

Nehemiah

Emerging Leaders Program

Presented by
Nehemiah Leaders Programs

IMPACT REPORT

2009-2025



Greetings



“These outcomes confirm what we believed at the outset: when emerging leaders receive rigorous development, high-stakes experiences, and a network committed to their ascent, the ripple effects reach every stakeholder.”

Fifteen years ago, NELP was created because Sacramento’s celebrated diversity was not yet reflected in the senior ranks of its employers or on the boards that shape public life. The gap was not one of talent but of access: communities of color were rich in potential leaders, yet under-represented in decision-making seats that guide capital, policy and culture.

Since its launch, NELP has graduated 238 professionals drawn almost evenly from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. Alumni now steward multi-billion-dollar operating budgets and direct workforces that number in the thousands, translating education, experience and insight into regional economic strategy.

Their civic footprint is equally substantial: they hold hundreds of board and commission appointments, often entering rooms where they are the first—or only—voice for their segment of the community.

By demonstrated performance, NELP graduates’ presence opens the doors to other diverse, equally qualified talents whose new voices strengthen their organizations, while bringing fresh perspectives to the tables of power, influence, and decision-making. These outcomes confirm what we believed at the outset: when emerging leaders receive rigorous development, high-stakes experiences, and a network committed to their ascent, the ripple effects reach every stakeholder—from neighborhood entrepreneurs to Fortune-listed companies.

This progress belongs to an extended coalition of Fellows who invested the hard work, to employers who have supported their ascent, to partners who underwrote scholarships, and to mentors who opened doors. Your collective commitment has transformed an audacious idea into a durable engine for C-suite and civic leadership.

As you read this report, I invite you to stay in the arena—keep nominating promising professionals, keep funding bold curricula, and keep challenging systems to reflect the full brilliance of the Greater Sacramento region. Together we can ensure that the next fifteen years produce an even deeper bench of home-grown leaders ready to serve, innovate, and inspire.

Scott C. Syphax

Board Chair, Nehemiah Leaders Programs
Founder, Nehemiah Emerging Leaders Program





“In a time when equity, inclusion, and representative leadership are being questioned—even challenged—we remain steadfast.”

For 15 years, the Nehemiah Emerging Leaders Program has been a quiet force with a powerful mission: to expand the supply of leaders in our region. What started as a vision to cultivate diverse, community-rooted leaders has grown into a movement—one that has placed 238 Fellows on more than 430 seats on boards, commissions, and leadership roles across Northern California.

This work hasn't always been easy. In a time when the values of equity, inclusion, and representative leadership are being challenged—we remain steadfast. While some systems resist change, we continue to be the change. Our Fellows are not just participating in conversations about power—they are leading, transforming, and building new venues where all voices are valued.

This Impact Report is more than a reflection of where we've been. It is evidence of our resilience, our results, and our refusal to back down from the work of building a region that truly reflects the people who call it home.

And... we are just getting started.

Deneva Shelton,
CEO, Nehemiah Leaders Programs
NELP Class IX



A message from our sponsor

At Peregrine Strategies, we believe inclusive leadership is the foundation of a thriving region. That is why we are proud to sponsor the Nehemiah Emerging Leaders Program's Impact Report.

For over 15 years, NELP has empowered diverse leaders to step forward with vision and purpose—strengthening communities, shaping organizations, and ensuring leadership reflects the voices of all who call this region home.

As we look ahead, it is essential that NELP continues this important work. The challenges and opportunities before us require bold, prepared leaders committed to equity and progress. We are honored to celebrate NELP's impact and excited for all that is yet to come.

Nanette Farag
CEO, Peregrine Strategies

About us

History

The Nehemiah Emerging Leaders Program (NELP) originated from the Nehemiah Community Foundation, which was founded in 2000. The Foundation itself traces its roots back to the Nehemiah Corporation of America (NCA), a social enterprise established in 1994 that focused on increasing homeownership and asset development for diverse populations, notably through its “Nehemiah Program” which facilitated down payments for homebuyers.

In 2007, the NCA Board of Directors dedicated \$1M and set CEO Scott Syphax on a journey to pull in the best parts of leadership development education from programs around the country. From this research, Syphax, founding program director Doni Blumenstock, and Foundation Executive Director Dr. Melissa Brown created the 10-month NELP program in partnership with Coro Northern California and the American Leadership Forum Mountain Valley Chapter, with the first class starting in October 2008.

While the NCA ceased operations in 2019, its legacy continued through its Community Foundation and NELP, its flagship program. In 2024, the Foundation, independent from NCA and responsible for its own financial stability, evolved into the 501c3 non-profit Nehemiah Leaders Programs (NLP). Untethered from its past as a foundation, NLP forges into the future not only as the producer of the successful NELP program, but with an eye toward using our mission of fueling and delivering programs that expand diverse leadership to realize our vision, that community leadership reflects the diversity of our nation.

NELP’s Program Mission

NELP’s mission is to change the world for the better by developing a network of empowered, diverse leaders with the skills and passion for leading and for achieving catalytic change within their organizations, communities, and lives.

NELP was established to address a critical need for diverse community leadership in the Sacramento region. Despite Sacramento being recognized as one of the most diverse cities in America in 2002, there was a significant underrepresentation of people of color in leadership roles, such as non-profit boards, commissions, and elected official positions.

NELP is specifically designed to prepare individuals for civic involvement and equip them with valuable leadership and problem-solving skills for use in their workplaces and communities.

The program’s core purpose is to deliver programs that expand diverse community leadership, aiming for communities to be led by the diversity they embody. It seeks to create a 21st Century leadership pipeline by developing and refining the skills and talents of culturally diverse emerging leaders.

The program emphasizes experiential learning, differentiating itself from programs that are solely theory-based. It provides practical skills that can be immediately incorporated into professional, community, and personal lives, deepening self-awareness for authentic and accountable leadership.

NELP *by the numbers*

15 Years Of NELP

We surveyed our alumni over the winter of 2024/2025 and 61% responded, with every class represented in the results. Their collective data tells a tremendous story of the impact that our highly trained graduates have on our region, from managing billions of dollars in budgets, to leading thousands of employees, to representing the breadth of our community in the rooms where decisions are made.

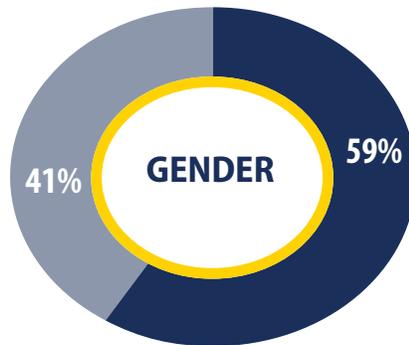
WHO WE ARE: DEMOGRAPHICS

Through a rigorous selection process that involves nomination, completing an application, and performing during an all-day competitive interview while being graded by dozens of community leaders and alumni acting as judges, NELP invites 10-20 Fellows to participate in the program each year.

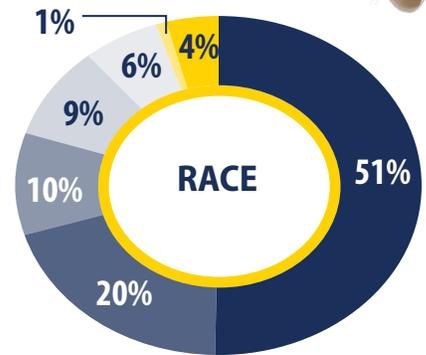
15 completed classes
238 graduates



- For profit
- Nonprofit
- Government
- Not-for-profit



- Female
- Male



- Black
- White
- Hispanic
- Asian American/Pacific Islander
- Mixed race
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Declined to state

Our Differences Brought us Together.



Veteran: **4%**



LGBTQIA+: **7%**



Disability: **7%**



IMPACT ON THE INDIVIDUAL

The NELP program trains its participants to lead from wherever they are, be it from an entry level position through CEO. Employers recognize this leadership development and promote and increase compensation of graduates at a rapid rate or, alternatively, graduates strike out on their own to find increased leadership responsibilities at a new employer or start their own business.

Income Growth

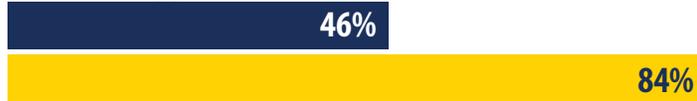
Low Income (\$12,000 - \$59,999)



Moderate Income (\$60,000-89,900)



Middle-to-Upper Income (\$90,000+)



Alumni who reported moving from Low-to-Moderate Income at the start of the NELP program to Middle-to-Upper Income as graduates



Alumni who report increased income since graduation

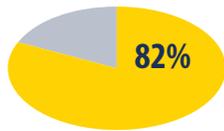


Average increase in income since graduation

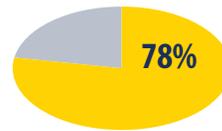


Alumni who have created "side hustle" business income since graduation

Professional Growth

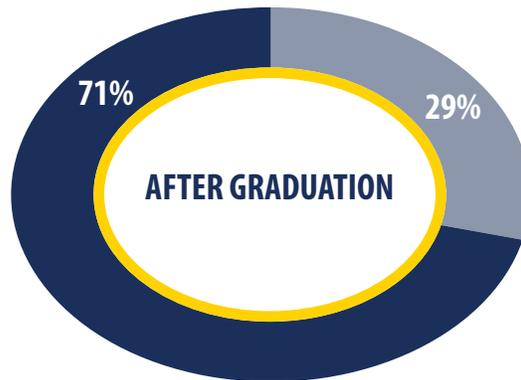
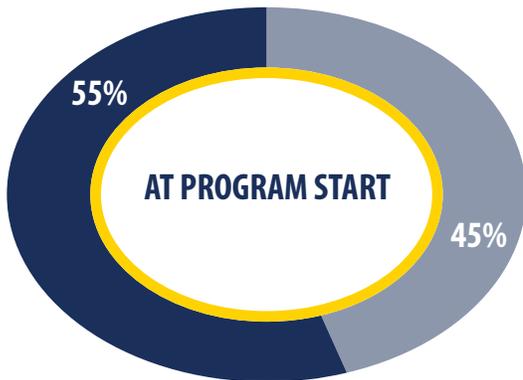


Alumni who experienced a promotion, obtained a new job with greater leadership responsibility, started a business, or experienced growth of existing business

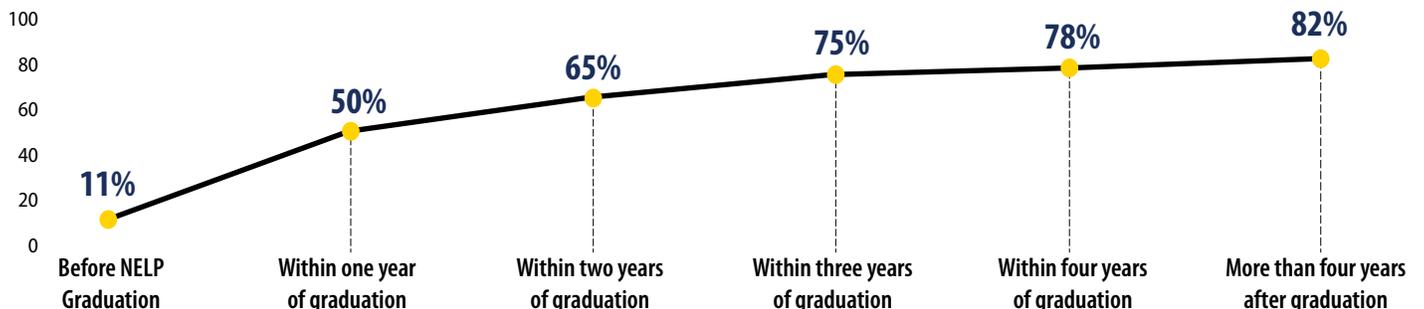


Alumni reporting that their NELP experience contributed greatly or significantly to their leadership development

Employment Level of Primary Occupation



When graduate experienced professional advancement or significant growth in their business if an owner



IMPACT AND INFLUENCE IN THE SACRAMENTO REGION

These statistics are a testament to the profound impact NELP graduates are making across various sectors, demonstrating their collective power in leadership, economic stewardship, and community advocacy. From fostering vast professional networks to directly managing significant financial resources and shaping crucial policies, NELP alumni are at the forefront of driving positive change.



181,477

Number of LinkedIn Connections



6,375

Number of employees that alumni lead



\$4.17 Billion

Value of organizational budgets alumni directly manage



67%

Graduates who have influenced policies or initiatives in their community or with their employer organization

"I led a Child Action initiative that increased the amount of money from local government for childcare providers and families."

—Adonai Mack, Class XI | CEO, Child Action Inc.

Awards & Recognitions

Not only are NELP alumni advancing personally and professionally, but they are also being recognized in the community for their leadership with community-wide awards, mostly for the first time in their careers.



76

40 Under 40



45

Exceptional Women of Color



26

Change Makers



12

Women Who Mean Business



4

Most Admired CEOs

"It seems as though there is a NELP Sr. Fellow leading or near the center of almost any critical issue impacting our region. We are leading or influencing the conversations and momentum in this region."

—Tiffany Fraser, Class IV | Chief of Staff, Street Soccer USA

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

NELP is growing diverse leadership not just in our employment centers. A key component of the program is to give back and serve the community. One of the graduation requirements is that the Fellow be appointed to a nonprofit Board of Directors or government commission, or, if already serving, elevate to an officer or leadership role. These organizations seek out our graduates to diversify their governing bodies and to better represent the communities that they serve.



430
Total number of nonprofit Board or government commission appointments

56%
Fellows who had not previously served on a nonprofit Board of Directors or government commission at start of their program year

3.4
Average number of nonprofit Boards or Government Commissions served as alum

17,320
Employees overseen as member of Boards or Commissions

1,632,147
Total clients served by organizations overseen by Boards or Commissions where alumni serve



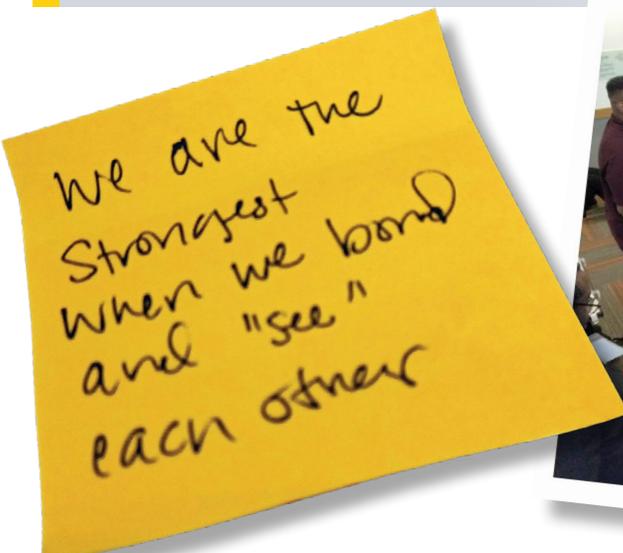
\$2.67 Billion
Total budgets overseen as member of Boards or Commissions

64%
Alumni who increased philanthropic giving as alumni

198%
Average percentage of increased giving following your NELP experience

Many NELP alumni now serve on city and county boards, commissions, and nonprofit boards of directors, helping to shape decisions on issues ranging from affordable housing and public health to transportation equity."

—Tiyesha Watts, Class XV | Associate Director Policy Advocacy, California Housing Partnership

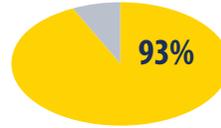


PROMOTING DIVERSITY

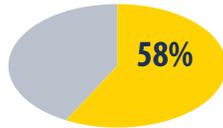
The Nehemiah Emerging Leaders Program is not only cultivating leaders but also actively championing diversity across all sectors. The following statistics highlight how NELP alumni are at the forefront of creating more inclusive leadership landscapes and driving meaningful change within their organizations and communities.



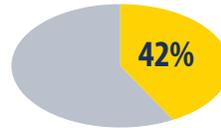
Alumni who agree that NELP supports and advances diversity in leadership



Alumni who contributed to diversity initiatives in their workplace or community



Alumni who experienced that they were the first or only one to represent a segment of our community's diversity when joining a nonprofit board or government commission



Alumni who were promoted or moved to a job with greater responsibility and experienced that they were the first or only one to represent a segment of our community's diversity among their employment level peers (manager, director, etc.)

“NELP alumni have been and will continue to break barriers and influence myriad spaces for generations to come because they are intentional, passionate and willing to serve and positively impact their communities and this region.”

—Melissa Gear, Class I | Deputy Director of Legislative & Government Affairs
California Department of Health Care Access



Members of NELP Class XIV with US Representative Doris Matsui

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT – Class Project Summaries

A key component of the NELP experience is the class project, designed to put into practice the skills that Fellows learn in the program. Fellows are challenged to practice these skills in a semi-controlled environment, alongside peers, to produce something meaningful for a community organization. This unique opportunity offers organizations the chance to leverage upwards of 500 hours of the skills and expertise of a diverse cohort of emerging business, nonprofit, government and entrepreneurial leaders who act as consultants to address a specific organizational need or implement a meaningful initiative.

MLK365

The Class III team improved logistics, sponsorships, and the website for MLK365, which increased the exposure of its annual march on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day with radio sponsorships, billboards and social media which resulted in more than 20,000 participants in the march, an increase of more 25% from the previous year. The class also assisted with the ideation and rebrand of the MLK365 organization.

NextED

Class IV created a strategic plan for NextED, employer-education partnership in the six county Sacramento Capital Region working to advance programs and policies that prepare students for success in the next economy. The plan included recommendations for building relationship with schools and businesses, discovering student interests, determining what employers had to offer, and exploring access to transportation to make internships possible.

Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD)

Class V evaluated the culture of SMUD and how it impacted employee recruitment, retention and impact in the greater Sacramento community it serves. SMUD leadership incorporated several of the Class's recommendations for improving the workplace culture.

Sacramento Region Community Foundation

Class VII created a strategy to increase giving among diverse populations in the region via a multi-pronged approach: 1) establish advisory councils and ambassadorship, 2) create an application called "SacGives," for which the class built a prototype and provided and estimate for development, 3) rollout of the strategy including a product launch, social event and integration with Big Day of Giving.

Sacramento Convention and Cultural Services Department

By assessing arts education in K-6 schools within the Sacramento City Unified School District, Class VIII created Arts for ALL, a comprehensive approach for arts education in Sacramento consisting of three key drivers: 1) ALIGN – bring together the arts providers, districts, schools, students, and community to improve communication throughout the region and foster a true arts education movement in the Sacramento area; 2) LEVERAGE – better utilize the region's existing resources and efforts to improve issues surrounding access and equity in arts education and exposure; 3) LEARN – empower the region to think expansively and creatively about how it can best serve Sacramento-area students with arts education and exposure.

Francis House

Class IX refreshed how Francis House, which provides the resources, support, and inspiration to help individuals and families transform their lives from living in crisis to having long-term stability, engaged with its local community through good neighborhood policies, its website (including assisting with migration & development), social media platforms and analytics, and helping the organization reach fundraising goals by throwing a Big Day of Giving Fundraising event, which increased giving by 148% from the previous year and surpassing its \$25K goal.

My Sister's House

Class X worked with My Sister's House, a social services nonprofit serving Asian and Pacific Islander and other underserved women and children impacted by domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking, to create employee and volunteer handbooks, functional organizational charts, and a succession plan for the Board of Directors, plus researched and provided recommendations for a new CRM system and created an external fundraising communication plan and PSA to reintroduce My Sister's House, its mission, and its impact to the community.

Cottage Housing, Inc.

Through Class XI's development of media campaign assets and Board engagement strategies, Cottage Housing, which provides housing and services to those experiencing the crippling effects of homelessness, exceeded their Big Day of Giving fundraising goal and developed a plan to duplicate efforts in following years. Class XI also advised on client mental health programming and completed an evergreen video to promote Cottage Housing and share their story more widely.

The Safety Center

Class XII created a plan for the redevelopment, activation, and maintenance of the physical Safetyville site, a unique 1/3 scale city that provides an immersive learning environment for children to practice everyday safety skills and laying the groundwork for lifelong safety & health. The strategic plan improved upon existing internal processes by developing, implementing and operationalizing key performance indicators and milestones to improve financial performance. These plans have sparked consistent revenue-generating events while re-energizing both the Safetyville site and its support staff.

Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD)

Class XIII evaluated the impact of three initiatives – the SMUD 2030 Plan, Clean Energy Vision and Community Impact Plan (CIP) – and developed recommendations to align programs for customer participation in a clean energy future and provide different entry points for under-resourced communities to participate in a clean energy future with easy to understand and culturally relevant options.

CLTRE

The Class XIV team worked with CLTRE, a nonprofit organization committed to shifting the cultural landscape in California by the year 2040, to develop a stakeholder database and engagement plan and an external feedback survey to support stronger relationships with funders, community leaders, and partners. The Class provided strategic fundraising resources used during Big Day of Giving, launched a newly refreshed CLTRE website, created segmented email newsletter templates, drafted a social media calendar and designed a press release template to support media outreach, while also facilitating media connection introductions and providing internal communications training.

Sacramento Regional Transit

Class XV conducted a strategic evaluation of the RydeFreeRT program – a fare-free transit initiative for TK-12 students in the Sacramento region. The Class engaged school districts, municipalities, and community-based organizations through interviews, focus groups, and surveys to offer recommendations for the program’s continued success. Their efforts led to a \$250,000 investment from the City of Sacramento with full program funding expected to come from municipalities, school districts, and SacRT itself. Class XV also initiated the formation of the RydeFreeRT Community Mobility Advisory Board, a cross-sector body to ensure continued public engagement and transparent decision-making.

Board of Directors, 2024-2025

Founder & Chair: Scott Syphax, CEO, Syphax Strategic

Vice Chair: Kris Martin, Executive Director, Cottage Housing, Inc.

Ed Phillips, President & CEO, Phillips Enterprises

Sam Starks, Executive Director, MLK365

Pamela Stewart, Director, Sacramento State University Foundation

Staff

Deneva Shelton, CEO

Scot Siden, COO & NELP Program Director

Kimberly Diaz, Director of Development

Emily Dutch, NELP Lead Facilitator

Bryan Cruz, NELP Facilitator

Terrence Shelton, NELP Facilitator

We're proud to partner with Nehemiah Leaders Programs

We support our region’s developing leaders
and their ongoing success in our community.

Powering forward. Together.



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