AMERICAN LEADERSHIP FORUM

TACOMA / PIERCE COUNTY

History of the Fellows Program

Classes I through XXVIII and onward

CLASS I – VI

SNAPSHOT	
Makeup	High-level corporate and government executives
Selection process	Hand-picked, personal referrals
Program cost	Fully funded by foundations and corporate sponsorships, no cost to Fellows
Wilderness	Mountain climbing, camping outdoors, minimal discussion of diversity
Class project	Yes

When the Tacoma chapter of ALF launched in 1989, it took a page from Jaworski's leadership playbook. Our participants were presidents, executives, and top senior leaders of Pierce County's most substantial organizations. They were hand-picked to join ALF because they were established leaders of influential establishments.

Looking back on the 1990s and Classes I – VI, ALF absolutely made a difference, connecting important leaders from many sectors to rally behind common issues in Pierce County. We clearly see the influence of ALF's Senior Fellows in their class projects:

- The Conflict Resolution Center (now the Center for Dialog and Resolution).
- Creation of the Tacoma Farmers Market

The original vision for ALF was that once a core group of high-level leaders were connected and invigorated with love for service to our community, the need for this program would have been met. So, the doors closed in 1993.

However, the need for connected and engaged leaders remained. A band of ALF graduates used their new connections and skills to launch a revised ALF chapter with a new financial model. This group of Senior Fellows also recognized there were drawbacks to the original ideas about where to find leaders and what leadership meant. The system of hand-picking leaders inadvertently reinforced a culture of traditional leaders nominating other traditional leaders. A new selection model was needed as well.

CLASS VII – XIX

SNAPSHOT	
Makeup	Leaders with strong spheres of influence (institutional or community based)
Selection process	Nominations by Senior Fellows, review by Selection Committee
Program cost	Through Class XVI: Fully funded by foundations and corporate sponsorships, no cost to Fellows Class XVII – Class XXIV: $600 personal, $8,000 total
Wilderness	Mountain climbing, camping outdoors, minimal discussion of diversity or inclusion
Class project	Yes

The revised ALF launched with Class VII in 1998. Between 1999 and 2012, ALF developed a more egalitarian selection process, transitioning from personal referrals to a rigorous nomination method focused on expanded areas of diversity.

During this evolutionary phase, ALF looked for nominees with high connection, not necessarily high status. This allowed us to compose classes with a mixture of leaders who could provide both institutional access and direct community action.

We began to recognize that leaders from all strata were incredible community influencers, essential to meaningful change.

We continued with our traditional Wilderness Week where Class Fellows spent a week in the mountains. The wilderness week was a physical and mental stress test, filled with hiking, camping, rappelling and obstacle course challenges designed to build trust and cohesion within the class.

CLASS XX – XXV

SNAPSHOT	
Makeup	Leaders with strong spheres of influence (institutional or community based)
Selection process	Nominations by Senior Fellows, review by Selection Committee
Program cost	Class XVII – Class XXIV: $600 personal, $8,000 total Class XXV – Class XXX: $1,000 personal, $9,000 total
Wilderness	Inclusive and accessible outdoor activities, diversity, equity and inclusion focus strengthened
Class project	Yes

The most impactful stage of ALF's evolution has been the resolute commitment to inclusiveness, diversity, equity, and access for those outside traditional leadership structures.

We substantially changed our curriculum with Class XX in 2013-2014. Our program facilitators were adjusted to better reflect the diversity of ALF classes. The program began a deep dive into the challenges and need for collaboration versus cooperation.

Prior to Class XX, the Wilderness Week focused strongly on physical challenges which created a barrier for many potential program participants. Our program locations were adjusted to be more inclusive of all bodies and abilities. Time in nature was used as a mindfulness tool for all bodies rather than a physical stressor.

There had been intense fireside conversations about differences and our impact on each other. However, there was only one facilitated conversation about diversity. It was a hard, incomplete conversation that left much unsaid and unsettled. Diversity shifted to the forefront of conversations throughout the week to ensure ample time, attention, and support for meaningful and transformative conversations.

CLASS XXVI – XXVII

SNAPSHOT	
Makeup	Leaders with strong spheres of influence (institutional or community based)
Selection process	Nominations by Senior Fellows, review by Selection Committee
Program cost	Class XXV – Class XXX: $1,000 personal, $9,000 total
Wilderness	Impacted by COVID
Class project	Yes, impacted by COVID

Better known as ALF's "COVID Classes," both Class XXVI and Class XXVII had unique class years due to the pandemic. Originally launched in June 2019, Class XXVI pivoted to meeting on Zoom for their monthly sessions beginning in March 2020 and extended their formal year through December 2020 to continue meeting virtually.

Class XXVII launched on Zoom in June 2020, continuing to meet virtually every month until finally gathering in person beginning in June 2021 for an extended formal year through December 2021.

Another pivotal change to the wilderness curriculum was realized with Class XXVII, who participated in a modified wilderness retreat on Zoom in March 2021. Through courageous conversations by Class participants, ALF recognized the curriculum used at that time placed a harmful and unfair responsibility on People of Color to teach White People through sharing their trauma. Fellows needed a curriculum and facilitators who better represented the experience of the class and better aligned with ALF's mission.

Class XXVII concluded their year in December 2021 with an in-person wilderness retreat using a completely redesigned curriculum by facilitators Jahmad Canley and Cliff Jones that better respected and served all Fellows.

CLASS XXVIII – ONWARD

SNAPSHOT	
Makeup	Leaders with strong spheres of influence (institutional or community based)
Selection process	Nominations by Senior Fellows, review by Selection Committee
Program cost	Class XXV – Class XXX: $1,000 personal, $9,000 total Class XXXI – Onward: $1,500 personal, $12,000 total
Wilderness	Inclusive and accessible outdoor activities; strong, thoughtful, individualized DEI focus
Class project	Varies

Among all the lessons learned from COVID, the one most valuable to the wilderness curriculum was that ALF classes do not need facilitators to create artificial chaos to build group cohesion. Enough chaos already exists in the real world.

The redesigned Wilderness curriculum begun with Class XXVII leads with the heart to engage in difficult conversations that give every Fellow the space to decide where their comfort zone is and how far they want to push themselves individually. Space is created for self-care and mindfulness to ensure that Fellows can grow through discomfort while never pushing themselves or others into harm.

COVID also allowed the ALF Fellows Program Committee to take stock of the effectiveness of the Applied Learning Initiative (ALI) element of the curriculum, often called the class project. This project provided Fellows an opportunity to practice their cohort learning and required additional time and effort beyond the cohort year. Modern leaders in our community exist in an increasingly interconnected society and often find themselves at a non-ALF table with ALF Senior Fellows. Classes from XXIII – XXVIII all chose maintaining their connections and collaborations with each other as their projects. The Fellows Program Committee redesigned and relaunched the class project beginning with Class XXX. It now includes a requirement for the project to create an opportunity to connect with Senior Fellows, a more structured deadline for completion, and clarifies the intent to practice new skills and approaches in a supportive cohort.

ALF Tacoma/Pierce County continues to adapt the Fellows program curriculum to the unique needs of Fellows every year. ALF simply could not do this without the tireless help of the ALF Fellows Program Committee and our amazing program facilitators. It is an honor to work with these dedicated and committed people.

Excerpted from the ALF Tacoma/Pierce County Board Orientation Booklet, 2026–2027.