conversations about nation building and more. Rebuilder graduates now hold posts as elected leaders in tribal, state, and local governments, sit on their states' Indian Cabinet, and work for federal or state agencies.

The cohort approach was key, says Pinkham. "We wanted them to learn and share together, and build relationships that last. We brought the first four cohorts together for a reunion, and the Native Governance Center is currently planning a Rebuilders 2.0 program to provide

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additional support and resources to boost their impact." In order to build the program, the Bush Foundation had to embrace some ambiguity, says Pinkham. "We had a 10-year window, and we had to be comfortable with starting without a clear-cut strategy and improving over time. There's some risk involved in that."

There also was the challenge of bringing together diverse tribes with different cultures, languages, and traditions. To accommodate this diversity and at the same time remain agnostic, the Native Governance Center leaves the definition of each cohort's culture up to each cohort. "Cultural leaders naturally emerge," says Pinkham, "so we don't have to invent it."

Pinkham adds that the Rebuilders program is helping repair damage sustained from decades of federal policies that did not recognize traditional forms of tribal governance, and it helps tribes embrace an opportunity to rebuild governance models that are culturally appropriate. "Ultimately, the system of government has to reflect the needs and visions of the tribes, not the vision that is pushed on them."

Internal Investment

All Bush Foundation staff spend time on talent and leadership development in some way, because building human capacity is a core strategy for making change in the region. But specific programs have more quantifiable investments.

For example, four staff support the Bush Fellowship, and the Foundation invests approximately \$3 million

each year in the program. The Native Nation Rebuilders program was developed by the Foundation in 2009 with the attention of three staff members. In 2016, the Foundation launched the Native Governance Center (NGC), now incorporated as a separate non-profit. The Native Nation Rebuilders program was moved from Bush to NGC.



Quick Case 1

A Life-Changing Opportunity

Gary Cunningham's resume is impressive. He's currently the President and CEO of the Metropolitan Economic Development Association (Meda), a minority business development firm. He's served as a hospital CEO and a vice president at the Northwest Area Foundation. He's been in senior leadership positions with school districts and with county and state government agencies. He's won numerous awards and serves on several boards. But there is one item on his resume that Cunningham describes as "life changing" — becoming a Bush Fellow.

Back in the late 1980s, Cunningham was researching the lack of women and people of color in real estate positions in Minneapolis. He proposed a pioneering new

"The network matters. It opens all kinds of doors. Your views get expanded, your network gets expanded, and your knowledge gets expanded."

scholarship program to encourage women and people of color to move into higher-level management positions in real estate (a program that still exists today). That work got the attention of another Bush Fellow, who told Cunningham about the program.

"I was excited, but then I didn't apply right away," says Cunningham. "I knew I wanted to use the fellowship to go to graduate school at Harvard, but I had three to four years of rigorous coursework ahead of me before I could get accepted there."

Fast-forward to 1991, and Cunningham's plan to attend Harvard's Kennedy School of Government to learn how to help shape public policy won him a Bush Fellowship.

"The Bush Fellowship allowed me an opportunity I never would have had otherwise," says Cunningham. "I wouldn't have gone to Harvard without it. I would have had a totally different life trajectory. I knew I was at a point in my career where I couldn't move to the next level without management, analysis, and human resources skills. Harvard's program was the best fit, and it was a powerful experience."

Getting through the fellowship application process wasn't easy. Cunningham took a psychological exam, aptitude tests, and completed an "intense" application process. Later, after his fellowship was complete, he returned to the application process as part of the selection committee, helping to evolve and hone the process over the next ten years. He spoke at applicant workshops and coached those who weren't selected so that they would reapply. "I'd do anything Bush asked me to," he says. "The whole process is a class act."

It's also a valuable one. Cunningham has stayed engaged with a growing network of Bush Fellows from all walks of life, building lifelong bonds. "The network matters, particularly as you move up in your career," he says. "It opens all kinds of doors and shifts your trajectory to a higher level. Your views get expanded, your network gets expanded, and your knowledge gets expanded. It has opened up more and more opportunities that I wouldn't have had — almost all in service roles."

"I still feel the impact more than 20 years later," he adds. "The Bush Fellowship has had a huge impact on the quality, output, and impact of the sector in our region. It's changed the universe in the three states in which the Foundation operates, and well beyond."



Quick Case 2

Finding a Voice

In 2003, drunk drivers killed six of Crystal Owen's relatives. For two years, she turned inward and remained silent, but that changed when she decided she wanted to do more to raise awareness and help others in her community.

"Before that, I wasn't someone who spoke out in public," she says. "I wanted to learn more about how I could make a better impact."

As she began to engage in her community, she noticed a lack of facilitators, public speakers, and community organizers. People seemed unaware of the need for grassroots leadership, and it was hard to motivate them toward community action.

"I wanted to be the person in my community who would be able to help," she says. "I wanted to learn more and speak out, and find different ways to engage my community in conversation and in taking action toward issues that are important to them. I wanted to help them use their voices."

She joined the Native Nation Rebuilders in 2013 and discovered a wealth of new skills to help achieve her vision.

"The curriculum was eye-opening and challenging, and it made me want to do my best," she says. "I was in a group of other like-minded individuals, we all had hope, and we wanted to find solutions to common problems."

For Owen, the skills surrounding communication were especially helpful. "A lot of times in our community, people will get up and speak from the heart, and that's nice, but I wanted to learn other ways to get messages across — especially when talking to different audiences. I learned messaging, presentation, and facilitation skills. Now I can share my story more effectively and encourage others to do likewise."

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As a Rebuilders graduate, Owen became the host of her own weekly talk show, "Getting Real About Life with Crystal," on the tribal radio station for two hours each Wednesday. Before long, she decided to run for office.

"I knew that through the tribal political system, I could probably do a lot more to get ideas out there and get others to take part in the process," she says. She ran for the post of Tribal Secretary, winning her primary and general elections but then facing a recount challenge that ended up in court before she finally was declared the victor.

"I saw how ugly politics can be, but I didn't let that hold me back," she says. "I hit the ground running and am up for re-election this fall."

As Tribal Secretary, Owen oversees 25 health and welfare programs. She points with pride to her ability to garner support from the majority of her community and help her program managers succeed. "I love using the skills I learned in Rebuilders to help those who run the programs to really listen to the community. I empower others to work together," she says.

"My viewpoint has become very hopeful. Service to community keeps the focus on future generations. Rebuilders really helped me to set a good foundation for that."



Lessons Learned

1

Learn continuously

Funders can and should learn throughout a leadership development process or program. Evaluations are an important tool for understanding the benefits of helping people think through their own leadership values, goals, and vision. Funders can also share knowledge and ideas by sharing the lessons and stories of what leaders are learning. The Bush Foundation has learning logs on its website that allow Bush Fellows to share what they are learning and to inspire others.

2

Leadership development – investing in people – must be part of any strategy

No matter what you're trying to take on, investing in leaders who power projects and ideas is critical. This is not an add-on. It's part of achieving your own mission.

3

Leadership and equity and inclusion work are one and the same

Funders need to be aware of and address the implicit bias in their selection process that may limit who is seen as

a leader and what their characteristics “should” be. This means that everyone needs to be committed to developing their own self-awareness and intercultural competency skills.

4

Look at it as long term

“You can't think of leadership development as a three-year program, unless you are incredibly constrained by a particular group or project,” says Bush Foundation Board Chair Moret. Funders need to be aware of and address the implicit bias in their selection process that may limit who is seen as a leader and what their characteristics “should” be. This means that everyone needs to be committed to developing their own self-awareness and intercultural competency skills.

5

Push for the personal

“When you're seeking a fellowship, you're often programmed to think about a project with a specific outcome,” says Leadership Programs Director Patel. “But in leadership development, the project is you. How are you stronger? It can take a lot of coaching to help people realize what they're learning, how to internalize it, how they are growing and changing, and how to bring that forward.”



Looking Ahead

With Bush Fellows and Native Nation Rebuilders now numbering in the thousands, the impact of Bush Foundation's leadership building work is apparent throughout the region. The Foundation takes an active role in promoting the work of its leadership graduates through social media, an online magazine, and a searchable database of graduates from both programs.

Within each program, the Foundation will continue to hone and refine both its selection processes and the experiences in which participants engage. It will also

continue to look for ways to support connections and networks among program alumni.

"Leadership development is a part of the Bush Foundation's history, woven into everything we do. There may be new programs or new ways of supporting leaders that emerge, but our core commitment will remain the same," says Moret. "Talent and leadership development is absolutely essential to achieving impact in our region, so I anticipate it will be an integral part of our focus always."





Bush Foundation Leadership Programs

Program name	Bush Fellows	Native Nation Rebuilders	Leadership Ecosystem Grants
Target participants	Extraordinary leaders who have the potential for even greater impact	Enrolled citizens of 23 Native nations	Organizations that build and sustain leaders, organizations that shape the field of leadership
Number of participants per year	Up to 24	About 20 per year	TBD
Content partner	Individualized according to each participant	Native Nations Institute	TBD
Topics covered	Individualized according to each participant	Nation building tenets, community engagement	TBD
Time commitment	12–24 months	2 years	2 years
Annual program cost	\$2.5 million	About \$500k per year	\$700,000
Year started	1964	2009	2016



About Fund the People



Fund the People is the national campaign to maximize investment in the nonprofit workforce. To achieve this goal, we make the case, equip for action, and build a movement to change the attitudes and behaviors of funders, fundraising nonprofits, and the intermediaries that support them. There is a long-standing, sector-wide deficit of investment in the nonprofit workforce. Nonprofit professionals work in environments typified by high burnout and stretched resources. So there is a real demand for equitable salaries and benefits, more and better professional development, improved

human resources functions, and healthy organizational culture. Together, we can address these challenges by reshaping existing resources to prioritize nonprofit people as the central asset of nonprofit performance. Now more than ever, we can ensure that America's civic leadership is diverse, well-supported, high-performing, and sustainable for the long haul. Launched in 2014 and headquartered in Beacon, NY, Fund the People (originally known as Talent Philanthropy Project) is a project of Community Partners. Our work is informed by an Advisory Council of diverse leaders and a team of skilled staff and consultants, and is supported by a coalition of regional and national foundations.

To learn more about Fund the People visit:
fundthepeople.org

Acknowledgments

Authored by Elizabeth Russell and Kris Putnam-Walkerly, MSW, Putnam Consulting Group. Fund the People commissioned the firm to produce this field story which part of the field story collection in the Fund the People Toolkit, a source of practical resources meant to help funders and nonprofits to maximize their investment in the nonprofit workforce.

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