Making Space for Generation Next: Or Using Design Thinking and Career Imprints to Create a Next Generation Fellowship at 50CAN

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Accessibility
Making Space for Generation Next:
Or Using Design Thinking and Career Imprints to
Create a Next Generation Fellowship at 50CAN

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone

Submitted by
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To the Harvard Graduate School of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education Leadership.

May 2023
Dedication

To my beautiful sister, Kenesha Demps Whitlock, who I miss every day, my great-grandmothers Josie and Sylici Mae, who prayed up this life for me, my grandfather Blanchard, who had his university dreams stolen, my godmother Debra, who bought me baby dolls that looked like me, my fierce Aunt Faye, who tried her best to love, my hilarious Uncle Warren, who fought battles with demons, and my brother Turner Cooper, he/him/his who always believed in Black people and always believed in me.

I promise to
take care of myself for you,
to tell my story,
to tell your story,
to tell our story,

and to work towards the loving and compassion-filled existence our ancestors always deserved.

Your legacy lives on.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to the ever-present God who loves me just as I am, remembers all my forgotten and secret prayers, and takes me on all my adventures. I will always live my life in gratitude to You.

Thank you to my grandmother Mary Green for being the best and to my parents, Cordelia and Kenneth Demps, Sr., for all your sacrifices and trust and for loving me the best way you could.

Thank you to my committee, Jal Mehta, Candice Crawford-Zakian, and Marc Porter Magee. I appreciate you for seeing me through my imperfections, your insight, and your care through this process.

Thank you to Margarita Ruiz and Matt Rose for having my back, my front, and my all around.

Thank you also to Liz City, Monica Higgins, and Simone Fried for re-orienting me when I got a little lost at sea. Thank you to Tim McCarthy, Christina Villareal, and Ron Heifetz for being my fairy god professors.

Thank you, Michele Mason. You are a model of poise and leadership and to the 50CAN Family for welcoming me.

Thank you to Shahara Jackson for holding me through this process and reminding me of the endgame and to Xiaohoa Ching for being the best twin ever.

Thank you to Mekka, Steve, Kori, and Amanda, for leaving no doctoral candidate behind. Thank you to Mama Sunny for loaning me some sunshine and to Natalie and Chiamaka for your sisterhood.

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Thank you to my nephews Quincy Whitlock and Collin Bell for loving on my baby dog, Carter, so I could write.

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Thank you to my Aunt Vermel for giving me homework when my teacher did not and my godmother JoJo, who spoke excellence over my life as an infant.

Thank you to Tess Durant and Steve Hitchcock for teaching me to stay in the race and for reaching down to grab my hand when you saw me reaching up.

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Thank you to my Chicago family: Reggie, Toshia, Mia, Gira, Tamiko, Bridget, Chakka, Evin, Eboni, Nicole, Bill, Ebony, and this is why you don't start naming names, and my Boston Family, Joe and Gary, and my Duval adopted family, Lori, and Laura, and my UberHUE family, especially Kandice Cooks.

And finally, thank you to Sean Stalling and all of my incredible students at Holy Angels School in Chicago for luring me back to education and reminding me that excellence does indeed come in Black.
# Table of Contents

**Dedication** .................................................................................................................. 2

**Acknowledgements** ..................................................................................................... 3

**Abstract** ......................................................................................................................... 6

**Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 7
  - Joining Forces with 50CAN .......................................................................................... 7
  - A Commitment to Expanding the Pool of Education Advocates ................................. 10

**Problem of Practice** ..................................................................................................... 12

**Review of Knowledge for Action** .................................................................................. 13
  - Technical and Adaptive Leadership during Strategic Growth ......................................... 14
  - Design Thinking ........................................................................................................... 17
  - Designing for Unique Opportunities in Late Adolescence and Young Adulthood ........... 19
  - Turning Policy Outsiders to Insiders .......................................................................... 25
  - An Opportunity to Overcome the Policy Insider/Outsider Dichotomy ............................ 26
  - Narrative, Adaptive Leadership, and My Political Lens ............................................... 27
  - Theory of Action ......................................................................................................... 30

**Project Description** ..................................................................................................... 30
  - Residency Interrupted .................................................................................................... 30
  - The Genesis of the Gen Z Fellowship ........................................................................... 31
  - Why this Fellowship Matters ....................................................................................... 32
  - Strategic Memo Achievement Checklist ....................................................................... 33
    - Benchmark Progress .................................................................................................. 33
    - Predicted Enabling and Constraining Elements ......................................................... 34
  - First Step: Learn More About the other Fellowships .................................................... 35
    - The National Voice Fellowships ................................................................................ 35
    - The Believe in Better Fellowship .............................................................................. 37
    - Create a Stakeholder Map ......................................................................................... 37
  - Second Step: Develop a Prototype for Design Cycling .................................................. 38
  - Third: Begin Design Cycles ........................................................................................... 41
  - Executive Leadership Meetings and Board Meetings ..................................................... 43

**Evidence** ...................................................................................................................... 43
  - Empathy Interviews with Existing Fellowship Managers ............................................ 43
    - The National Voices Fellowship Empathy Interviews ............................................. 44
    - The Believe in Better Fellowship Empathy Interviews ............................................ 45
Abstract

50CAN is a national education policy advocacy nonprofit committed to high-quality education for students regardless of zip code. Keeping to its organizational commitment to being "nationally led, but locally run," the organization's flagship institution is its network of effective locally-led state campaigns. Over the last few years, the organization has added education policy advocacy-based fellowships to the services it offers. This capstone examines my 10-month residency at 50CAN, where I worked to develop a young adult-focused policy advocacy fellowship aimed at bringing fresh blood into the policy advocacy space. To inform my approach, I drew from research on adaptive leadership, IDEO's Design Thinking Framework, Higgins' work on career imprinting, and Public Narrative. In my role, I worked across teams and initiated empathy-centered conversations to create a sustainable fellowship replete with stakeholder buy-in. Resultingly, the Next Gen Fellowship is design cycles to be a test case for 50CAN as they explore its next stage of strategic growth. Capstone findings reiterate the complexity of reverse engineering career imprints and the importance of place and organizational culture in the process. At the sector level, the results suggest the importance of succession planning in nonprofit spaces and implications about how organizations grieve.
Introduction

Joining Forces with 50CAN

50CAN (Campaign for Achievement Now) is a national policy advocacy organization that creates policies to provide access to high-quality education for all children in the United States, regardless of zip code. The organization currently consists of three operational components:

- State-based campaigns that advocate for choice-based education reform policy.
- Fellowships to increase the number of local advocates.
- Fiscal sponsorship of smaller choice-focused education reform organizations.

50CAN began as ConnCAN in 2005 under the leadership of CEO Marc Porter-Magee and quickly gained respect from policy insiders as one of the nation's most impactful advocacy shops (Whiteboard Advisors, 2012). In December 2010, after a fellowship at the Pahara Institute, Porter-Magee began the quest to expand ConnCAN into a network of state-based campaigns, and in early 2011, he launched 50CAN (Cavanagh, 2011, p. 1).

In July 2023, I joined 50CAN to learn how national organizations effectively wield local power and to expand my lens from a school and district-based educator to an education policy advocate. Led by founder and CEO Marc Porter-Magee and President Derrell Bradford, 50CAN is known for being "nationally led, but locally run." Primarily an education advocacy organization, 50CAN occupies a similar political space as Education Trust, Leadership for Education Equity (LEE), Democrats for Education Reform (DFER), and The New Teacher Project (TNTP) in the education reform landscape. Like the organizations mentioned earlier, 50CAN is politically nonpartisan and grounds its work on identifying, supporting, and showcasing the stories and experiences of local advocates. 50CAN believes that people with
diverse experiences and backgrounds previously untouched by traditional education reform circles must design and lead advocacy campaigns (Phillips et al., 2022). As an organizer and educator, most important to me is 50CAN's belief that "Education advocacy campaigns should be led by citizen advocates who are part of the communities that they're working to serve." I began my career in education as an alternatively certified teacher in Catholic and charter schools in a teaching program run by an Illinois billionaire. The school choice movement of the early twenty-first century is an indelible part of my professional identity. However, over the years, my political lens shifted more to the left, and school choice advocacy became less palatable to me. Nevertheless, I have a deep investment in public education, and joining 50CAN meant amplifying a network of local voices I deeply respect alongside those I started to move away
from. Table 1 outlines the primary workstreams for 50CAN, which includes a network of state campaigns, fiscally sponsored, like-minded organizations, fellowships, and other endeavors. The heart of 50CAN is a network of primarily autonomous, deeply embedded, and locally run state campaigns (CANs). While early states like Connecticut and New York are homegrown campaigns, 50CAN now mainly recruits existing organizations to join a national network of like-minded education advocates rather than create new CANs from scratch. The national team offers operational services like human resources and legal support to each state campaign. A complete list of services can be found in Appendix A. 50CAN's National Team does not direct State CANs; however, they demand high accountability for state campaign-selected goals. In addition to accountability, 50CAN offers operational support for organizing efforts, fiscal disbursement, human resources, and fundraising development for state campaigns.

In addition to serving state campaigns, the national team 50CAN fiscally sponsors nine independent education advocacy organizations (Appendix B). Like state campaigns, these independent education advocacy organizations receive operational support from 50CAN, but to a lesser extent. For example, 50CAN partners with Georgetown University's education policy think tank, FutureEd, to produce AdvocacyLabs. This partnership highlights 50CAN's commitment to evidence-based policy and the power of open advocacy. Of AdvocacyLabs, Marc Porter-Magee, the executive director of 50CAN, writes, "Our goal is to provide better answers to the big questions that really matter to those who have devoted their lives to changing the world (Porter Magee, 2017, para. 2)." In addition, 50CAN provides free access to organizational learnings and pathways to securing advocacy wins for other advocacy groups.
A Commitment to Expanding the Pool of Education Advocates

50CAN is committed to building a better, choice-filled education landscape for children, no matter their demography. As a result, they commit to expanding the pool of education policy advocates. This commitment led them to launch a cadre of fellowships. Early in my tenure at 50CAN, my initial supervisor, Chief Operating Officer Michele Mason, added me to the executive leadership team and arranged for me to spend significant time learning about their respective initiatives. Fellowships were top of conversation for nearly every meeting.

With a heavy focus on communications and advocacy, 50CAN's National Voices Fellowship, launched in 2019, aims to "strengthen the leadership and public profiles of the next generation of commentators, correspondents, and analysts across the education sector (About the National Voices Fellowship, n.d., para. 1)." Fellows reflect "the diversity of students in American schools" and come from "a diverse set of backgrounds and experiences, reflecting urban, rural and suburban communities, as well as from both historically privileged and marginalized communities (About the National Voices Fellowship, n.d., para. 5)." Fellows are nonpartisan and characteristically pragmatic in their approach to improving education in the United States.

50CAN expects fellows to prioritize student and family needs and education policy reform before politics. Cohort-based National Voices fellows are a group of eight to twelve education policy advocates who commit to a year of: "building or enhancing a communication, community or policy platform; developing an audience; and honing their voice to accelerate the national conversation about [American] schools (About the National Voices Fellowship, n.d., p. 2)." During their fellowship, participants engage in media opportunities "from television and podcasts to authoring op-eds (About the National Voices Fellowship, n.d., para. 2)." After four
years, National Voices occupies and a critical space in the education policy advocacy landscape and has been an excellent resource for the organization. For example, both Michele Mason and Amanda Aragon, executive director for NewMexicoKidsCAN, are alumni of the National Voices fellowship.

The success of 50CAN's National Voices fellowship has engendered the development of a legislator focused Believe in Better Fellowship for elected officials seeking a deeper understanding of education policy. "The fellowship will create a process for each participant to define their own vision for public education and help fellows shape a vision of the future of education in their own state. Fellows will also have the opportunity to learn from peers from around the country who want to lead in a similar way (Nikkila, 2023, para. 5). This fellowship furthers 50CAN's nonpartisan commitment to "boundaryless education, innovation" and policy solutions that are locally driven (Nikkila, 2023, para. 6)

Derrell Bradford is both the President of 50CAN and the Director of Fellowships. In his role, he is always looking to the future of education advocacy. In 2022, before my arrival, he proposed a Generation Z-Focused Fellowship for the organization after a conversation with a grants officer at the Walton Foundation. The audience for the next-generation fellowship would be considerably younger than its predecessors. However, it would still be on the cutting edge of education reform to complement the success of National Voices and the promise of The Believe in Better Fellowship. A grants office from The Walton Foundation loved his idea and agreed to fund the project.

After conversations with the executive leadership team, we decided that the initially entitled "The Gen Z" Fellowship matched my professional expertise in program development, adolescents, and young adults. This fellowship would allow me to learn how organizations
expand and innovate. Also, I became a true believer in design thinking while at Harvard Graduate School of Education. This fellowship would allow me to test my assumption that design thinking was the key to building human-centered, sustainable projects.

**Problem of Practice**

I joined 50CAN to learn how a successful, nationally run organization builds and maintains political power while respecting local authority and autonomy. I found a well-developed, human-centered, and intentionally relational organization on the precipice of dramatic growth. 50CAN has a relationship-driven organizational structure and intends to push forward as a leader in innovation and increase the breadth and depth of its serviced communities.

However, there is some imbalance in responsibility in the organization, with members of the executive leadership taking on out-of-scope work. My early observations of team dynamics and availability indicated that adding a new fellowship might further strain the organization leading to the following problem of practice: How do I add a brand-new fellowship to the organization without shorting the initiative or stressing the organization's relational culture? Also, how do I build a meaningful fellowship that works specifically for Gen Z?
Review of Knowledge for Action

I turned to three frameworks to ground my research and inform how I approached the problem of practice. I investigated human-centered frameworks because I believed a successful initiative would come from stakeholders' buy-in inside and outside the organization. I also researched unique opportunities available to people in young adulthood because I suspected that Gen Z was not as different from previous generations as my colleagues assumed. They are, however, late adolescents and young adults. My experience as a former middle school educator and director of a freedom school told me that studying the collective developmental stage of Gen Z would be a more useful entry point for developing this pilot. Finally, in early conversations, Bradley insisted that the fellowship be geared towards policy outsiders with fresh views on

TABLE 2. REVIEW OF KNOWLEDGE OUTLINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Centered Framework:</td>
<td>Marshall Ganz asks organizers to consider the following questions: Who are my people and what do they care about? Design Thinking offers insight into how to keep ventures human-centered by integrating stakeholders' thoughts, needs, and desires.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Design Thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Opportunities in Young Adulthood</td>
<td>An effective Gen Z-focused fellowship requires an initial understanding of Gen Z, their drivers, and knowledge of the complexity of identity development with a particular focus on adolescent identity. Last, the impact of political and professional experiences in late adolescence, has meaningful implications for helping new education policy advocates enter the field. Higgins framework on Career Imprints Offers a road map to creating a meaningful experience for young adults that will follow them as they develop into policy advocates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Generation Z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Young Adult Development Framework:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Career Imprints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking the Policy Insider/Outsider Dichotomy Framework:</td>
<td>Creating an effective policy advocacy pipeline development fellowship requires exploring barriers to lay participation in the policy advocacy universe. This review of knowledge explores the insider/outsider dichotomy between professional policy advocates and lay people's expert recommendations to overcome this barrier, including re-evaluating the value of personal narrative. This portion also explores existing literature on the revaluation of personal narrative in policymaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Public Narrative</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
complex issues. As such, one of my goals was to help participants find an entry point into the typically closed policy advocacy pace. Accordingly, I explored ways to break through the policy insider/outsider dichotomy in policy advocacy. Table 2 details the topics and corresponding rationale.

*Technical and Adaptive Leadership during Strategic Growth*

50CAN's strategic growth plan ends in 2023. They are currently evaluating the value proposition for both their organization as a whole and each of their workstreams. The Gen Z Fellowship will be a part of their evaluations. Growth is complex and requires attention to what Ron Heifetz calls *adaptive* and *technical* work. For the Gen Z Fellowship to thrive and be sustainable at 50CAN, I must pay close attention to both adaptive and technical challenges, the spheres of influence within 50CAN, and when and where to exercise leadership. In change efforts, technical work requires deep thinking and systemic change (Williams, n.d., p. 3). The stem "All we have to do is…" will likely appear when considering technical work. However, experience and study reveal that "all you have to do…" often means encountering tasks that confound simple actions; the work becomes adaptive.

According to Heifetz, technical work becomes adaptive when a group 1) lacks motivation, 2) is missing systemic coordination, or 3) the organization is missing the necessary resources for success (Williams, n.d., p. 3). Another way to identify adaptive work is to consider the gap between an organization's desires and experiential reality. Typically, with an adaptive challenge, "their current condition, if it persists, is insufficient to deliver on the aspiration. Recognizing and confronting an adaptive challenge requires adept leadership; however, according to Heifetz, it is necessary to avoid conflating the act of *leadership* with the resource of *authority* (Table 3). Instead of a formal position, a leader is what "one is 'being' when one
exercises leadership. It is not a formal position, but a function that anyone can do irrespective of title or status (Williams, n.d., p. 2)." Leaders can be formal or informal, but a hallmark of leadership is that by getting the group to pay attention to issues hindering the intended work of the group, they mobilize adaptive, often complex work.

Like leadership, authority is categorized as either formal or informal. However, authority and leadership differ in that where leadership is an action, and authority is a resource "conferred upon an individual in exchange for a service (Williams, n.d., p. 6)." Systems workers often emphasize the risk of leadership, and most agree that the most dangerous is leadership from a position of formal authority. Where the call of leaders (those making leadership moves) is to help an organization or group confront complex issues, the hallmark of formal authority is to create stability (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 8). Conversely, where leadership might disrupt, authority maintains the narrative and identity of the group.

Understanding the politics of leadership means understanding the values, concerns, and motivations of the factions present in any group or organization. Factions, or stakeholders, within a system or organization, are people with shared goals, values, and conceptual frames. Effective leaders work to not only identify these factions, but also their drives, loyalties, and values. When exercising leadership to mobilize adaptive work effectively, leaders must first diagnose the system, then take action. Next, they must diagnose their internal system before taking internal action. Understanding factions allows leaders to make effective change but requires them to be empathetic or curious about system members, including themselves.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A resource conferred upon a person or body in exchange for a service (e.g. a boss, pastor, coach); present as long conferred by authorizing agency</td>
<td>• Anyone can enact leadership regardless of positon or title; often momentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expected to provide the key services: protection, direction, maintain order, act as an orienting symbol</td>
<td>• Is an action; what one is exercises when one is being a &quot;leader&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Protective and stabilizing</td>
<td>• Typically disruptive:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides holding environment for adaptive work</td>
<td>• Helps the group address tough issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• protective of deviant voices</td>
<td>• orchestrates confrontation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• monitor the &quot;temperature of a group&quot;</td>
<td>• Creates opportunities for learning and change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• embody aspirations of the group</td>
<td>• Keeps the group focused on &quot;the work&quot; or the real issues at hand in order to enact organizational change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leadership from a place of authority is sometimes necessary, but is extremely dangerous</td>
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(Williams, n.d., p. 4)
taking an internal action. This is because understanding factions allows leaders to make effective change, but it also requires them to be empathetic or curious about members of the system including themselves. In order to move the fellowship forward, I borrow heavily from adaptive leadership to pay close attention to the perspectives around the organization. I hypothesize that by conscientiously attending to the competing factions of the organization, I will develop a more meaningful and sustainable fellowship.

*Design Thinking*

Design Thinking offers insight into how to create a sustainable, human-centered Gen Z fellowship. Borrowing language from Hiefetz's work on adaptive leadership, developing a sustainable, human-centered fellowship requires empathy for all the factions or stakeholders in the project. Empathy goes beyond curiosity and *guessing* a faction's opinions, concerns, and fears. Empathy means asking. In systemic leadership, simply asking offers a clearer insight into the potential impact of any new imitative. In a 2014 Ed Week article, Sandy Speicher, managing director of the design firm IDEO's education practice, offers this: "But what if we looked first to the needs of people, and then designed ways the system could meet its goals by serving these needs? This is the heart of how design thinking gets to innovative solutions (Speicher, 2014, p. 1)." Design thinking means recognizing the end user's humanity rather than the system's needs and desires.

In systemic leadership, paying attention to the factions within any organization is beneficial, especially when inviting any new initiative. Once those factions are identified, the next important step is considering how the proposed initiative might impact each faction, especially those closest to the issue. With empathy as a critically important component, design thinking is one way to consider the impact on factions. In addition, with empathy as the catalyst,
acknowledging the humanity of end users is central to the continuous reflection cycle of Design Thinking (Rock, 2019). Employing this cycle requires me to pay attention to the organization's emotional, financial, and human experience as I develop the Gen Z Fellowship.

There are already two national level fellowships in existence at 50CAN: the four-cohort-old National Voices and their most recent addition, Believe in Better. When developing this fellowship, I am considering questions outlined in Figure B as I seek to build a meaningful fellowship for the organization. While these questions inform my background understanding of the necessities of a late adolescence fellowship, I will also engage the cycle of inquiry associated with learning cycles in design thinking. After all, who can be more expert on the needs and desires of Gen Z than Gen Z members themselves? However, before I start asking questions, I must ask: "Who is Gen Z?"

FIGURE A DESIGN THINKING CYCLE
Designing for Unique Opportunities in Late Adolescence and Young Adulthood

In early conversations with Bradford about the Gen Z fellowship, he said that one impetus was that "these kids don't know how things really work." This fellowship would be an opportunity to test the perceived overconfidence of GenZ.

His remark felt eerily familiar.

Research by Protzko and Schooler's work confirms my observation (2019). They coin "the tendency to believe children of the present are failing on those traits one happens to be high on due to a biased memory mechanism" as the kids these days (KTD) effect (Protzko & Schooler, 2019, p. 7). One argument for the KTD Effect is that contemporary youth naturally appear in decline compared to most adults' artificially inflated past. Big readers opine about the modern adolescent's disdain for the literary novel. Authoritarians are disdainful of seeming disrespectful teenagers. Your marine uncle hates their lack of discipline, and elite university professors complain that the kids these days are terrible writers.

Another proposal is that "older adults may have less recent experience with contemporary youth, so they may rely more on their memory of kids from the past and less on their experience with kids of the present (Protzko & Schooler, 2022, p. 8)." Older adults not only compare children to an inflated recollection of their own youth but also of the youth with whom they have had the most recent contact. Resultingly, generation after generation of adults
erroneously projects collective incompetence on younger generations or, in some cases, the weight of the heroism.

Most articles I read about Gen Z turn them into heroes or villains. It is problematic that most of the articles I found are written about members of Gen Z rather than with or by them. As I design this design of this fellowship, for the prototype and pilot to be applicable to Gen Z, it will be necessary to incorporate the actual voice of members of Gen Z rather than depend on the typically ageist lens of older adults, including myself.

Researchers separate generations into fifteen-to-twenty-year cycles. Every generation cycle has had and will have unifying, "generation defining moments" and innovations (Dimock, 2019, p. 1). For my generation it was social media, cell phones, and 9/11. For my mother's

**FIGURE C KEY BRAIN DEVELOPMENTS IN YOUNG ADULTHOOD**

YOUNG ADULTHOOD

LATE TEENS & EARLY TWENTIES

- Greater complexity of thinking
- Critical thinking
- More integration of cognitive & emotional
- Relationships based on shared values, mutuality
- Respect for diversity
- Modified risk-taking
- Decisions based on future consequences & impact on others

(A. R. Simpson, 2018, p. 8)
generation it was cable television, school integration, and the Women's Rights Movement. My grandmother's generation was marked by the development of interstate highways, television, and the Civil Rights Movement.

Besides making space for Gen Z to define themselves, I believe a more useful approach to understanding Gen Z can be found in the domain of adolescent development and the emerging field of young adult development. In 2023, the oldest members of Gen Z turn twenty-four. Most of Gen Z falls within the developmental stage of late adolescence and young adulthood. As such, human development offers helpful insights into the unique opportunities available during this distinct developmental period and how I might capitalize on them with this fellowship.

Simpson's research on young adult development indicates consensus on a dramatic shift in thinking structures and the brain from 18- to 25-year-olds (Figure D). Not only is there a shift in how young adults think, but also in what they think about or their mental visor (Simpson, 2018, p. 4). Simpson (2018) writes, "As development unfolds, one can 'see' and think about more and more complex phenomena such as abstractions, relationships, and moral problems, offering more and more powerful thinking tools (p.4)." This development happens on a biological timetable, is predictable in "good enough" settings, and is also prompted or hindered by environmental demands.

Citing adult development expert Bob Kegan in his book In Over Our Heads, researchers emphasize the influence of external factors on young developmental milestones:

"If I were asked to…summarize my reading of centuries of wise reflection on what is required of an environment for it to facilitate the growth of its members, I would say this: people grow best where they continuously experience an ingenious blend of support and challenge; the rest is commentary (Kegan, 1997, p. 42)."

This remarkably sensitive moment is akin to the sensitive development periods associated with early childhood, making those in young adulthood uniquely positioned to
experience long-lasting transformative experiences. To students in this developmental stage, context, mentorship, peer relationships, and effective engagement are critical to impactful out-of-school experiences (Simpson, 2018). Success means not only having a clear view of Gen Z, but also protecting the fellowship by seeking and incorporating the voice of young adults as much as possible through the design of the project and beyond. Design thinking should help this process.

Creating New Policy Advocates with Higgins Career Imprint Framework

In her 2005 book, Career Imprints: Creating Leaders Across an Industry, Monica Higgins dissects how some organizations exploit this developmental period to create what she calls an organizational career imprint. The concept of a career imprint "reflects the central idea that there are observable patterns in the type of capabilities, connections, confidence, and cognition that groups of people develop as a result of a common set of career experiences in a particular organization (Higgins, 2005, p. 12)." These imprints depend on the organization's context, experiences in said context, and the connective relationships arising from these experiences (Figure F). These imprints identify those involved with a particular organization.

FIGURE D HIGGINS CAREER IMPRINT FRAMEWORK
good or bad. Fellowships become known by the quality of their alums. Also, according to Higgins (2005), "A strong imprint will always bring people back to their intended impact (Higgins, 2016, para. 18)

"Individuals are particularly likely to pick up an organization’s career imprint when they are younger and more impressionable" making late adolescence and young adulthood fertile ground for impactful career imprints (Higgins, 2016, para. 22). An organization does not always control the imprint they leave behind, however. As such, Higgins reiterates the importance of an organization being intentional about their desired of outcomes and their path forward to achieving outcomes. Higgins suggests that in addition to considering the capabilities, connections, confidence, and cognitions I would want a participant to leave with after a Gen Z Fellowship, I also need to pay close attention to the background and experience of the people I recruit, their adult development and career stage, and how they might fit into the place or organizational culture in the context of 50CAN (Higgins, 2005, p. 53).

When discussing organizational culture, Higgins asserts that strong organizational culture engenders strong career imprints (Higgins, 2005, p. 55). Referencing Ed Schein, she writes:

"[A]n organizational culture is the “pattern of assumptions—invented, discovered, or with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration—that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” A more popular way to think about culture is simply as “the way we do things around here(Higgins, 2005, p. 57)."

Factors that strengthen overall organizational culture for career imprinting are outlined in Figure E. The three factors are social reinforcement as indicated by collective identity, socialization and shared norms of behavior, stretch opportunities or corporate strategy and structure, and demonstrated success, or a member opportunities for recognition and reward within the organization (Higgins, 2005, p. 55).
A strong career imprint is "is recognizable by outside parties… [members] take it with them when they move to other organizations (Higgins, 2005, p. 55)." In a way, career imprinting is like alumni development, which is especially relevant for this fellowship. The Gen Z fellowship has the opportunity to not only engage young adults but create alumni whose career and success can be directly traced back to their experience at 50CAN. Effectively creating positive career imprints means positively developing an organization's reputation, as most institutions derive strength from their alumni. According to career imprint theory, when alumni of organizations that have strong career imprints transition from an imprinting organization, the carry with them a set of perceived professional requirements for specific roles and the perception of being prepared for specific roles. The literature suggests that while these imprints occur without or without intervention, organizations can influence these imprints with careful experience curation and giving close attention to factors that increase their likelihood.
**Turning Policy Outsiders to Insiders**

In this fellowship, an important goal is for fellows to transition from being outside the world of policy advocacy to insiders in a way that acknowledges their value as *meta-experts*, or the liminal space between policy experts and policy lay people, rather than experts (Collins, 2007). Integrating narrative into the prototype is one way of doing this. In *The Value of Words: Narrative as Evidence in Policy Making* (2014), researchers assert that "policymakers today rely primarily on statistical, financial, and other forms of technical data as their basis for decision-making…there is a potentially underestimated value in substantive reflections of the members of the public who will be affected by a particular piece of regulation (Epstein et al., 2014, p. 1)."

The policymaking domain often undervalues personal narratives, which are accessible not only to experts but to everyone. To be considered evidence-based, public policy is typically "expertise [bound] by available empirical data and constrained by social, political, and economic factors (e.g., organizational culture, current political leadership, funding) (Epstein et al., 2014, p. 9)." Epstein et al. (2014) assert that

> While policymakers rely primarily on economic, technical, and other quantitative data, statistical analyses, and formal 'premise-argument-conclusion' argumentation as their bases for decision-making, members of the lay public tend to offer context-based reflections on first-hand experiences with the particular problem or general domain that policymakers are proposing to address—a form of contribution we call 'situated knowledge' (p.2).

There is underestimated value in substantive reflections from the public who will be affected by a particular piece of regulation (Epstein et al., 2014). In other words, over-reliance upon technical evidence for solutions typically further misses what Heifetz terms *adaptive challenges*.

This overreliance on technical evidence also creates a barrier between policymakers and everyday people who are typically closest to the problem, or a barrier between what Epstein et al. (2014) term *professional participants* and *lay participants*. 
According to Epstein et al. (2014), lay participants view and experience policy problems from a very subjective and highly contextualized point of view—they may have in-depth knowledge about facts, causes, interrelationships, and likely consequences, but they do not share the repertoire of the professional participants characterized by technical data and reason-giving (Fischer, 2003). Instead, they employ narratives as rhetorical means to support their normative positions (e.g., Hampton 2009; McDonough 2001) (p.7).

According to Mullan, however, "'the anecdote' as evidence is as much demeaned in policy circles as it is in clinical medicine (Mullan, 1999, p. 123)." Conventional policymaking erects barriers to lay people's potential participation in public policy development by overvaluing the technical language and skills that professional participants gain by repeated exposure to a world for most lay participants. The repertoire of policy wonks, where 'evidence-based' and 'data driven' hold the most valuable currency, situates lay participants or non-specialists outside the policymaking community of practice and creates a formidable informal barrier to broader civic engagement (Epstein et al., 2014, p. 7). The public becomes the outsider in a hostile and intimidating policymaking participation environment (Epstein et al., 2014, p. 2).

An Opportunity to Overcome the Policy Insider/Outsider Dichotomy

Citing a 2007 work by Collins and Evans, Epstein et al. and Carlson and Gause suggest an alternative but complementary pathway to redefining policy expertise (Epstein et al., 2014, p. 10). In their work, they argue:

[F]or moving away from the expert vs. layperson dichotomy towards a more granular view that unpacks the notion of specialized knowledge. This move [highlights] the boundaries of the various communities of practice involved in the policymaking process, thus offering a discursive reflection on the social system and an opportunity to reconsider it (Epstein et al., 2014, p. 10).

Epstein et al. (2014) and Ganz (2008) propose narrative to overcome the barrier between policymakers and laypeople. In fact, Ganz believes that personal narrative is particularly essential to effective public work. He writes:
Some of us may think our personal stories don't matter, that others won't care, or that we should talk about ourselves so much. On the contrary, if we do public work, we have a responsibility to give a public account of ourselves—where we came from, why we do what we do, and where we think we're going. In a role of public leadership, we really don't have a choice about telling our story of self (Ganz, 2008, p. 1).

Like Ganz and Epstein, my professional experience tells me that clear and articulate storytelling is central to understanding the complexity of systems and a requirement for systemic change which is another important goal for participants in the Gen Z Fellowship as they transition from policy advocacy outsiders to insiders.

_Narrative, Adaptive Leadership, and My Political Lens_

While many focus on external systems when discussing adaptive leadership, internal systems are just as relevant. While developing this fellowship, I must continuously return to the impact of my own political lens. I began my residency at 50CAN centering personal narrative in policy advocacy because I believe telling one's own story with unflinching integrity and fidelity is one of the most important, and typically first, political acts in the human experience. For Ganz, storytelling for liberation is also core to effective political organizing. He writes, "Well-told stories help turn moments of great crises into moments of 'new beginnings' (Ganz, 2008, p. 15)."

My organizing principle aligns with Ganz, who writes,

"If we don't author our story, others will – and they may tell our story in ways that we may not like. Not because they are malevolent, but because others try to make sense of who by drawing on their experience of people whom they consider to be like us (Ganz, 2008, p. 11)"

However, over the years, I have become increasingly curious about the impact of my personal narrative on my political lens. As a result, I entered my residency at 50CAN determined to complexify my understanding of education as a system. Developing the meta-space between
personal experience, narrative, and the world of the experienced policy advocate may create valuable entry points for long-lasting systemic change.

*RKA Summary: The Path to a Successful Gen Z-Focused Fellowship*

The literature indicates that design thinking cycles should effectively integrate the needs and desires of organizational stakeholders (i.e., experienced policy advocates, organizers, and members of Generation Z) when designing a successful fellowship pilot. Research also suggests that the common understanding of Gen Z as a powerful outlier to previous generations needs to be corrected. Gen Z more closely resembles adolescent-aged members of the generations preceding them than not (Dimock, 2019). Therefore, the literature suggests that a more effective approach is considering late adolescent and young adult learners' unique needs in out-of-school experiences (Simpson, 2018, p. 16). This means prioritizing factors known to support impactful experiences, namely participant engagement, high-quality mentor and peer relationships, and careful consideration of the fellowship's context (Higgins, 2005).

According to the literature, late adolescence and young adulthood also offers a unique opportunity to have a long-lasting impact in the sector by creating positive career imprints on the participants (Higgins, 2005). Young adults who receive positive career imprints from the fellowship are ultimately positioned to become invaluable ambassadors for the organization. A positive imprint means carefully curating the participant's resulting capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence-improving experiences. While the research indicates that focusing on these specific elements might encourage a positive career imprint from the fellowship, participants might still need help transitioning into the relatively insular world of education policy advocacy. The research indicates that incorporating personal narrative into the design
will elevate participants as meta experts and support their transition from policy outsider to insider (Epstein et al., 2014).

This fellowship will join a bourgeoning fellowship sector at 50CAN. Ideally, the Gen Z fellowship will complement the National Voices and Build Back Better Fellowships. I am uncertain what a complementary fellowship might look like, but engaging stakeholders during the design thinking process will offer the opportunity for co-creation of a solution.

In addition, this new fellowship should align with the agenda outlined in the organization's 2018-23 strategic plan, "Four Million Opportunities, Four Big Bets" as listed below (Phillips et al., 2022). The portions I adopt for the fellowship are in bold.

1. MORE PEOPLE. We will recruit the next generation of local advocates and invest in them heavily so they can lead this nationwide effort to provide all children with the education they deserve.

2. GREATER OPPORTUNITIES. We will provide more opportunities for local advocates to create new campaigns, seek out new partnerships with existing campaigns and help organizations scale up to grow this movement.

3. SMARTER GOALS. The disruptions of the pandemic pushed us to invest more in innovative policy thinking through new support systems, workshops, and trainings, we will help local advocates develop and implement the policy ideas needed to usher in a whole new era of education.

4. BETTER TOOLS. We will invest in a suite of advocacy tools to help these local leaders build, carry out and learn from their campaigns while leveraging research on what works so that they secure more wins for kids across the country.
Theory of Action

If I

- use design thinking to design a Gen Z-focused fellowship focused on transitioning policy advocacy outsiders to insiders that is grounded in empathy, personal narrative, and the needs and opportunities of the distinct developmental period of young adulthood
- and if I incorporate 50CAN's growth goals and make the fellowship complementary to existing fellowships

Then, 50CAN will

- Meet its strategic growth goals of recruiting and investing in the next generation of local advocates, promoting innovative policy thinking, and developing new support systems, workshops, and training.
- Maintain its trusted position in the domain of education policy advocacy innovation.

So that...

- A new generation of education advocates will arise from within and outside the organization.

Project Description

Residency Interrupted

I began my residency at 50CAN under the supervision of well-regarded Chief Operating Officer Michele Mason. Mason gave me a front-row seat to the complexities of re-crafting and streamlining the operations of an established organization by situating me on the Executive Leadership team at 50CAN. I attended all weekly executive leadership meetings and received calendar holds for National Team, State Executive Director, and All-Staff Meetings. Because Michele was both positioned on the executive leadership team and respected by her fellow
executive leadership team members, her positive regard offered me proximity to formal authority.

Unfortunately, in the early fall, about a month before I would finally meet my colleagues in person at 50CAN's National Summit, Mason suffered a life-altering emergency. This meant an abrupt departure for medical leave. Mason believed her leave would end in time for the summit in New Mexico. Unfortunately, she did not return in time for the summit and ultimately did not resume her role as my site supervisor. Fortunately, CEO Marc Porter-Magee agreed to transition to the mentor and site supervisor role for me. 50CAN responded to the sudden departure by redistributing tasks and protecting Mason from extraneous stress. Nevertheless, her sudden departure significantly delayed progress on my strategic project. Prior to her departure, I was very invested in developing the next Believe in Better seemed to offer the opportunity to learn more about the policy side of education advocacy, which is I wanted to learn at 50CAN. However, as the organization began to settle, instead I found myself working on the Gen Z fellowship.

The Genesis of the Gen Z Fellowship

The Gen Z Fellowship arose from a friendly conversation between Derrell Bradford and a program officer from The Walton Foundation long before I arrived at 50CAN. The program officer suggested that not only was there a lot of energy, but more importantly, a lot of funding around Gen Z and their political potential. Their discussion pointed to existing youth-focused fellowships like the former Secretary of Education Betsy Devos backed, American Federation for Children's (AFC) Future Leaders fellowship and the high school oriented National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' Rising Leaders program. Where these fellowships focus mostly on
narrative, Bradford imagined that 50CAN's fellowship might offer experiences for those considering policy advocacy.

*Why this Fellowship Matters*

While my heart was set on the Believe in Better Fellowship, The Gen Z Fellowship also captured my imagination with its possibilities. I came to 50CAN to enter the world of education policy advocacy. Even though the bulk of my career is based in and around schools, my early experiences at 50CAN left me feeling like an outsider. Working in schools and with students did not give me an edge in the education policy advocacy space. Neither did my experience as an organizer. Losing my site supervisor compounded my experience of feeling outside at 50CAN. I thought this fellowship offered an opportunity for me to re-introduce myself confidently to the organization, because if I know anything, I know adolescents.

Also, I am always thinking to the future. My professional experience tells me that many organizing efforts fail to develop the next generation of leaders. Seeing themselves as forever young, leaders hoard power and information. Their impulse blocks fresh, innovative perspectives that might orient to the future and keep the organization in line with the needs of those they purport to serve. In some industries, organizations simply disappear. Successes and failures in the education sector have far-ranging impact. Therefore, the stakes are too high in education policy advocacy to be cavalier about dying organizations. This fellowship would be an opportunity to pull in and empower the voices of the true K-12 education end users, young people. While there is debate about the success and failures of education reform efforts, our current system is far too ineffective to be left to its own devices. Change must happen. Creating a vehicle to develop the next generation of advocates through authentic and meaningful
experiences seemed like the perfect way to move the organization forward. Table 4 offers a guide to the unfolding of my project.

Strategic Memo Achievement Checklist

In October, I created a set of benchmarks for success and potentially enabling or constraining elements with Marc Porter-Magee and use this to monitor progress of the project. When project planning began, my benchmark for success was that by January 15, the fellowship would have clear programmatic goals, an understanding of where the fellowship lives in the organization, and a vision for the program five years into the future. Success by April 30 meant established programming, recruited fellows, and an established funding plan.

Benchmark Progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4 BENCHMARK PROGRESS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>By January 15</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>By April 30</strong></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicted Enabling or Constraining Elements for the Project</th>
<th>Realized?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enabling Element:</strong> Good relationships with current managers of National Voices</td>
<td>Partially realized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enabling Element:</strong> Program is aligned with 50CAN's Strategic Plan</td>
<td>Partially realized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enabling Element:</strong> 50CANs established reputation with fellowships</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constraining Elements:</strong> Hair crossing with State Initiatives; must figure out how to keep the fellowship innovative while sharing organizational values</td>
<td>Not Realized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constraining Elements:</strong> Money.</td>
<td>Not Realized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constraining Elements:</strong> Capacity: 50CAN is lean. Where does this program reside? How can it become self-sustaining?</td>
<td>Limited information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None of my benchmarks were realized by January 15, however two of the three were realized by the end of February. Michele's sudden departure destabilized the executive leadership
team and focus on my project. However, I was able to establish program goals through design cycles by the end of February. The planning process for the 2024-2029 strategic plan situated the Gen Z Fellowship pilot next to the National Voices Fellowship under the strategic lever, SPARK (Appendix F) by February.

Predicted Enabling and Constraining Elements

I hypothesized enabling and constraining elements for the fellowship at the beginning of my project. I predicted that a positive relationship with Bradford and Stanley, alignment with 50CANs 2018-2023 strategic plan, and the reputation of 50CAN's strategic plan would be enabling elements for the fellowship. Because the project has yet to launch, I do not know if my hypothesis is accurate. However, I do have some evidence of progress towards or away from my predictions.

My relationship with Bradford and Stanley helped establish my credibility at 50CAN. Also, because National Voices is the most established fellowship at 50CAN, they offer invaluable insights into how to make this pilot successful. I sought feedback about the progress of the Gen Z fellowship and engaged Stanley and Bradford in design cycles. While I did have access to them around my strategic project, I did not gain access to the development and recruitment process.

Alignment with the 2018-2023 strategic plan was central to developing the Gen Z prototype. However, because the 2018-2023 strategic plan is at its end, I am still determining the value of this alignment. Fortunately, fellowship development is central to the current strategic planning process. I have no evidence of the enabling effect of the reputation of 50CAN's other fellowship.

I predicted constraining elements to be hair-crossing with state initiatives and alignment with organizational values, money, and an unclear picture of the fellowship's sustainability beyond the pilot. In interviews with the states, there was some evidence that they felt the absence
of the executive leadership team. Several reported needing more attention to their projects when needed, but there is no strong correlation to the Gen Z fellowship. Money is not a risk for the pilot. The Walton foundation is funding the project.

First Step: Learn More About the other Fellowships

I began my fellowship project by interviewing members of the executive leadership team and state executive directors and observing the dynamics of organizational team meetings. I decided first to investigate the vision and priorities of the existing fellowship managers through empathy interviews; Derrell Bradford & Ned Stanley for the National Voices Fellowship and Jonathan Nikkila for the legislator focused, Believe in Better Fellowship. Information that I learned from these empathy interviews, in addition to knowledge from my review for knowledge, helped me create a prototype in alignment with existing national based fellowships at 50CAND. Later, I also met with executive leadership team members whom I believed to be critical to the success or failure of this initiative.

The National Voice Fellowships

I learned that participants in the National Voices fellows are groomed to steer the national conversation around education reform that "that places students, their families and educational excellence at the center" (About the National Voices Fellowship, n.d., para. 7)." Fellows develop skills in the following domains: groundbreaking communications, the past and future of education policy, navigating contemporary political trends, and finally, education advocacy (About the National Voices Fellowship, n.d., para. 10). The expectation is that fellows build advocacy platforms to change the conversation around education reform. Fellows grow their influence as education experts within their city/region and at the national level by executing deliberate communications campaigns to shift the education conversation. These campaign
typically include on-air media, op-eds and columns, in-person speaking events and quotes in mainstream media articles (*About the National Voices Fellowship*, n.d., para. 9).

Bradford and Stanley designed the fellowship to be nonpartisan and welcomed participants from across the political spectrum. In early iterations of the National Voices fellowship, however political differences resulted in unproductive verbal disagreements amongst participants. As a result, Bradford and Stanley integrated collegiality as a core competency in the selection process. Cohorts consist of six to eight people who agree to participate in the year-long in exchange for a $3000 stipend and communications training, policy support and access to alumni programming.

From these interviews, I decided to incorporate their experience around short form storytelling and lessons learned about recruitment.

**TABLE 5 UNFOLDING OF THE STRATEGIC PROJECT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Activities</th>
<th>Theory of Action Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gen Z oriented pipeline development fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy Interviews with Existing Fellowship Managers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prototype</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Thinking Cycles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized Gen Z focus group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Leadership Meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation to National Team Members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Meeting attendance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Believe in Better Fellowship

Jonathan Nikkila is just completing the pilot for the legislator focused Believe in Better fellowship when I join 50CAN. As executive vice-president, Nikkila is 50CAN's political weapon who helps state level executive directors (EDs) realize their ambitious policy goals. He and his team coach EDs through policy advocacy campaigns and manage the organization's 501c (4), the 50CAN Action Fund. The Believe in Better fellowship is Nikkila's attempt to answer the legislators' problem. This fellowship is singular in its aim to flatten a legislator's learning curve on education policy and its supportive, bipartisan programming, and its attempt to keep the focus on children and families. In the pilot of Nikkila's Believe in Better fellowship, a bipartisan set of legislators, who are recruited from recommendations made by state CANs, gather monthly to learn from policy experts on specific contemporary policy issues. Because of legislative rules, The Believe in Better Fellowship is unpaid.

I attended fellowship sessions to observe how experts delivered information to the legislators. They mostly talked at the legislators and left room for a few questions toward the end. While not exciting, the legislators find the sessions quite useful. Even though legislators seem to want more direction around what to think, Nikkila prefers to provide them with pertinent information, then wait for them to arrive at their own conclusions. Their first cohort consists of six legislators, and they meet once a month for ten months.

Create a Stakeholder Map

Through the empathy interviews, I was introduced to several new actors and realized that I did not have as clear a view as I thought of 50CAN. I needed to understand how the fellowship would fit not only in the landscape of the organization, and what the fellowship might mean for 50CAN in the broader education policy landscape. Therefore, I created a stakeholder map to understand the players seen and unseen within the organization (Figure G). The stakeholder map
served multiple purposes: it helped me identify less obvious stakeholders for the fellowship and directed design cycles for rapid prototyping. I did not share this map with the rest of the team because it supported my internal efforts to understand the organization and determine my leadership moves.

Second Step: Develop a Prototype for Design Cycling

After the initial empathy interviews and stakeholder mapping, I developed a prototype of the fellowship using knowledge gained from my empathy interviews with the other fellowship managers, what I know about the needs of Gen Z, the unique needs of adolescents and young adults, career imprints, and narrative which I learned is useful when trying to transition policy outsiders into insiders.

Currently, the organization is in the middle of a strategic planning cycle as their current plan expires at the end of 2023. For this pilot, I engage with the 2018-2023 strategic plan. TABLE 6 outlines the map I used to track the career imprinting components of the fellowship. TABLE 7 outlines the sources of the design decisions I made for the prototype. In the prototype, fellows are selected from nationwide call from the website and email list. Based on conversations with Bradford, I am selecting fellows who are not incredibly well known, or as Derrell puts it, "not the superstars," but who show potential for talent in policy advocacy. I also decided to make a cohort of twelve fellows. The rationale is that this will allow me to split the cohort into even groups of four. If a fellow must be absent from a session, it is easier for the group to function in a group of three that it would be if decreasing the size from three to two people.

I also decide that, in this prototype, the goals of the fellowship are to introduce the policy advocacy landscape to the next generation of policy advocates, bridge the gap between policy
outsiders and lay people, and build a pipeline for 50CAN advocacy fellowships and policy advocacy in general.

The fellowship prototype consists of two days of in person workshops and six weeks of research and relationship building with the advocacy mentors from the National Team. The plan was for the first day of the fellowship to focus on building trusting relationships with each other, learning short form narrative in the style of Marshall Ganz, learning how to use TikTok for storytelling, and telling their narrative about their education experience during the COVID-19 pandemic using the skills they learn. The second day would be spent building relationships with their policy advocacy mentors and learning how policy advocates trace their experience back to policy decisions. Fellows will also learn different entry points into the policy advocacy landscape. Close to the end of their two-day, in-person experience, the fellows would be broken into groups of four along shared interests and choose a particular education related issue that is deeply impacted by policy. I propose that fellows spend the six weeks investigating the policy issues surrounding their issues. During this time, fellows meet with their mentors weekly to get guidance and recommendations for next steps in the project. Ultimately, fellows present their policy research to the 50CAN Staff.
Stakeholders
1. Executive leadership team
2. Legislators
3. Former Team Members
4. State teams
5. Junior members of State Teams
6. National team members
7. Folks who straddle teams
8. Redundant Former Team
9. School Choice Landscape
10. Other ed Advocacy agencies
11. Fiscal Sponsors
12. Former Fellows
13. Funders
14. Former Fellowships
15. National voices fellows
16. Other Fellowships
17. Gen Z Fellowship

Operational Context
1. Culture wars
2. COVID
3. Shifting Advocacy Winds
4. Legacy (StudentsFirst)

Espoused Work at the Center
1. Fiscal Legacy
2. Students
3. Families
4. Education Choice
### TABLE 6 CAREER IMPRINT MAP FOR PROTOTYPE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEOPLE (Who? What Backgrounds and Experiences do they come with?)</th>
<th>16- to 24-year-olds from across the country who have an interest in learning more about policy; not obvious stars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| PLACE (Where do we want to situate fellows in the organization?) | - Interact mostly with Junior members of 50CANs national team to provide growth opportunity for those team members.  
- Fellowship to be held in Washington D.C. to enhance political experience of fellows—make it memorable |
| PLACE (What career stage are fellows in? Where are fellows in Adult Development?) | These fellows are complete novices and are in late adolescence through young adulthood |
| CAPABILITIES (What should fellows be able to do after they complete this fellowship) | - **Short Form Narrative.** Fellows should be able to tell the story of their experience in schools through the short format of TikTok.  
- **Trace experience to policy.** Fellows should be able to research the underlying policies that impacted their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic |
| COGNITIONS (What should fellows know that they did not know before?) | - Fellow should know about careers that span the world of policy advocacy so that they might find an entry point.  
- Fellows should learn how policy advocates trace and respond to the experiences of constituents |
| CONFIDENCE (Where and should fellows become more confident about?) | - Fellows should become more confident in participating in the policy advocacy world.  
- Fellows should also become more comfortable in connecting their personal narrative to decisions made by local politicians |
| CONNECTIONS (What connections should arise from participating in this fellowship?) | - Fellows should become connected to  
- National organizers at 50CAN  
- Young adults who are also interested in pursuing policy advocacy.  
- 50CANs network of policy advocacy fellows |

**Third: Begin Design Cycles**

For the next phase of my project, I turned the major components of my prototype into a presentation that I would use in the design cycles. I used this presentation to test and refine the prototype with feedback from the fellowship's target audience: young adult members of Gen Z and constituencies within 50CAN as identified in Table 8. For each design cycle, I gave the stakeholders the opportunity to respond to a feature of the fellowship and recorded their feedback. After each design cycle, I used stakeholder feedback to amend the prototype. I then presented the newest iteration of the prototype to the next set of stakeholders. Because I consider the Gen Z stakeholders to be the true end users of the fellowship, I began and ended each cycle.
with them. Table 9 illustrates how the most current iteration of the fellowship looks very different than my original prototype.

**TABLE 7 SOURCE OF PROTOTYPE ELEMENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Prototype Element</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathy Interviews with other fellowship managers</td>
<td>Cohort is small (12) and interviewing for collegiality. Including portion on short form storytelling to align with comms instruction in National Voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unique needs of Gen Z</td>
<td>Because the COVID-19 pandemic is a generation defining moment for Gen Z, the fellow narratives will focus on their education related experience during this period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unique needs of late adolescents and young adults</td>
<td>Offers opportunities to build lasting, trust-based relationships with each other and mentors in the policy advocacy space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Imprint Theory</td>
<td>See Table 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitioning Policy Outsiders into Insiders</td>
<td>Narrative will feature heavily in the fellowship, with fellows first sharing a well-crafted narrative of their pandemic education experience, then revisiting that experience with the help of experienced policy advocate mentors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8 FELLOWSHIP STAKEHOLDERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fellowship Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Gen Z aged focus group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Managers for existing fellowships at 50CAN | Derrell Bradford and Ned Stanley, managers for the National Voices Fellowship  
Jonathan Nikkila and Andrew Thode, managers of the Believe in Better Fellowship. |
| Executive Leadership Team | Vice President of Finance Kenna Little,  
Vice President of Development Alex Lawrence  
Chief of Staff, Samantha Kobbah  
CEO, Marc Porter-Magee |
| Members of the National Team, especially those who run local fellowships | Luis Ortiz, ConnCAN  
Hamish MacPhail, ConnCAN  
Stephen Quinn, GeorgiaCAN |

During the design cycles I continued to research Gen Z fellowships for marketing ideas. I enlisted the help of 50CANs, Creative Manager who is also a member of Gen Z, to help me create a polished iteration of the fellowship. During the design cycles, I received feedback from the Gen Z stakeholders that they thought the fellowship should feel prestigious from beginning to end. This informed the conversations I had with the Creative Manager. Together we discussed
the ideal look and feel of the fellowship. She agreed to create a set of design prototypes that I would test with the Gen Z focus groups.

Executive Leadership Meetings and Board Meetings

During my residency, I was given the opportunity to attend executive leadership meetings. These meetings gave me insight into the direction of the organization. Early in the project, I had some doubt about the long-term sustainability of the Gen Z Fellowship because of observations from these meetings. During the development of the fellowship, I began to consider the overall potential of the Gen Z fellowship in context of the organization's new strategic growth plan.

As previously mentioned, the organization is in the middle of a strategic planning cycle. As part of their work, the organization has separated their efforts into four strategic levers or workstreams as outlined in Appendix F. They are: Serve the public, Spark new ideas, Advocate for the future of education, and Build proof points. In the most recent draft of the strategic plan, fellowships reside under the strategic lever, Spark.

Evidence

Appendix C is a helpful reference in this section that outlines my theory of action, related activities, and the resulting evidence. I have selected the following artifacts for analysis: an achievement checklist using my strategic memo from October, an overview of empathy interviews with the managers of existing fellowships at 50CAN, an overview of design cycle innovations as outlined in Table 8, and a high-level overview of the fellowship from prototype to its current iteration in Table 9.

Empathy Interviews with Existing Fellowship Managers
The empathy interviews with existing managers offered insights about the position of the Gen Z at 50CAN and its chances at sustainability within the organization.

*The National Voices Fellowship Empathy Interviews*

As previously mentioned, Bradford believes that a primary goal of 50CAN is to spark new ideas and be at the forefront of education policy. A driving force behind the National Voices Fellowship for Bradford is his desire to replicate and eventually replace policy advocates like himself. A major goal of National Voices is the creation of a bench of policy advocates. Building a bench is important to Derrell. This reaffirms my goal to have the impact of this Gen Z pilot extend beyond the six-week duration of the fellowship.

In our interviews I learn that both Bradford and Stanley have some nagging concerns about the fellowship. National Voices is structured around Bradford. According to Bradford, the fellowship consists of "a pile of [readings] that [we] should use, right? And a process to pull people together. And there's nothing else about how it goes. There exists no place other than...the two of us putting a schedule together and...us showing up and hopefully me making the magic happen." Bradford and Stanley do not keep formal records of what happens in the fellowship from session to session, much less year to year. The fellowship is vulnerable to because its curriculum exists primarily inside Bradford's head, rendering the internal organization of the fellowship opaque. Interestingly, both managers were very clear about this vulnerability, however had no plan to correct the issue and were dismissive of efforts to formalize the program.

In later interviews, another issue arises from Bradford and Stanley: how can effectively engage the thirty-seven alums of National Voices? Not only do the managers have no way to track the long-term success of their fellowships, but they also have no formalized engagement
plan for their alumni. While Bradford and Stanley occasionally tap the fellows for opportunities within the network and help with job placement, I learn that interacting with the alums of the fellowship in a meaningful way is an unwieldy prospect. In later strategic planning sessions, as they explore the value proposition of the National Voices Fellowship at 50CAN, the executive leadership team identifies this as a missed opportunity.

The Believe in Better Fellowship Empathy Interviews

Unfortunately, I have no empathy interviews with Nikkila beyond our first one. Meeting with Nikkila about the fellowship becomes almost impossible to schedule. The timing for our would-be meetings was tricky because it coincided with the busiest part of Nikkila's year. Late November and early December are when Nikkila and his team must help all state EDs review their progress on policy goals, plan for intense legislative sessions that begin in February, close out annual responsibilities for the 501(c)4, prepare for the winter board meeting, and conduct performance reviews. This realization helps mitigate my feeling of dismissal.

Initially, I kept track of Believe in Better's development through executive leadership meetings. In one of these meetings, I learn that Nikkila and Thode are imagining ways to make the fellowship feel incredibly prestigious. Nikkila and Thode are building a prestigious board that might feature Howard Dean or Jeb Bush for their fellowship. They are also expanding into a candidate development fellowship. I still want the Gen Z Fellowship to maintain a close connection to Believe in Better, so I am careful to include Thode in design cycles.

As my project progressed, my understanding of the inner workings of the National Voices became murky. After a few empathy interviews, I did not attend further meetings concerning the National Voices Fellowship. However, I was able to gain access to the criteria that National Voices
uses to select its fellows. While not developed yet, the selection criteria for the Gen Z fellowship will align with the criteria for National Voices.

*State-Based Fellowships*

During design cycles with members of state level teams, I unearth several other existing fellowships at the organization. ConnCAN, GeorgiaCAN, and HawaiiCAN all host successful-parent focused fellowships. During their time as fellows, parents learn to self-advocate for their children and communities and how to advocate with legislators. These fellowships appear to be a natural partner for national based fellowships and in alignment with 50CANs goal of recruiting and training more local advocates, however, the executive leadership team sees these fellowships as "different."

I do not recall hearing about state-based fellowships before working with Luis Ortiz (Lu) and Hamish MacPhail from the ConnCAN team and Steven Quinn who sits on both the GeorgiaCAN and national team. During our design cycles, MacPhail and Ortiz share the existence of these fellowships in a matter-of-fact way, while Quinn seems dejected. At several points during the conversation, it is clear that while Quinn believes the executive leadership team appreciates his work with his parent fellowship, EPIC, he also implies that the executive leadership team does not take his efforts seriously. To Quinn, the executive leadership team considers the national based fellowships to be more important. Later, when I attempt to bring the parent fellowships into the same conversation as the national fellowships, the consensus from the executive leadership team is consensus is that "these fellowships are not the same" however they do not clarify this stance.

*The Design Cycles*

The design thinking cycles emphasized the value of curiosity and human-centered empathy, creating a product with an increased likelihood of sustainability through organizational
buy-in. As I tested iterations of the fellowship with stakeholders (Table 7) innovation patterns began to emerge. The final row of Table 8 illustrates emergent innovations. As expected, the people closest to the problem did, in fact, have the most interesting, innovative, and useful answers ensuring that the fellowship will be centered on human needs and perspectives.

In early cycles, I engaged the stakeholders most closely tied to the successful execution of this inaugural fellowship: a Gen Z aged focus group from Harvard, managers for existing fellowships at 50CAN, the executive leadership team, members of the national team, especially those who run local fellowships and national campaigns. Each design cycle revealed innovations that otherwise would have been invisible to me. For example, in one of the early cycles, Catherine, an eighteen-year-old undergraduate from Harvard College recommended that any monetary compensation be called a grant. Her peers agreed with her sentiment that it sounded more impressive to say, "I received a grant to research policy issues impacting my community as part of my fellowship with 50CAN" rather than, "This fellowship came with a stipend." The student said that "grant" coupled with "research" sounded like academically serious and meaningful work. Students were also adamant about not being forced to discuss COVID-19 as I originally planned. "I mean, if it comes up, it comes up, but we are so over it. It's just a part of our lives, and there's other things we care about."
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
<th>ITERATION ONE</th>
<th>ITERATION TWO</th>
<th>ITERATION THREE</th>
<th>ITERATION FIVE</th>
<th>ITERATION EIGHT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE</td>
<td>Gen Z Fellowship</td>
<td>Next Gen Fellowship</td>
<td>Next Gen Fellowship</td>
<td>Next Gen Fellowship</td>
<td>Next Gen Fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOALS</td>
<td>To introduce the policy advocacy landscape to the next generation of policy advocates</td>
<td>To introduce the policy advocacy landscape to the next generation of policy advocates</td>
<td>To introduce the policy advocacy landscape to the next generation of policy advocates</td>
<td>To introduce the policy advocacy landscape to the next generation of policy advocates</td>
<td>50CAN’s Next Gen Fellowship introduces passionate and high-potential young adults to the universe of education policy advocacy by helping them tell their own stories, authentically experience the world of the policy advocate, have impactful experiences, and build relationships as they begin their formal career path.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COACHES</td>
<td>Junior members of National Team in need of growth opportunity</td>
<td>Junior members of National Team in need of growth opportunity</td>
<td>Junior members of National Team in need of growth opportunity partnered with Nev Fellow</td>
<td>Junior members of National Team in need of growth opportunity partnered with Nev Fellow</td>
<td>Junior members of National Team in need of growth opportunity partnered with Nev Fellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DURATION</td>
<td>2 Days and 6 weeks</td>
<td>2 Days and 6 weeks</td>
<td>2 Days and 6 weeks</td>
<td>3 Days and 6 Weeks</td>
<td>3 Days and 6 Weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUDIENCE</td>
<td>16-24 from across country</td>
<td>18-24 from across country</td>
<td>18-23 from targeted states</td>
<td>18-23 from other Spark Fellows</td>
<td>undergraduate or 18-22 from recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPENSATION</td>
<td>$500 Stipend</td>
<td>$800 Grant</td>
<td>$800 Grant</td>
<td>$800 Grant</td>
<td>$1200 Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CULMINATING EVENT</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Present at National Summit</td>
<td>Present and Pitch at National Summit</td>
<td>Present at National Summit, Event with all Spark Fellows, Funders, and Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOTABLE INNOVATIONS</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Compensation: Offer a modest stipend, but call it a grant to elevate the entire fellowship.</td>
<td>Duration: Have fellows begin in July to coincide with legislative planning and typical advocate downtime</td>
<td>Relationship: Extend fellowship to include time for intra-cohort relationship development</td>
<td>Impactful Event: Dinner or talk from high profile policy advocate youth (e.g. David Hogg)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A later design cycle with Andrew Thode, campaigns manager for the national team and co-designer of the Believe in Better Fellowship, helped me reconsider a fellowship recruitment goal. Thode questioned my impulse to gear the fellowship towards policy outsiders and diamonds in the rough: "If we know there are kids who are into this kind of stuff then why punish them? Go get the stars." When I spoke to him about creating meaningful, once-in-a-lifetime connections for the fellows, he recommended that I engage politically powerful teen superstars like David Hogg. "Get them close to kids already effective at doing the work." The fellowship that launches in late April and begins in later July is significantly improved by consulting stakeholders like Thode and Mignone.

Each iteration of the design cycle saw improvement upon a prototype that, haughtily, I believed was already perfect. Transparently, I was both disappointed and relieved when fellowship design improved during the design cycle. While I believe that the idea of expertise is an intellectual trap, a quiet part of me wanted to believe that because I have worked so closely with young adults, that I was an expert. Luckily, during this strategic project both colleagues and advisors have demanded my curiosity more than my expertise.

Prototype to Current Iteration

Table 10 outlines the fellowship from prototype its most current iteration. Design Cycles, interviews with the managers of existing fellowships, and attention to 50CAN's strategic goals helped me create the most current iteration of the Gen Z, now entitled the Next GEN, fellowship. This most current iteration is nimble and adaptable enough to be relevant to generations of young adults beyond Gen Z, which is why I changed the name. The design of this fellowship dismisses the idea that the Gen Z generation is markedly different from preceding generations. Instead, it is designed around research on young adult development and considers stakeholder perspective.
The prototype and the most current iteration are markedly different. A small, but impactful change came from my very first design cycles with the Gen Z focus group who concurred that none of them want to hang out with high schoolers and that twenty-four-year-olds felt "old" to them. Paying attention to stakeholders during design cycles and empathy interviews incorporated also uncovered elements I forgot to consider. For example, in the prototype, I only scheduled two days for our in-person workshop. Bradford pointed that starting the fellowship with a morning arrival made little logistical sense. The fellows would be arriving from all over the country. What would happen if a flight was delayed? It made more sense for the fellows to arrive the day before the true "programming." This would offer a buffer for logistical challenges and give the fellows an opportunity to settle after travel.

Coming a day early would also give fellows the opportunity to develop informal relationships. While developing the prototype, I tightly focused on how I could orchestrate relationships between the fellows, missing an opportunity for them to build trusting relationships with each other absent my overt intervention. His suggestion reminded me that meaningful aspects of cohorts form in the spaces of ease where the managers of fellowships are often not allowed. The most recent iteration of the fellowship has many more moments of ease built into allow for relationship building.

A suggestion by Porter-Magee also makes it into the prototype. He points out that I should consider the parts of this fellowship that I might take for granted as an adult who experienced quite a bit of privilege. Because our fellows are so young, this might be the first time that many of them had taken a plane or stayed in a really nice hotel as the guest of a fellowship. It also might be the first time many for most of the fellows to visit DC. Earlier in this capstone, I wrote "if I know anything, I know adolescents" yet I missed an easy opportunity to
### TABLE 10 FELLOWSHIP Prototype VS. CURRENT Iteration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prototype (The Gen Z Fellowship)</th>
<th>Current Iteration (The Next Gen Fellowship)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Introduce the policy advocacy landscape to the next generation of policy advocates</td>
<td>- to introduce the policy advocacy landscape to the next generation of policy advocates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bridge the gap between policy outsiders and lay people</td>
<td>- bridge the gap between policy outsiders and lay people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bridge political divides</td>
<td>- build a pipeline for 50CAN advocacy fellowships and policy advocacy in general.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ultimately build a pipeline for 50CAN advocacy fellowships advocacy in general</td>
<td>- <strong>Vision</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Focus of Day Two</strong></td>
<td>- <strong>18 to 22 Years Old</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Twelve (12) Fellows (three groups of four)</td>
<td>- Eight (8) Fellows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fellows selected from a nationwide call</td>
<td>- Begins in Late July for timeline to coincide with legislative planning and policy advocate down time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fellows are &quot;not the superstars,&quot; but show potential for talent in policy advocacy</td>
<td>- Fellows come from recommendations by fiscal sponsors, state campaigns, and strategic partnerships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Two days of in person workshops in Washington DC</td>
<td>- o Students with experience in organizing are not precluded from admission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Six weeks virtual meetings with cohort and mentors from the National Team</td>
<td>- o While not a requirement, preference is given to students who have significant experience with TikTok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No Stipend</td>
<td>- o Most fellows still are &quot;not superstars,&quot; but show potential for talent in policy advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus of Day One: Fellows will—</strong></td>
<td>- Three days of in person workshops in Washington DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Build trusting relationships with each other</td>
<td>- Six weeks virtual meetings with cohort and mentors from the National Team and National Voices Alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learn short form narrative in the style of Marshall Ganz</td>
<td>- $1200 Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use TikTok for short form storytelling</td>
<td><strong>Focus of Day One (Afternoon Arrival): Fellows will—</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Tell the narrative of their education experience during the COVID-19 using new storytelling skills</td>
<td>- <strong>Build trusting relationships with each other during dinner</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus of Day Two: Fellows will—</strong></td>
<td>- Be introduced to impactful speaker, previously inaccessible to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Build relationships with their policy advocacy mentors and small group members</td>
<td><strong>Focus of Day Two: Fellows will—</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learn how policy advocates trace their education experience during COVID-19 back to policy decisions</td>
<td>- Continue to build trusting relationships with each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Find a shared advocacy concern</td>
<td>- Learn short form narrative in the style of Marshall Ganz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learn different entry points into the policy advocacy landscape</td>
<td>- Use TikTok for short form storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Six Weeks: Fellows will—</strong></td>
<td>- Tell the narrative of their education experience during the COVID-19 using new storytelling skills (Use Contest to Build Meaning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Research into the policy origins of their education advocacy</td>
<td>- <strong>Have a deeply meaning making experience in the evening</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Present Findings During 50CAN All Staff Meeting</td>
<td><strong>Focus of Day Three: Fellows will—</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Trace the policy origins of their education advocacy</td>
<td>- Build relationships with their policy advocacy mentors and small group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learn how other state/cities/advocacy groups are responding to their same issue</td>
<td>- Learn how policy advocates trace their education experience during COVID-19 back to policy decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Build relationships with participants in other Fellowships, policy advocates, state, and national campaign members</td>
<td>- Find a shared advocacy concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Present at National Summit, Event with all Spark Fellows, Funders, and Partners</td>
<td>- Learn different entry points into the policy advocacy landscape</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Six Weeks:**
- Trace the policy origins of their education advocacy
- Learn how other state/cities/advocacy groups are responding to their same issue
- Build relationships with participants in other Fellowships, policy advocates, state, and national campaign members
- Present at National Summit, Event with all Spark Fellows, Funders, and Partners
capitalize on the developmental stage of our fellows and add to a career imprint. In the most
current iteration, we build in welcome kits that will include thoughtful design and swag. The
second day also includes a yet unspecified, Washington DC specific experience for the fellows.

Once again design thinking invited curiosity into this fellowship and has resulted in an
iteration that is now ready to pilot. While I am are still in the process of developing a prototype
of more specific curriculum for design cycling, after the completion of visual design sessions, we
will be ready to recruit the first cycle of fellows in late April and begin in late July.
Analysis

My strategic project at 50CAN had its share of successes and failures in both design and leadership. When I began my project, I believed that design thinking would allow me to build a sustainable project that would serve the needs of generations beyond Generation Z. To achieve this goal, I brought in my professional expertise as a former educator of adolescents. In addition, I borrowed principles from Higgin's career imprint framework, and design thinking to engage key stakeholders to design a fellowship that would transition outsiders of the policy world to insiders.

The organization is also strategic planning for the years 2024-2027. In the most recent iteration of this strategic plan, 50CAN separates organizational focus into four work streams or strategic levers, as outlined in Appendix F. Currently, the pilot for the Next Gen fellowship is categorized alongside the National Voices Fellowship under the strategic lever "SPARK new ideas." The project has yet to launch, 50CAN continues to demonstrate investment in the initiative by including the pilot in strategic planning and allocating a detailed budget to the project. We plan to announce the fellowship in late April, with a call for applications after the creative design team finished with the pilot.

The Design Thinking Process

I turned to design thinking because to design the Gen Z fellowship because I wanted to keep empathy at the center of the project. Importantly, while developing this pilot, I learn that the executive leadership team likes to get their hands dirty. In early design cycles process, I learned that the executive leadership team is not only interested in hearing about but offering tangible support for the fellowship. Their overall goal is to create life changing experience for young adults. Because executive leadership team members are so open to sharing both personal
experience and professional expertise, I was able to build a strong pilot with a vision towards the future. However, early interviews with Bradford and the executive leadership team indicated that there were a preconceived notions about Gen Z which were mostly based in deficit thinking. In a 2021 blog post, authors Dam and Siang write this about empathy in design thinking:

"Empathy is simply crucial to a human-centered design process such as design thinking as it helps you set aside your own assumptions about the world to gain insight into your users and their needs instead (Dam & Siang, 2021, para. 11)."

I knew that if this fellowship was to be successful, it would have to be rooted in empathy with instead of assumptions about Gen Z.

Outcomes from empathy interviews conducted at the very beginning of my residency indicated that there were sometimes misalignments between staff and the executive leadership around strategic decisions in the organization. In a 2005 in Harvard Business Review, the authors write that "[t]he disagreements sparked by differences in perspective, competencies, access to information, and strategic focus within a company actually generate much of the value that can come from collaboration across organizational boundaries (Weiss & Hughes, 2005, p. 2)." So instead of avoiding the possibility of conflict, I welcomed it by inviting a cross-section of organizational voices for collaboration as early as possible in the design process. I consulted with Bradford and Stanley to pull in their recommendations for organizational stakeholders to involve in the process. Bradford recommended that I avoid involving the state teams when designing this fellowship. He thought that the executive directors would be too close to their own work to have good perspective about a new initiative. Choosing to maintain a good relationship with Bradford, I reluctantly agreed to exclude state executive directors until the very last design cycle. I chose to trust Bradford and incorporate other stakeholders, especially those with experience aligned to the needs of the fellowship; campaign managers, organizers, and managers of state-based fellowships, but not totally exclude the state executive directors.
The most recent iteration of the NextGen fellowship is noticeably different from the prototype as Table 9 outlines in the Evidence section. In a 2020 Work Design Magazine article, "The Co-Creation Process: How Inclusion Builds a Resilient Culture," Elizabeth Lowrey writes, "Co-creation regards every stakeholder as a creative contributor without hierarchical limits to their input. Companies possess much untapped raw material – data, experience, narrative, culture. Anyone, from the most junior line employee to the most senior executive, can provide key insights to a successful project (Lowrey, 2020, p. 4)."

The current iteration of the Gen Z pilot is attuned to the wants and needs of all stakeholders and is the result of a co-creative process with internal stakeholders at 50CAN and previously missing Gen Z. Lowrey tells us that in co-creation, "The antidote to complexity is not simplicity – it’s transparency." However, a powerful faction from within the organization, state executive directors, was almost missing from this pilot. My near decision to align with Bradford and exclude the executive directors for this particular project might have made developing this pilot simpler. However, I also believed that failing to include insights from such a powerful faction may have inadvertently added to my perceived misalignment between the state executive directors and the national team. Because I chose to be transparent with the executive directors and their insights are now also a part of this most current iteration. As a result, the most current iteration of the prototype creates a "solution that meets the needs of all stakeholders involved (Barenscheer, 2022, p. 2)." Research says that "using design thinking at the early stages of a project, you can mitigate the risk of things going wrong later on," which makes me confident in fellowship's chance at success (Barenscheer, 2022, p. 2).

In a 2016 report, McKinsey writes that, "rather than adapt to the demands of an organizational transformation, employees are more likely to resist passively, undermining the effort and spreading that contagion throughout the organization (Basford & Schaninger, 2016)." My experience in tech and with convincing stakeholders in schools to adopt innovations supports
their assertion that new initiatives often require "hearts and mind" campaigns to win over detractors. In the project, I borrowed principles from design leadership to track stakeholders who might not outright oppose the fellowship and instead subtly undermine my efforts. I used stakeholder mapping to obtain a clearer view of power within the organization. What I found is that support from the executive leadership team was a protective factor for the fellowship. Because I had their approval, I was able to avoid answering questions that I typically expect to find when I am promoting a new initiative. I believe that because 50CAN is fairly healthy, then approval from formal authority figures meant approval for me. Authoritative support from the executive leadership team meant much easier progress for the development of the fellowship. Also, 50CAN's executive leadership team has earned trust and respect from its the staff by responsibly wielding formal authority. Proximity to their formal authority offered me protection and assistance as I was developing this pilot.

In addition to the authorizing effect of the leadership team, 50CAN's culture of openness, trust, and autonomy both supported and hindered the progress of the Gen Z fellowship. The Clemmer Group writes "there’s a direct and strong relationship between organization trust and innovation…if we want more experimentation and learning on our teams or organizations, we must establish an atmosphere that builds self-confidence and trust (Clemmer, n.d., p. 1)." When I joined the 50CAN, the leaders on the executive leadership team welcomed me with open arms. I found the same was true from the state level teams. Early on, it was clear that whatever was being said about one team, the other team already knew. In early interviews, several state team members relayed a statement along the lines of "I'm not saying anything I haven't said to anyone on the executive leadership team."
50CAN's organizational bend towards honesty supports innovation and was a boon to the design of the Gen Z fellowship because "a big cause of team and organization learning impairments is lack of openness (Clemmer, n.d.)." Learning cycles require not only an invitation to the process, a trusting context for design stakeholders to be reflective, open, and authentic. Later in his article, Jim Clemmer reminds leaders that "trust is built or destroyed by what we do," and offers a helpful list for identifying if an organization is building towards a trustworthy context (Clemmer). He recommends that leaders pay keen attention to the following indicators of a trusting organization:

"How are mistakes treated? How much experimenting do we personally model and encourage in others? Who gets rewarded and recognized for what behavior? What management support systems and processes are in place? How much and what type of skills are developed and for whom? What information is shared, by whom, and with whom? Do we keep our promises? Do we truly live according to our values? How clear and consistent are our goals and priorities? (Clemmer, p. 1)."

During the development of the Gen Z Fellowship, the leadership at 50CAN modeled a willingness to experiment, openly sharing information, and being clear and consistent about their values. Porter-Magee and Bradford were extremely supportive about the innovations that I presented to them between innovation cycles. I think this is because their culture of openness had already resulted in an organization with a tendency towards innovation. Early in the fellowship, the leadership team likes to ask a lot of questions, give a lot of feedback, and offer support when I needed it. Their behaviors reflect the behavior of the rest of the staff. I believe the culture of trust and innovation led the leadership team to offer me high levels of autonomy. In December 2021 Harvard Business Review article, the authors assert that organizational autonomy lends itself to "higher levels of ownership and creativity, [and] this strategy leads to better, more innovative ideas (Boss et al., 2021)." I believe that this proved true in the development of this project. Autonomy gave me the freedom to use my expertise to design
a testable prototype for the fellowship. However, later I will discuss how autonomy at 50CAN also became a limiting factor in the progress of the fellowship.

As I mention at the beginning of the description, my residency was interrupted by the sudden departure of my site supervisor, Michele Mason. There is a clear line of demarcation for before her departure and after. Immediately after Michele's departure, both the organization and I went quiet. For example, I knew the nature of Michele's illness because I called to check on her well-being. Acknowledging the sensitivity that is required from an organization, it was disconcerting to be disinvited from meetings that had once been on my calendar. My presence at 50CAN was because of Michele's initiative and her departure meant that for a few weeks, I was left without a champion. This resulted in a delay in not only identifying my strategic project, but a lack of guidance after I had identified one. In a 2002 Harvard Business Review Article, Dutton et al. assert that the costs of not providing leadership and the organizational infrastructure to help people deal with their grief [after a crisis] are considerable. People in pain tend to be distracted at work, and if they don’t have appropriate outlets, they may become unresponsive (Dutton et al., 2002, p. 2)." While it has not been directly named, I believe that 50CAN may have been and still is grieving her loss.

The result for my project was a delay on beginning the project at all. The original timeline was that my strategic project would begin in mid to late September. By mid-September, I still did not have a site supervisor. Eventually, Porter-Magee took over Michele's role in my residency. However, the delayed timeline pushed the project into October and late November which are particularly busy times in the non-profit landscape. Dutton et al. write, "autonomy is neither all-good nor all-bad (Dutton et al., 2002, p. 2)." In my case, same autonomy that was a promoting factor, became a limiting factor.
After Michele's departure, the organization distributed her work amongst the staff, depleting the bandwidth of the leadership team. The depletion of bandwidth made it difficult to gain the same access to stakeholders, namely Nikkila, Bradford, and Stanley. Rachel Mucha advises, "the best way to handle an unexpected departure is to be ready for it. This means having a succession plan in place (Mucha, 2020, p. 2)." Prior to her departure, members of the executive, leadership team, including Mason, already had an inordinate amount of responsibility.

For example, as I began developing the pilot, even though I could get empathy interviews with both Bradford and Stanley, I remained shut out of the inner workings of the other fellowships. National Voices is only one of Bradford and Stanley's projects. In addition to managing this fellowship, they have clearly defined responsibilities on the executive leadership team. After Michele's departure, the Gen Z fellowship was not a priority for the National Voices team.

The same happened with the Believe in Better Fellowship. I was only able to have one empathy interview with Nikkila. However, as I mention in the evidence section, in addition to managing this fellowship, he is also managing nearly a dozen state executive directors, helping them navigate their legislative cycles and policy goals, and building the 501(c)4 portion of the organization. My strategic project came back online at the beginning of one of the busiest cycles of the year for Nikkila because it coincides with state goal setting, legislative cycles, and end of the year reviews. Nikkila's lack of communication was not personal, he was busy. Nevertheless, the Gen Z fellowship is not as aligned with the Believe in Better Fellowship as I would have hoped. The obligations of the executive leadership team increased exponentially after Michele's departure, reducing the likelihood of sustained collaboration beyond the design cycles. This lack
of sustained collaboration makes me concerned that the Gen Z fellowship exists in an unsustainable silo.

*Career Imprint View of 50CAN*

Because the project has yet to launch, I am only able to assess the success of the design thinking process, the organization's response to my leadership efforts, and my resulting hypothesis about the sustainability of the project. I can however examine the readiness of the fellowship to leave a lasting and beneficial career imprints on fellowship participants. As mentioned in my review of knowledge for action, Higgins indicates that the indicators of an organization that will leave a strong career imprint are: *social reinforcement* as indicated by collective identity, socialization and shared norms of behavior, *stretch opportunities* or corporate strategy and structure, and *demonstrated success*, or a member opportunities for recognition and reward within the organization (Higgins, 2005, p. 167).

*Social reinforcement* is the strongest indicator of 50CAN's readiness to create a career imprint. There is a very clear way of the way 50CAN "does things around here." For example, school choice principles will strongly influence the experience of the Gen Z fellows. This is because, school choice is 50CAN's central ethos. Also, while it was difficult for me to find a stable home at 50CAN, I observe a great deal of collaboration and knowledge sharing in the organization, especially amongst the state executive directors. Also, outside of my experience after Michele's departure, I believe 50CANs culture of openness and orientation towards innovation would positively impact a fellow's experience. I believe that fellowship mentors have will have an incredible opportunity to offer fellows *stretch opportunities* and give them the chance to *demonstrate success* during the fellowship, however there is currently no written curriculum for the fellowship as of yet.
Implications

Implications for Self

Design Thinking
The Next Gen pilot is a result of my commitment to root this project in empathy and curiosity. I entered residency as a champion of design thinking. While at HGSE, my advisor Jal Mehta and colleague Xiaohoa Ching convinced me that design thinking might correct negative patterns I had experienced in my leadership. According to them, well-intended, carefully designed initiatives fell flat because they needed to be in touch with the needs and desires of their audience (Mehta, 2016). In my professional experience, I had observed that often, leaders talked through instead of with stakeholders. I had even been guilty of creating a project and presenting it to stakeholders for feedback, while fully intending to execute the project as I saw fit, no matter the feedback. Jal and Xiaohoa suggested design thinking as a possible correction for systems hopelessly out of touch with those they intended to serve. I found that, in practice, adhering to the principles of design thinking is quite difficult.

The reality that it is much easier to talk to people than talk with people was apparent in this project. Regularly consulting stakeholders required me to have enough discipline to keep my leadership rooted in curiosity and humility rather than certainty. Adhering to the design cycle process forced me to trust my stakeholders and my belief in the values of co-creation and collective power building. However, the temptation to follow my own understanding rather than that of the stakeholders appeared often through the unfolding of this project.

I assumed that accessing my professional expertise with adolescents, human development, research, and observations of the organization to produce a thoughtful prototype would help alleviate my inclination towards acting as expert. I was mostly correct in this assumption. As I mentioned earlier, even though I espouse a belief in design thinking as a
meaningful tool for human-centered engagement and power building, I also secretly believed there would be minimal change from prototype to iteration. I had one foot in a world where my intelligence outweighed stakeholder input and another where I believe collective efforts always outweigh individual inputs. As indicated by experience and research, the latter was true instead of the former.

Adaptive Leadership: Inside/Out

In adaptive leadership, it is as important to pay attention to internal systems as external systems. Heifetz writes: "People who lead adaptive change most successfully have a diagnostic mind-set about themselves as well as about the situation. That is, they are continually striving to understand what is going on inside, how they are changing over time, and how they as a system interact with their organization as a system (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 4)."

My rationale for joining 50CAN was lofty. I believe in access to good education for all students. Refusing to interact with school choice organizations meant choosing politics over what could be best for students. I wanted to complicate my understanding of the policy landscape. I was successful in not only complicating my understanding of education policy advocacy, but also of myself. One important lesson I learned about myself is that mentorship matters to me.

Besides its focus on building national impact with local power, mentorship from Michele Mason was my biggest draw to 50CAN. I believed our shared identity as black women would offer important insights into my leadership. Michele showed up unapologetically as COO of 50CAN and she was teaching me to do the same. I believe that losing her mentorship was a loss for my development in residency as I was hoping that she would also become a sponsor for me, or someone who spoke up for me in rooms I had yet to enter.
When Marc Porter-Magee took over as my site supervisor and mentor, I began to question the role of identity in mentorship. Although Marc is male, white, and Catholic, he is far more appropriate for my leadership journey. Our identities do not align, but the way we think about organizations does. With Marc, I have learned how "big thinkers" lead. My shared identity with Michele matters, but she is also what I aspire to be. I wish I was more direct and operations oriented and I have spent too much of my career trying to jam myself into the form of people I admire rather than being comfortable as myself. In this residency, I realize that I must be far more thoughtful about the roles I take and the mentors I choose. Am I developing my gifts or feeding aspirations that do not fit.

Also, I have learned to that I need to be vigilant about constantly reasserting my curiosity. "The ladder of inference is a model of decision making behavior originally developed by Chris Argyris and Donald Schoen (Staff, 2020)." Participants move up and down this "ladder" based and make decisions using self-selected data. The type of data one chooses is key when using the ladder of inference. The computer science "GIGO Effect" applies here; garbage in, garbage out. In my case, there were several instances where I did not have enough information to make an informed decision but was comfortable with the information I had. Being forced to step back and reassess situations with curiosity has been an invaluable process.

Implications for Site

Become More Discriminating About Project Selection

As the organization enters a new strategic planning cycle, I recommend that 50CAN design a tool to help them decide on whether they adopt, or even pilot, new initiatives. 50CAN currently holds strong position in the education reform sector and as such, they have lot of opportunities available to them. Even as the political winds shift, I anticipate that 50CAN's model of leading with local support will continue to positively position the organization in the
education reform sector. Resultingly, I hypothesize that more and more organizations will want to partner with 50CAN. The organization also has a talented and flexible team who can take on a diverse set of projects. However, just as there are benefits to saying yes to projects, there are benefits to saying no. In a 2023 Entrepreneur Magazine article, the author suggests that saying no can actually strengthen an organization's reputation sending a message about how a company values their time. In short, refusing work indicates to potential partners that the company is very careful about the work they take on, adding an air of exclusivity (Jacques, 2023, p.1). They also offer that that the "ability of a business owner or team leader to recognize their capacity is essential in order to turn down certain tasks and projects that may take away from the main objectives of their business, creating a more productive environment and happier employees, etc. (Jacques, 2023, p. 1)."

In a 2022 Forbes article, the author suggests that 50CAN's imbalance of responsibility is not specific to 50CAN. They write:

"High-level employees often take on their roles and lower-level tasks. The statistics show more than 30% of employees feel undervalued; rather than companies hiring lower-level employees or developing technologies to complete those lower-level tasks, they are using high-level employees. It’s almost like wasting the high-level employees’ qualifications by having them do tasks outside of their expertise, which takes away from the company's forward momentum as a whole. It also keeps companies from hiring lower-level employees who can learn and grow/be promoted within the company (Schafer, 2022, p. 1)."

Currently, the executive leadership team is effective, but some members have an overwhelming number of responsibilities. Some of these responsibilities might be offloaded onto more junior staff for stretch opportunities, be turned into new roles, or as suggest above, refused before they are even realized in the organization. In addition, the article recommends that organizations borrow from tech and create liaison positions between high and low-level positions (Schafer, 2022). They assert that doing so might, "save time and finances and [give] an
The opportunity for high-level employees to preserve time to do work they're most qualified for and for low-level employees to have the opportunity for more training and future advancement."

The author also suggests that if organizations fail to combat responsibility overload, they risk burning out their employees. This would be a shame at 50CAN. Policy advocacy roles require specialized knowledge, skillsets, and vast personal networks. Like most organizations, 50CAN cannot afford to turn over staff, especially executive leadership, and state executive directors.

**Succession Planning**

The organization's Mason's sudden departure was an emotionally and operationally upending moment for 50CAN. The organization's initial response to Mason's departure was remarkably emotionally intelligent and empathetic, centering her well-being and humanity. Mucha advises, "It's crucial that leaders don’t try to hide what’s happening from their employees…When the worst happens, the best way to handle these situations is to address them head-on (Mucha, 2020, p. 2). 50CAN, did just as Mucha advises, holding no secrets from the staff and conferring often with Mason.

This moment also carries real lessons for 50CAN. The consequence of her sudden departure indicates that the organization should revisit succession planning. The research says that "Although [organizations] cannot plan for all executive departures, [they] should have a transition team in place, ready to respond to any eventuality (The Crisis Checklist, n.d.)."

Employees leave, whether intentionally, or unintentionally. How organizations handle these departures has significant implications for the organization. Therefore, I recommend that 50CAN develop a robust transition and succession plan for the eventuality of employee departures.
Implications for Sector

Organizations Grieve, Even Superheroes

The film "Waiting for Superman" debuted in 2011 to rave reviews. Overnight, school choice advocates began identifying as superheroes for education. The work done by policy advocacy groups does, in fact, appear super heroic. Daily, regular looking people go into battle for children, families, and schools against formidable foes and come home with hard fought wins or devastating losses. While the foils in of these stories vary based on political alignment, a shared truth is that policy advocates fight for what other see as impossible, or at the very least improbable. As expected, a lot of times policy advocates lose, but sometimes they win. The question that needs to be considered is how policy advocates deal with unavoidable losses. How do organizations deal with grief and loss? "Harry Levinson, who, in the 1950s, applied psychoanalytic theory to the management of organizations, famously said that 'all change is loss, and loss must be mourned (De Smet, 2020, p. 1).'' Nevertheless, the education non-profit and policy advocacy space appear to intersect in an insistence to push through loss.

I recommend that the non-profit and policy advocacy sector step back a moment from the push to be superheroes in "the work" and instead re-invite humanity. Recognizing corporate grief is a beginning. After all, saving the world includes the superheroes, too.

Conclusion

I am grateful to have been able to learn from and work beside such an outstanding group of policy advocates. The learning has been beyond what I could have expected. I look forward to watching the evolution of the organization over the next few years. I am especially excited to follow the evolution of the fellowships division at 50CAN. The organization's vision for creating a new generation of policy advocates to fight on behalf of families and students is ambitious and exciting and I am grateful to have been a small part of the work.
List of Tables and Figures

Tables

TABLE 1. 50CAN WORKSTREAMS AS OF MARCH 2023 ................................................................. 8
TABLE 2. REVIEW OF KNOWLEDGE OUTLINE ........................................................................... 13
TABLE 3 LEADERSHIP VS. AUTHORITY ....................................................................................... 16
TABLE 4 BENCHMARK PROGRESS ............................................................................................. 33
TABLE 5 UNFOLDING OF THE STRATEGIC PROJECT ................................................................. 36
TABLE 6 CAREER IMPRINT MAP FOR PROTOTYPE ....................................................................... 41
TABLE 7 SOURCE OF PROTOTYPE ELEMENTS ........................................................................... 42
TABLE 8 FELLOWSHIP STAKEHOLDERS ....................................................................................... 42
TABLE 9 GEN Z FELLOWSHIP DESIGN CYCLES ....................................................................... 48
TABLE 10 FELLOWSHIP PROTOTYPE VS. CURRENT ITERATION .................................................... 51

Figures

FIGURE A DESIGN THINKING CYCLE........................................................................................... 18
FIGURE B GUIDING KNOWLEDGE FOR FELLOWSHIP ............................................................... 19
FIGURE C KEY BRAIN DEVELOPMENTS IN YOUNG ADULTHOOD ............................................ 20
FIGURE D HIGGINS CAREER IMPRINT FRAMEWORK ................................................................. 22
FIGURE E PLACE: FACTORS THAT STRENGTHEN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE FOR CAREER IMPRINTING ...................................................................................................................... 24
FIGURE F STAKEHOLDER MAP FOR 50CAN 2023 .................................................................. 40

Appendices

APPENDIX A SERVICES OFFERED TO STATE CAMPAIGNS ....................................................... 73
APPENDIX B 50CAN FISCAL SPONSORS ....................................................................................... 73
APPENDIX C PROTOTYPE TO MOST CURRENT ITERATION WITH LINK TO TOA AND CAREER IMPRINTS ................................................................................................................................. 74
APPENDIX D D EXCERPTS FROM 50CAN’S STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2023 ............................... 76
APPENDIX EE 2023 WORKING STRATEGIC PLAN ................................................................. 77
Bibliography

About the National Voices Fellowship. (n.d.). Retrieved September 8, 2022, from https://50can.org/about-the-fellowship/


Appendices

APPENDIX A Services Offered to State Campaigns

- Finance, HR, and operations services
- Grant writing strategy and support
- Tools, technology, and website
- Communications support
- Policy and research support
- Design support
- Legal support
- Tracking of lobbying costs and management of lobbying expenditures
- Management and network development

APPENDIX B 50CAN Fiscal Sponsors

- School Facts Boston
- PACE Education Strategies
- Education Civil Rights Now (ECRN)
- LEAD Education
- Rise Free
- Freedom Coalition for Charter Schools
- New Jersey Education Report
- Middle Childhood Matter Coalition
- Middle Childhood Matters Coalition
### TOA LINK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design Thinking Cycles</th>
<th>The Gen Z Fellowship</th>
<th>The Next Gen Fellowship</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No stipend</td>
<td>$1200 Grant</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Empathy Interviews with Fellowship Managers | Cohort is small (12) and interviewing for collegiality. Including portion on short form storytelling align with comms instruction in National Voices | The cohort is sized at 8 because of promises made to Walton Foundation. Now includes National Voices Alumni as advocacy coaches for small groups. |

| The unique needs of Gen Z | Because the COVID-19 pandemic is a generation defining moment for Gen Z, the fellow narratives will focus on their education related experience during this period. | The Gen Z focus group was wholly uninterested in revisiting their pandemic experience. They thought there were more compelling issues. |

| The unique needs of late adolescents and young adults | Offer opportunities to build lasting, trust-based relationships with each other and mentors in the policy advocacy space. | Expands opportunities to build lasting, trust-based relationships with each other and mentors in the policy advocacy space. |

| Transitioning Policy Outsiders into Insiders | Narrative will feature heavily in the fellowship, with fellows first sharing a well-crafted narrative of their pandemic education experience, then revisiting that experience with the help of experienced policy advocate mentors | Narrative offers an entry point into the policy advocacy space. Rather than focusing on the pandemic, topics are evoked from the interests of the fellows. These topics are collected during prework. |

### CAREER IMPRINT MAP

| PEOPLE (Who? What Backgrounds and Experiences do they come with?) | 16- to 24-year-olds from across the country who have an interest in learning more about policy; not obvious stars | Ideal participants are 18-23 years old. Fellows for this pilot come from recommendations by fiscal sponsors, state campaigns, and strategic partnerships. Students with experience in organizing are not precluded from being admitted. While not a requirement, preference is given to students who have significant experience with TikTok |

| PLACE (Where do we want to situate fellows in the organization?) | Interact mostly with Junior members of 50CANs national team to provide growth opportunity for those team members Fellowship is held in Washington D.C. to enhance political experience of fellows—make it memorable | Fellows interact with National Voices Alumni, National Team Members. and State Team members. Fellowship is still held in Washington DC. The fellowship is held at the end of the summer so that the culmination of the project coincides with planning periods for most legislators and 50CAN’s National Summit. |

| PLACE (What career stage are fellows in? Where are fellows in Adult Development?) | These fellows are complete novices and are in late adolescence through young adulthood | The fellows may or may not be complete novices to the advocacy space. |
| CAPABILITIES  
(What should fellows be able to do after they complete this fellowship?) | Short Form Narrative. Fellows tell the story of their experience in schools during the pandemic through the short format of TikTok  
Trace experience to policy. Fellows research the underlying policies that impacted their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic | Short Form Narrative. Fellows should be able to tell the story of an activating moment from their experience in schools  
Trace experience to policy. Fellows should be able to research the underlying policies that impact their activating education experience  
Learn how to build relationships with advocacy stakeholders. Fellows should know how to identify and build relationships with stakeholders that impact their key political concerns |
|---|---|---|
| COGNITIONS  
(What should fellows know that they did not know before?) | Fellows learn entry points into a diverse set of policy advocacy careers  
Fellows experience to trace policies choices and how to respond their experiences like an effective policy advocate | Fellows learn entry points into a diverse set of policy advocacy careers  
Fellows experience to trace policies choices and how to respond their experiences like an effective policy advocate  
Fellows learn how timing impacts policy decisions |
| CONFIDENCE  
(Where and should fellows become more confident about?) | Mentors coach fellows through communication outreach efforts that are often intimidating to policy advocacy outsiders.  
Fellows learn to confidently share their experience of the COVID-19 pandemic by learning to craft a Ganz style, compelling personal narrative. Fellows use TikTok as a form to share their story with a wider audience.  
Mentors coach fellows through a confidence building research process that connects their personal narrative to policy choices. | Mentors coach fellows through communication outreach efforts that are often intimidating to policy advocacy outsiders.  
Fellows learn to confidently share their compelling education experience by learning to craft a Ganz style, compelling personal narrative. Fellows use TikTok as a form to share their story with a wider audience. These stories are entered into a low stakes competition.  
Mentors coach fellows through a confidence building research process that connects their personal narrative to policy choices. They present their findings at the National Summit in the Fall. |
| CONNECTIONS  
(What connections should arise from participating in this fellowship?) | Fellows become connected to  
- National organizers at 50CAN  
- Young adults who are also interested in pursuing policy advocacy  
- 50CANs network of policy advocacy fellows including National Voices | Fellows become connected to  
- National organizers at 50CAN  
- Young adults who are also interested in pursuing policy advocacy  
- Active and powerful youth advocates  
- Legislators in their home state.  
- 50CANs network of policy advocacy fellows including National Voices |
We are proud of all that we have accomplished, but we know we have just scratched the surface of the changes needed to reach our goals.

Building upon the insights from our first six years of successes and failures, we are eager to go further.

Four Big Bets of the Future

When we developed this strategic plan in 2017, we set as our goal the bringing together of three worlds that don’t overlap all that often in our communities: people who want to be local advocates, people who have the policy knowledge and political skills to get wins for kids and people who can raise the funds needed to sustain campaigns in the long term.

To bring these different worlds together in communities across the country, we committed to investing in four, interconnected big bets:

1. More people with diverse skills and backgrounds;
2. Given greater opportunities to lead advocacy campaigns of all shapes and sizes;
3. Aimed at smarter and more transformational goals; and
4. Equipped with stronger advocacy tools to increase the odds of success.

Over the past four years since we first committed to those goals, we put this work at the center of everything we do while also adapting and evolving our approach to the challenges and opportunities of this new era.

MORE PEOPLE

+ GREATER OPPORTUNITIES

+ SMARTER GOALS

+ BETTER TOOLS

= ALL KIDS EDUCATED TO THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

(Phillips et al., 2022, P. 9, 12, 19)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Strategic Theory of Change</th>
<th>Newly Proposed Strategic Levers</th>
<th>Core Goals and Outcomes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IF 50CAN</td>
<td>“SERVE the Public”</td>
<td>Our core goal here is to identify, train and elect these leaders. Our outcomes are built around number of leaders trained and number elected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEN, 50CAN can help usher in the future of American education to better serve future generations of students and families</td>
<td>“SPARK new ideas”</td>
<td>Identify and support the next generation of commentators and advocates on our issues. Transmit our policy values and ideas. Align and support fellows professionally to support an expansion of the 50CAN network and 50CAN “soft power.” Identify and support individuals who are committed and able to bridge partisan and racial divides. Develop and promote policy ideas that are foundational for 50CAN’s view of the education system of the future. Begin a deliberate effort at “succession” for movement leadership. Increase the number of messengers we have in the spotlight, advocating for a vision for the future of education that aligns with ours. Seed partner organizations with staffers that are aligned with 50CAN through their participation, to create opportunities for learning, collaboration, and leadership.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“ADVOCATE for the future of education”</td>
<td>Core goal: Seeking better laws that result in academic success for kids.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“BUILD proof points”</td>
<td>Core goal: Seeking better laws that result in academic success for kids.</td>
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