

# WHAT

# IF

Insights from  
a Decade of  
Philanthropic  
R&D

THE DURFEE  
FOUNDATION:  
STANTON  
FELLOWSHIP  
PROGRAM  
2007 TO 2017

## As funders, we are expected to measure things:

how many dollars given, how many grants distributed, how many organizations served, and what results from the funded dollars. These are all familiar metrics we use to determine our impact. But what if we reconsidered our attachment to these metrics? What if instead of expecting a specific outcome, we pursued a promising hypothesis? This is an accepted practice in other fields, such as business and science, and they call it Research and Development, or R&D.

The challenges we face as a society are so nuanced and complex that we make room for the “what if” type of thinking that propels any field into next stage thinking; we must challenge our basic assumptions and follow the winding path of inquiry where it goes rather than simply where we expect or want it to go. And when we can follow a hunch and step away from the pressure to produce a known outcome, more creative avenues for groundbreaking solutions can emerge.

It was from this hypothesis about the power of open-ended inquiry, and our fundamental belief that smart, innovative, passionate people are the most essential force for progress, that we created the Stanton Fellowship Program in 2005. Since our first cohort concluded in 2007, we’ve had 36 Stanton Fellows who have spent two years thinking deeply about the complex challenges in Los Angeles. This seems like a natural moment to pause and reflect on what we’ve learned during the past decade, in anticipation of the continued expansion and impact of the Stanton Fellowship network.

Like our founders Stan and Dorothy Durfee Avery, we believe that novel ideas from people with fresh perspective, passion, and determination will generate a brighter future for Los Angeles. As an inventor and lifelong tinkerer, Stan demonstrated what’s possible when creative people are given room for experimentation and iteration as they refine their vision and their approach.

At the core of The Stanton Fellowship are the time, space, and resources to allow leaders to test a hypothesis and leverage their knowledge and relationships for the betterment of Los Angeles. What our fellows have shown us over the last decade is that when leaders are curious and have the resources to be supported as they follow a line of inquiry, they can become true instigators for change.

As you read this report about some of the success stories that confirm our approach, we encourage you to consider how R&D could advance your organization’s vision and the impact you seek to make in the world. What if more funders allocated a portion of their budget to support open inquiry and intellectual stimulation for proven leaders? What could be possible if we all took more calculated risks and trusted in leaders with a track record for success and an informed hunch for how to find unprecedented solutions?

We hope you will join us in reimagining what’s possible in the social sector.

Claire Peeps, Executive Director  
Carrie Avery, President  
December 2017



### ABOUT THE DURFEE FOUNDATION

The Durfee Foundation is a family foundation that seeks to adhere to the values of our founders, Dorothy Durfee Avery and R. Stanton Avery, by rewarding individual initiative and leadership.

The majority of our grantmaking focuses on the Los Angeles region, where the foundation’s history lies, and where funding needs are great.

We build partnerships with individuals and institutions that share our ideals of creativity, risk-taking, fiscal care, integrity, entrepreneurial spirit, and continuous learning. We seek to build community in unexpected ways.

We make grants where our dollars will have the greatest impact. We hope that Durfee funds provide leverage for other opportunities.

Durfee is a patient grantmaker. We are willing to make grants where the outcome may be hard to measure or not measurable for many years. Above all, Durfee’s focus is on extraordinary people who are making a better Los Angeles.

### CREDITS

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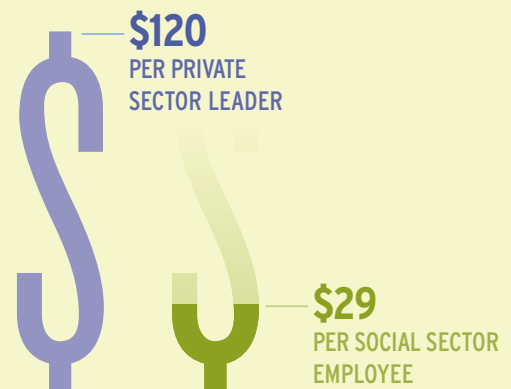
Portraits by Robert Pacheco

# INTRODUCTION

In product and service businesses, research and development – better known as R&D – isn’t focused on immediate profit or other traditional market-based metrics. It’s a phase of study based on testing innovative boundaries and making discoveries that keep companies at the top of their game over the long term. Considering that social sector leaders are charged with steering organizations seeking to solve society’s toughest challenges, adopting their own form of R&D makes a lot of sense.

In addition to R&D, leadership development programs have a long history in the private sector, but the consulting firm McKinsey found that there is a “chronic underinvestment in leadership development within the US social sector.” After analyzing 20 years of foundation spending, McKinsey found that most allocate 1 percent of annual funding to leadership development, or \$400 million in 2011. The Center for Nonprofit and Public Leadership at the Haas School of Business of the University of California, Berkeley estimates that \$12 billion was spent in 2011 on skills building for private sector leaders. This corresponds to about \$120 per employee annually in the private sector versus \$29 per employee in the social sector.<sup>1</sup>

The Stanton Fellowship puts an R&D spin on leadership development. Named after inventor and Durfee Foundation co-founder Stan Avery, the fellowship was established in 2005 as an R&D philanthropic program to support open inquiry and intellectual stimulation for exceptional leaders in Los Angeles County.



SPENDING IN 2011 ON SKILLS BUILDING FOR PRIVATE SECTOR LEADERS VERSUS SOCIAL SECTOR EMPLOYEES (ESTIMATE BY UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY)<sup>1</sup>

The seed for the Stanton Fellowship Program was planted at an annual retreat for Sabbatical Fellows in 2004 when a fellow made the exuberant claim that with all the brainpower and talent in the room, they could create and carry out a master plan for L.A. What might have sounded impossible to others resonated with the Fellows. They were all in the same boat: they had plenty of good ideas percolating, but not enough time and money to develop them.

“Why would you limit your goals to what you know at the beginning of a journey? It shuts off adaptation, and limits creativity and risk-taking. We want the Stanton Fellowship to be about discovery.”

- CARRIE AVERY, DURFEE FOUNDATION

When McKinsey asked social sector leaders what would help support their leadership development, the top answers were:

49%



Time to experiment and innovate

49%



A sabbatical to rejuvenate themselves<sup>2</sup>

42%



Participating in cross-sector networks to build connections with peers

“We didn’t want applicants to tell us exactly what they planned to do or to guarantee the results,” says Carrie Avery. “Why would you limit your goals to what you know at the beginning of a journey? It shuts off adaptation, and limits creativity and risk-taking. We want the Stanton Fellowship to be about discovery.”

This 10th Anniversary report looks at people and organizations that have created a cross-disciplinary network to share ideas and resources that have made tangible improvement to Los Angeles. Stanton Fellows look at adaptive strategies rather than technical fixes – although of course, many problems do get fixed in the process. The Stanton journey may not be linear and will likely involve both known stakeholders and new partners. It requires patience, perseverance, and flexibility. And whether or not the question is solved, Stanton Fellows share their lessons learned with colleagues in the field, so others can build upon that knowledge.



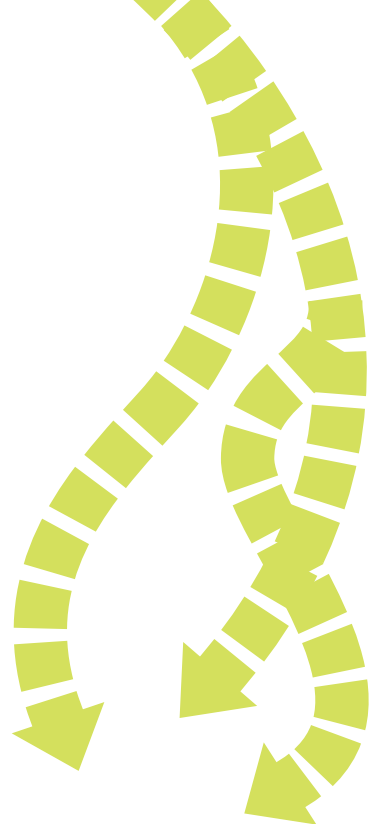
# HOW DOES THE STANTON FELLOWSHIP WORK?

Every two years a review panel composed of Durfee trustees, staff, and Stanton alumni select six Stanton Fellows.

Eligible candidates must be in senior leadership positions, have demonstrated track records of contributions to the community, and be in positions to influence policymakers and peers. Their respective organizations must also meet these criteria and have at least three full-time paid staff.

The Stanton Fellowship provides fellows with \$100,000 each over a two-year period to tease out and test solutions to complex challenges in their field to improve the lives of people living in Los Angeles. Fellows stay in their jobs, but take three months of leave time over the course of the two years to delve deeply into their Stanton issue. “Stanton time” must be taken in increments of no less than two weeks, to allow the fellow to think big without distraction. This requirement was added at the urging of early Stanton Fellows, who acknowledged that they were most productive when they disengaged from their day-to-day work for an extended period to focus on Stanton.

Peer learning is an important part of the Stanton Fellowship. Fellows meet regularly to share their work, learn from one another about their respective fields and projects, and discover more about L.A. from site visits to different neighborhoods and hearing from local



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experts. Each fellowship cohort starts and ends with a retreat. In addition, the Foundation brings all of the Stanton Fellows together for biannual retreats.

The Durfee Foundation assembles each cohort of leaders seeking to tackle issues in an interrelated way. They come from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines, and bring curiosity and engagement to a cross-disciplinary network.

Candidates are encouraged to choose a project related to their work, based on their expertise, but something that they wouldn't have time or resources to do without the Stanton grant. Unlike the Durfee Sabbatical Program that limits applicants to those working in nonprofit organizations, the Stanton Fellowship also welcomes candidates from government and social enterprise organizations.

At the end of the first year, fellows submit narrative reports on their projects, an accounting of their spending, and a plan for the second year. In some cases, they may have to correct initial assumptions and shift gears, which is part of the discovery process. They also write a final report and distribute their findings to the field. Even if they haven't fully tackled the huge question they set out to work on, Durfee expects them to share the lessons they learned with colleagues so that others can benefit from their work without having to go over the same ground.



These are the questions that the Stanton Fellowship review panel, comprised of Durfee trustees, staff, and Stanton alums, ask when selecting a cohort.

Candidates must present a clearly articulated proposal describing a complex issue affecting the future of Los Angeles and develop a plan for spending a minimum of three months over the two-year fellowship pursuing the inquiry.

For more information visit  
[durfee.org/stanton](http://durfee.org/stanton)

# BIG QUESTIONS

*What is your big question? What is the complex challenge you seek to address?* This is where Stanton fellows start their dive into reimagining a better Los Angeles. Open-ended inquiry lets us look at the toughest challenges with a fresh eye.

Research and history both show that important innovations often arise from contemplating an issue from multiple angles and possibilities beyond the typical or obvious straight-line approach. And yet for busy leaders, it is nearly impossible to find the time in their fast-paced, time-restrained lives to circle around a conundrum and follow an idea to its best possible iteration.

## A DECADE OF BIG QUESTIONS

With a decade of “big questions” behind us, we’re ready to look at some of the new ideas and new ways of thinking that have emerged for our fellows. We asked them to share with us what they reimagined as a result of their fellowship, and here are just a few of the answers we received:

### “The Stanton Fellowship helped me reimagine...

- ... how to re-inject public purpose into our democratic institutions
- ...an approach to leadership and a process to evaluate that approach
- ...how cities can be a center for thriving regional food systems
- ...how you could stop homelessness before it happens
- ...how philanthropy and nonprofits can work in sync with local government
- ...the way I think of communities inside seniors and multigenerational housing
- ...the full contribution that faith leaders and communities can make to the movement for justice
- ...Los Angeles as a place where all languages and cultures are valued
- ...how women will be able to get jobs after spending many years on the streets
- ...how a gaming industry could improve the wellbeing of children in underserved communities
- ...how to move the city of Los Angeles on the enormous subject of climate change
- ...how creative industries can expand to include people who have been left out for generations
- ...how government could work to address poverty through affordable housing

As part of the Durfee Foundation's investment in extraordinary people, the Stanton Fellowship allows leaders to ask big questions related to their field and follow that thread of inquiry over a two-year period, leveraging the breadth and depth of their knowledge and community connections. Over the last decade, the foundation has seen what happens when leaders are curious, open to new outcomes, and fully leverage their network. With the right person, and the right situation, having a hunch is enough to begin.

The big questions examined with the Stanton Fellowship come from a variety of areas and aim to solve the most complex challenges in L.A. — cleaning the air everyone breathes, housing the homeless, increasing school graduation rates, or promoting job growth in the creative industries, for example.

## HOW TO CLOSE THE “GROCERY GAP?”

Concerned about the prevalence of low-income communities across L.A. with little or no access to fresh, healthy food, **Elwood Hopkins** used his Stanton Fellowship to immerse himself in the supermarket industry and develop an approach to bring more supermarkets into these communities. He had a hunch that the same process that he used to bring banks to low-income communities could be used to bring supermarkets there. His hunch proved right and resulted in the expansion of his company, Emerging Markets, Inc., to work with major industries in Los Angeles to familiarize them with low-income neighborhoods, overcome their avoidance of doing business there, and partner with communities productively.

Fellows meet regularly to share their work, learn from one another about their respective fields and projects, and discover more about L.A. They come from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines, and bring curiosity and engagement to a cross-disciplinary network.

Each fellow designs their own inquiry and plan. The Durfee Foundation supports proposals that build on the fellows' expertise and allow them to reach in new directions.

Albert Einstein is credited for saying, “It’s not that I’m so smart, it’s just that I stay with the questions much longer.” By not jumping prematurely to superficial solutions, but encouraging fellows to stay with and deepen critical questions, the Stanton Fellowship offers a unique opportunity for original thinking to flourish.



# AARON PALEY CONNECTING 140 MILES OF OPEN STREETS

You can pass through Los Angeles yet not be in it. Aaron Paley, like many Angelenos, struggles with this paradox. Concealed among the city's highways and busy thoroughfares is a wide array of diverse, vibrant cultures, but this "other" Los Angeles can feel elusive. In 2008, Aaron received the Durfee Foundation's Stanton Fellowship to unlock this enigmatic "other" city.

**His big question was: how do you bring people together in ways that allow the diverse beauty and vitality of L.A. to shine through?**



The basis of Aaron's creative pull is how urban spaces work – or don't. Growing up with a father who was a civil engineer, he later studied architecture at UC Berkeley. "I was interested in how things got built," he reflects. But he was also intrigued by how things come apart. "You go to different cities and see other ways things can be arranged. L.A. had eliminated public space."

Aaron knew from his many years working in both urban planning and the arts as President of Community Arts Resources (CARS) that the city could be re-energized if he could find the right conduit for bringing diverse communities of Angelenos together in a way that felt natural.

The Los Angeles River – the arid, concrete-lined flood channel that connects 52-miles of the county – would often drift across Aaron's imagination as a possible conduit to bring the city together. The Stanton Fellowship allowed him to hire a researcher while he kept exploring. On a trip together for the American Planning Association's national conference, Aaron discovered a parallel between a redevelopment project in Atlanta, and what might be possible for L.A.

"They were talking about the Atlanta Beltline, an old railroad route that circled the city. The plan was to create green space for the public along with trails and transit, that would connect the city and it just hit me: 'Wait, we have the river! We can do a River Festival.'"

Optimistic, he began outlining his proposal, but as he began to research examples, he couldn't find a model. "I'd spent six months researching the river and I had to ask myself, 'how are we going to make this happen?'" he wondered. "There's no festival anywhere for a dry river. L.A. is *sui generis*." Aaron kept exploring, making connections, and doing research, and the Stanton Fellowship allowed him breathing room to remain open for the right solution to materialize. But his vision for a festival that stretched for miles like the L.A. river was unshakable.

In a conversation with urban planner Jason Neville, he diagrammed this vision of an elongated festival. Neville asked him if he'd heard of Bogota's 'ciclovía' – bicycle way in Spanish. When he watched a video of the bicycles and pedestrians swarming the streets of Bogotá, it clicked: "I could see it," he remembers. What flowed through Los Angeles that everyone had access to? The streets. That river of asphalt. "Of course," he remembers thinking. "We'll take back the streets."

Fortified by his clear vision for a car-free, open street festival, Aaron made a series of critical pivots. First, he wrote an open letter to Mayor Villaraigosa in Los Angeles Magazine asking him to consider implementing a ciclovía-style event in Los Angeles. That letter turned



PHOTO BY SEBASTIAN AUER WWW.CICALAVIA.ORG

"My entire vision has become 360- instead of 25-degrees wide. Now I always have workforce development, public health, environmental concerns, and social equity running through my head where, without my Stanton Fellowship, I wouldn't have taken these things into consideration."

- AARON PALEY



into a metaphorical bridge and a second pivot, connecting him with a group of young planners who were already working on designing an event inspired by Bogotá's model. "So, we joined forces," he explains, sharing research, access, and expertise. He then traveled to Bogotá to meet the mayor and ciclovía's founder Jaime Ortiz.

The other leaders in Aaron's Stanton cohort challenged and supported him in equal measure. They helped him realize the importance of cross-sector collaboration. The Stanton experience both reenergized and reinvented him: "I was pushed in ways I never would have imagined. Among the cohort, there's this sense of learning from each other, sharing, and respect that translates into action."

"My Stanton cohort forced me to think about art and public space from different angles and apply different tactics. My entire vision has become 360- instead of 25-degrees wide. Now I always have workforce development, public health, environmental concerns, and social equity running through my head where, without my Stanton Fellowship, I wouldn't have taken these things into consideration," he says.

In 2010, Los Angeles CicLAvia was born. What began as a kernel of an idea for a river festival in Aaron's mind evolved over the course of his time as a Stanton Fellow into the largest bicycle event of its kind in the nation. "CicLAvia triggered a sea change in attitude, policies, activation, and participation," says Aaron. "It has also inspired leading edge thinking on reevaluating public transit, expanding public space, and implementing new bike infrastructure.

"When Los Angeles became car dominant, cities all over the world followed," Aaron explains, "Now we are leading the way out and none of this would have been possible without the Stanton Fellowship." In 2015, Aaron resigned as the founding executive director and CicLAvia became fully independent of him and his company, CARS. "It feels like a great success to have CicLAvia institutionalized as a stand-alone non-profit organization," he says.

Aaron's Stanton experience didn't end with his fellowship term. "Being part of this small group of super-connected, super-smart people is an amazing shortcut to getting things done," he says. "The first thing I do now is go to the Stanton list and say, 'who can I hook up with to solve this problem?'"

By supporting Stanton Fellows in refining their vision and uniting their knowledge and contacts with an open exploration of the best approaches, Stanton Fellows like Aaron Paley are reimagining what's possible for L.A. "There's a lot of talk about how philanthropy can change the world," says Aaron, "but the Durfee Foundation is actually doing it."

"The first thing I do now is go to the Stanton list and say, 'who can I hook up with to solve this problem?'"

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PHOTO BY MONICA OROZCO DEMONICA WWW.CICLAVIA.ORG

"There's a lot of talk about how philanthropy can change the world, but the Stanton Fellowship is actually doing it."

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# ROBERT SAINZ HELPING STUDENTS DROP BACK IN



Fresh out of graduate school in the early '90s, Robert Sainz got a job with the probation department and was dispatched to the Hall of Justice. During a tour, he'd encountered a holding cell full of teenagers. "The sheriff told us 'these kids are never going to see the light of day.' I remember looking across the bars and seeing that they were me. I wasn't that far removed from any of these kids' experiences."



The difference, he suspected, was they didn't have the same encouragement and resources he'd had. Their fate rested heavy inside him. "There's no reason a teenager has to spend life behind bars. To me that was a real failure on our side. We can do better."

That experience motivated Robert, then Assistant General Manager to the City of Los Angeles Community Development Department, to spend almost three decades in public service creating roads to opportunity where there was once only dead-ends for kids like those he met on his first job assignment. But for public sector leaders like him, it is nearly impossible to find the time and resources required to explore solutions beyond the status quo. "Being in the public sector, we don't get a lot of opportunities to experiment," Robert laments. In 2012, he received the Durfee Foundation Stanton Fellowship to do just that.

Robert built his inquiry around a notion he'd long wanted to chase: Could the City of Los Angeles build a dropout recovery program where a 19 year-old who wanted to go back to school could find their way back? If so, what would it look like?

While he knew that L.A. could do better, he didn't know exactly what that might mean. Improving the chances for young people who had vanished from school rolls and the job force would require untangling a multi-pronged, multi-agency knot of red tape. "At the end of the day, we always blamed the kid or their family," he explains. "But the system had failed these kids just as much as they failed the system."

The Stanton Fellowship allowed him to get a sharper picture of his target population, 16 to 24 year-olds. The stats told a sobering story: out of half-a-million young people in that age range, one out of five were not at school or work. And that had many implications, including for economic development.

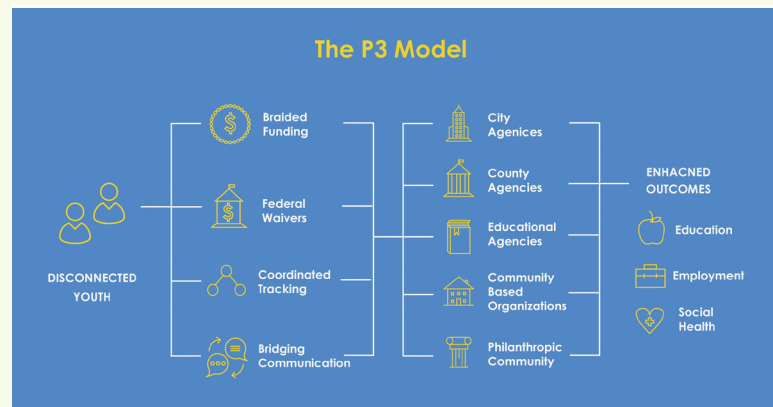
"We learned that if you were a high school dropout, you would contribute, on average, \$5,000 in taxes in your lifetime, but if you were a high school graduate, you would have the potential to contribute close to \$100,000. And if you were a college graduate, \$250,000," he says. In other words, the longer you stay in school, the more you earn and the more you contribute.

This realization made Robert's quest to keep kids on track an economic development issue for the City of Los Angeles. Using his Stanton resources, Robert traveled to other cities with similar demographics and dropout statistics – New York, Boston, Albuquerque, and San Antonio – which is something he couldn't otherwise do on the city's budget. He investigated different models, exploring how each city developed solutions from a creative angle.

"There's no reason a teenager has to spend life behind bars. To me that was a real failure on our side.

**We can do better."**

– ROBERT SAINZ



Through his Stanton Fellowship, he developed a plan to build a different kind of system. He outlined how to align existing resources to reach a larger number of young people. “I wanted to put a network in place, one that could do two things: stop the number of kids dropping out and bring kids who were out of school back to school or into a job,” he says.

Robert knew the Los Angeles Unified School District was attempting a similar plan, but they were doing it in isolation. “I knew other institutions like the community colleges wanted to see this, but no one had ownership. So if a 19-year-old kid was a dropout, the school board has no responsibility for that kid. If they are not enrolled in community college, then the community college board has no responsibility. That’s why I got our workforce development board to say we should take responsibility.”

The Stanton Fellowship provided an essential cloak of neutrality, helping to open doors during the intergovernmental turf wars of the time. “I could go in and say, ‘I’m here for a fellowship project,’ and it helped.”

Partnering with the Director of the Dropout Prevention Program, Deborah Duardo – now L.A. County Office of Education’s Superintendent – Robert proposed partnering with LAUSD in their Student Recovery Day – a door-knocking campaign targeting disconnected youth, involving city council members, and the mayor himself. “A door opens and the mayor says, ‘Hi, I’m the Mayor! How can we get your kid back in school?’ You can only imagine their faces!”

Robert was the first public official to receive a Stanton Fellowship and the only public employee in his cohort. The ideas that his nonprofit peers shared proved tremendously helpful as he developed his plans. “I was inspired by all of them tackling big problems. I highly recommend the fellowship to my colleagues in the public sector,” he says.

During his Stanton Fellowship, Robert created a dynamic, game-changing model for the City of Los Angeles. To date, more than \$13 million in federal funds have been designated to his new initiative, known as P3 – Performance Pilot Partner for Disconnected Youth. Sixteen centers are in operation across the City of L.A., and a pilot program to integrate programs at the national level is underway. “As we enter our fourth year of service,” he reports, “we’ve been averaging close to 7,000 kids per year. So, to me, every door is the right door for these kids coming back in.”

“A door opens and the mayor says, ‘Hi, I’m the Mayor! How can we get your kid back in school?’ You can only imagine their faces!”

– ROBERT SAINZ

“I was inspired by all of them tackling big problems. I highly recommend the fellowship to my colleagues in the public sector.”

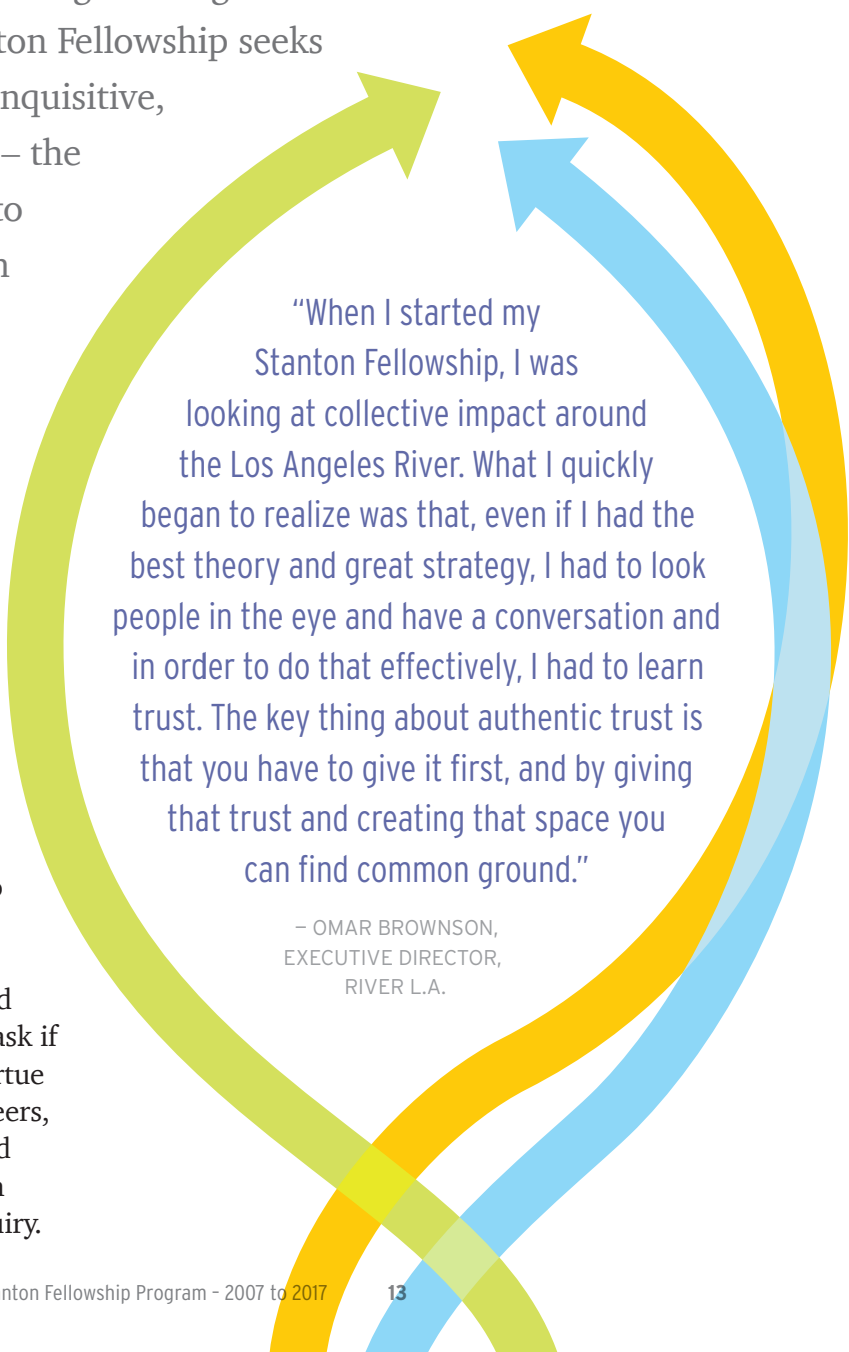
– ROBERT SAINZ

# EXTRAORDINARY LEADERS

Above all, the Durfee Foundation is focused on providing exceptional leaders the opportunity to make breakthroughs toward solving Los Angeles's toughest challenges. The Stanton Fellowship seeks out the most knowledgeable, inquisitive, and highly networked leaders – the ones who are best positioned to identify and make headway on a big question.

Through the Stanton Fellowship, the Durfee Foundation deliberately funds the leader, not specific projects or roles they fulfill in a moment in time. It is crucial to fund leaders with a lifetime commitment to serve a place, regardless of what role they happen to be serving at any given point in their career.

When the review panel evaluates applicants for the Stanton Fellowship, they're looking for someone who has been in a leadership position for at least five years, is widely recognized as a thought leader in their field, and would be an engaged participant in their peer cohort. They ask if the applicant is the right person, by virtue of track record and standing among peers, to be tackling their proposed issue, and whether they are at the right inflection point in their career for a Stanton inquiry.



"When I started my Stanton Fellowship, I was looking at collective impact around the Los Angeles River. What I quickly began to realize was that, even if I had the best theory and great strategy, I had to look people in the eye and have a conversation and in order to do that effectively, I had to learn trust. The key thing about authentic trust is that you have to give it first, and by giving that trust and creating that space you can find common ground."

– OMAR BROWNSON,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
RIVER L.A.

CASE STUDY NO. 3

# MARQUEECE HARRIS-DAWSON BUILDING A PIPELINE OF COMMUNITY LEADERS

Marqueece Harris-Dawson's story is a strong demonstration of what's possible when you invest in extraordinary leaders beyond the role they happen to hold at any given point in their careers.





Long before Marqueece became a Councilmember in 2015 representing Los Angeles City Council District 8, he was serving South Los Angeles – the place he calls home – and paying attention to what it takes to be a leader. “Los Angeles is the city where people come to realize their dreams, and that was no different for my family. Los Angeles animates everything I do.”

Marqueece gained an understanding of what motivates people at an early age from his parents. “I have never known leadership disconnected from daily life,”<sup>5</sup> he says. His father was a pastor and his mother was a church leader and childcare provider, and he watched as they brought people in and transformed their struggles.

“If you are a pastor, you are always a pastor. You go to the local market, and you are the pastor. You go to the dentist, and you are the pastor. You do not get time off from leadership. I saw that my father could never step away from his leadership role,”<sup>6</sup> he says.

His mother followed what he calls the “Harriet Tubman tradition of leadership. In a time when many were speaking about the evils of slavery and advocating for abolition, Harriet Tubman embodied the action side of living an abolitionist life, filled with clear plans for liberation, strict allegiance to those plans, and commitment to laying down the law about meeting responsibilities.”<sup>7</sup>

In the early ‘80s, his family left South Los Angeles as gang and police violence skyrocketed with the onset of the crack cocaine epidemic. He was heartbroken to leave his home and decided at that point to dedicate his life to making sure other families didn’t feel that the only way to keep their children safe was to leave South L.A.

After attending Morehouse College, he went into his family’s real estate business before joining Community Coalition in 1995 under then-founder and current Congressman Karen Bass. Marqueece became President and CEO of Community Coalition in 2004, where he was instrumental in influencing public policy and action to make significant improvements in the lives of L.A. families.

He saw firsthand how decades of disinvestment in Black communities, the flight of jobs and manufacturers, mass incarceration, gentrification, and the aging leadership of key civil rights organizations had stifled the development pipeline of up-and-coming Black leaders prepared to steer critical social justice organizations. He wondered: How do you systematically produce a pipeline of Black leaders?

This question led him to pursue the Stanton Fellowship, which he received in 2012. His exploration of African American leadership transitions led him to a vision for systematic, high-quality pipeline for African American leaders. It also helped him understand certain universal principles about leadership – namely that leadership is cultivated rather than simply an innate gift.

“If you are in the grind being a leader, the time to stop, reflect, and record your reflections is nonexistent.”

- MARQUEECE HARRIS-DAWSON

“Your cohort at Stanton allows you to think and work out themes of leadership that cut across issues.”

- MARQUEECE HARRIS-DAWSON

Through the Stanton Fellowship, he found the time to think deeply and write about the issue. “If you are in the grind being a leader, the time to stop, reflect, and record your reflections is nonexistent,” he says. As he dug in, it became clear that the stories that revolved around transitions were not just limited to the individual, or to African Americans alone, but offered a broader story about leadership that included both the cultivation and transition of it.

At the end of his fellowship, Marqueece produced *Towards A New Generation of African American Leaders*, a comprehensive report that offers concrete theories and actionable ideas for cultivating African American social justice leadership and supporting successful leadership transitions in Black organizations in Los Angeles. His Stanton fellowship allowed him the time to think more deeply about the state of African American leadership, which translated into an overall understanding of leadership development. He set out to understand why Los Angeles has witnessed such a crisis of leadership and examine what can be done about it.

In *Towards A New Generation*, Marqueece shares 12 lessons for cultivating leadership. Step one: remove the mystery.

He had a hunch that with the right systems, leaders, like other professions, could be cultivated. “You have to be born with the desire and the willingness to work through the hard parts,” he says, but he rejects the notion that any of us are just born leaders. “If you’re a good speaker, people say you should be a leader,” he says. “But leadership is so much more than that.” So, if leaders aren’t born, how do we cultivate them? Marqueece starts with “debunking the superhero myths” around leadership.

From early on he realized that leadership could sometimes be isolating, which is one of the reasons he sought to look at leadership through the lens of communal endeavor. It is also one of the reasons the collaboration of his Stanton Fellowship cohort was critical for his development. While other fellowship programs have a set curriculum and focused on skills, Stanton’s program is more improvisational and rooted in the power of the cohort.

“The best part of the Stanton Fellowship is the collective,” he says. “Leaders usually come together around a set of problems – not around leadership itself. Your cohort at Stanton allows you to think and work out themes of leadership that cut across issues,” he says. “Seeing challenges played out in a different way is incredibly helpful.”

*Towards A New Generation* forms the blueprint for how to systematically build new African American leaders in Los Angeles, but its lessons reach beyond the Black community and beyond Los Angeles. It is a tangible example of the knowledge that can be collected and distributed through R&D philanthropy like the Stanton Fellowship.

CASE STUDY NO. 4

# MADELINE JANIS

## CAN PUBLIC PURCHASING ON A NATIONAL LEVEL CREATE LOCAL JOBS?

We often hear the phrase “all politics is local.” But can the collective purchasing power of municipalities across the country bring back manufacturing jobs at home while also positively impacting the global economy?





"After the civil unrest in L.A. in 1992, I didn't want to just be fighting against wrongs. I wanted to think creatively about innovative approaches to building power and better understanding ways to harness the power of our government to create a better society."

- MADELINE JANIS

"The Stanton Fellowship made me appreciate how much I love to learn. It reminded me that life is about learning and that being an effective social justice leader is about learning."

- MADELINE JANIS

In 2014, native Angeleno Madeline Janis set out to explore that question. Through her Stanton Fellowship, she sought to understand what kind of measurable impact public purchasing could make on both good jobs as well as GDP, and in turn, the global economy. Specifically, she was interested in investigating how investment in transportation infrastructure could help create domestic manufacturing capability in Los Angeles.

Her more than 30 years working at the intersection of economic justice in Los Angeles, and for solidarity and human rights internationally, uniquely prepared her for this exploration.

In college, Janis became an activist in the Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement and worked to support immigrants, leading her to become the executive director of the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN) in 1989. By being in solidarity with the Central American people trying to combat dictatorships, and supporting immigrants and refugees, she saw revolution and resistance as the only answer to improving people's lives. "I was on the defensive," she says.

"After the civil unrest in L.A. in 1992, I didn't want to just be fighting against wrongs. I wanted to think creatively about innovative approaches to building power and better understanding ways to harness the power of our government to create a better society," Janis explains.

That drive led her to co-found the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE). Under her stewardship from 1993 to 2012, LAANE became an influential leader in the effort to build a new economy based on good jobs, thriving communities, and a healthy environment.

In 2012, Janis stepped down as the executive director of LAANE to launch a project looking at rebuilding manufacturing, first in L.A. then across the U.S., by using the power of public purchasing of manufactured goods. She knew that in order to be successful, she needed to look at other countries and models. It led to her Stanton inquiry: How do you take this huge part of what government does – buying goods and services – and use it to rebuild manufacturing in the U.S.?

"Billions of tax dollars can be harnessed across America to create good jobs in new factories, lift up low-income communities, and upgrade America's transit network with clean, efficient trains and buses," she says.

She understood that the local perspective of this work was very important because it's where people touch the ground. But equally important was the global perspective to understand how systems work together. Stanton's support of both research and travel was key. "My Stanton Fellowship helped me think globally again," she says.



Her project became Jobs to Move America, a national coalition uniting more than 30 community, labor, faith, civil rights, philanthropic, academic, and environmental groups, of which Janis serves as executive director. The organization is dedicated to ensuring that the billions of public dollars spent on public transit systems translate into good local jobs.

“The Stanton Fellowship made me appreciate how much I love to learn,” she says. “It reminded me that life is about learning and that being an effective social justice leader is about learning.”

She acknowledges that leaders find it hard to make the time for true study, and there is seldom time or budget for travel to learn from experts. “It takes a very disciplined leader to create the space for deeper inquiry,” she says. “The Stanton helped me build a habit of reading, researching, and really understanding things.”

Janis says her fellowship cohort was particularly strong, smart, and connected, and she remains in close contact with them. One particular situation with her cohort member Joe Lyou, the president and CEO of the Coalition for Clean Air, a statewide nonprofit organization committed to restoring clean and healthful air to all of California, exemplifies how relationships made through the Stanton Fellowship lead to positive change for L.A.: “There was a Chinese electric bus company that we believed was committing human right violations. Joe and I worked with them over a couple of years to reach an agreement around providing good jobs and reducing fossil fuels with zero-emission busses – a win-win for L.A. and California.”

Janis has done other fellowships and leadership trainings, but claims there’s nothing quite like the Stanton Fellowship. “Durfee has invested a lot in me and in exchange that has led me to want to invest a lot in Durfee and be involved in their work creating a community of leaders investing in other leaders,” she says.

As a national organization, Jobs to Move America could be headquartered anywhere, but Janis is committed to her hometown. “L.A. is 40 percent of the state’s population and as such has helped shape the state for the better,” she says. “There’s so much of L.A.’s story that’s about change and I’m proud to be part of that story. For me L.A. is the best place to live in the whole world.”



PHOTO BY DEANNE FITZMAURICE WWW.WOMENCANBUILD.ORG

“It takes a very disciplined leader to create the space for deeper inquiry. The Stanton helped me build a habit of reading, researching, and really understanding things.”

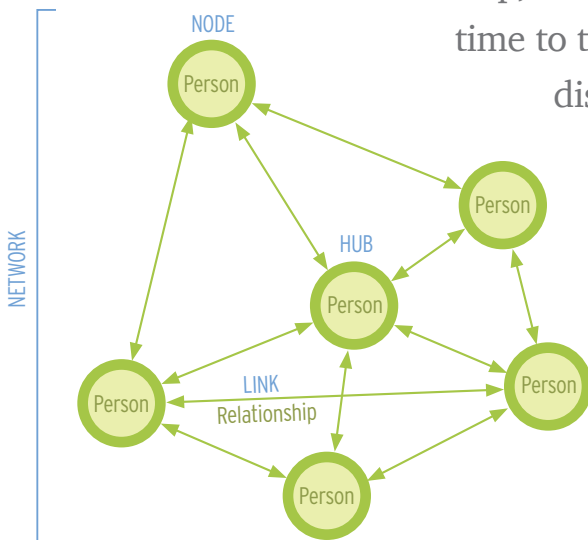
- MADELINE JANIS

## SECTION 3

# HARNESSING THE POWER OF NETWORKS

When the Durfee Foundation created the Stanton Fellowship, it was focused primarily on giving leaders time to think, not necessarily creating a cross-disciplinary network. Then they started to see connections happening.

Fellows were joining each other's boards and working together in innovative ways the foundation hadn't expected.



**SOCIAL IMPACT NETWORK:** a set of relationships that are maintained over time to activate as needed.

**SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS (SNA):** a set of theories, tools and processes for understanding the relationships and structures of a network.

**HUBS:** highly connected nodes

**STRONG TIES:** bonds ideal for close collaboration. They are time and labor intensive and tend toward connections with those similar to you. (ex. Long-standing organizational partnership)

**LOOSE TIES:** best for accessing new resources and opportunities for innovation. They tend to be episodic. (ex. Connection made through mutual friend/colleague)

This prompted the Durfee Foundation to get curious about social impact network analysis to better understand how the Stanton network was already contributing to the fertilization of ideas and resources among L.A. leaders, and how they could strengthen the flow of information and opportunities.

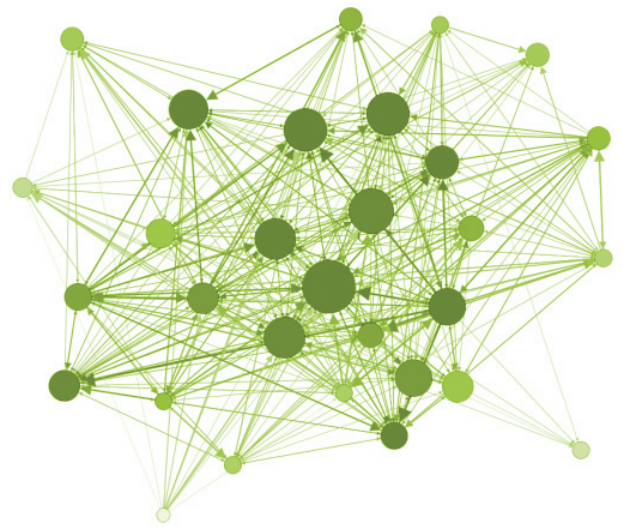
In 2014, Durfee enlisted the help of Network Impact to help them understand how the network of Stanton Fellows was accessing information, ideas and insights that could lead to more innovative, faster solutions, and better outcomes for L.A.

## STANTON NETWORK MAP

### Before



### After



The study showed that the total number of overall connections increased by 137% for leaders after joining the fellowship, and the average number of connections to other fellows increased by 111%. It showed that unlike other fellowships where connections were concentrated within cohorts, 70% of fellows reported connections with fellows beyond their given cohort. While fellows expressed appreciation and some deep connections with cohort members, connections are not limited to the two-year fellowship time period.

Network Impact found that there were two primary factors that contributed to this unique outcome. First, “big question” projects provided the basis for discussion that fosters relationship development, which in turn builds trust and understanding for the

## LOOSE TIES + STRONG TRUST = EXPONENTIAL IMPACT

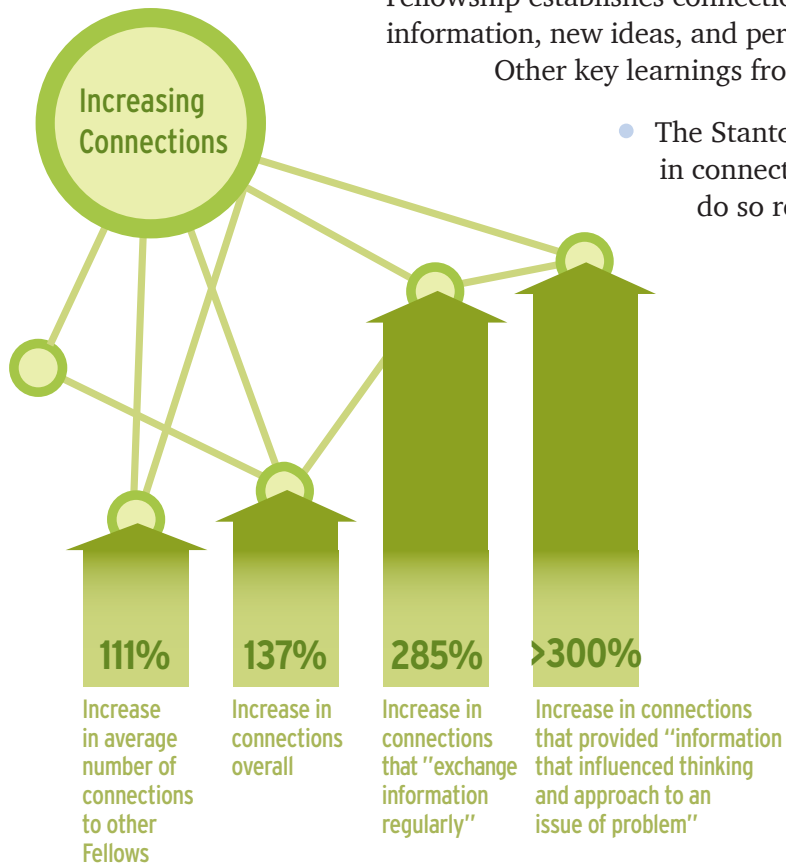
In 1973, the sociologist Mark Granovetter wrote an influential paper called “The Strength of Weak Ties.” His research found that people are more likely to adopt new ideas from acquaintances than from close friends. This theory, coupled with the inherent trust Stanton Fellows feel for each other by being in the program together, significantly increases the flow of ideas, information, and connections.

underlying motivation for the project. Secondly, the program design provides opportunities such as quarterly peer check-ins and alumni retreats for the meaningful exchange of ideas.

In summary, the Network Impact report confirmed that the Stanton Fellowship establishes connections that lower transaction costs so information, new ideas, and perspectives are obtained more quickly.

Other key learnings from the Network Impact study:

- The Stanton Fellowship led to a 285% increase in connections that exchange information, and do so regularly.
- More than 300% increase in connections providing “information that influenced thinking and approach to an issue or problem.”
- The overwhelming majority of fellows reported that the Stanton Fellowship expands awareness, knowledge, and appreciation for the work of others in L.A. outside their own domain.



The full presentation of the Network Impact study of the Stanton Fellowship can be found here: [durfee.org/stanton](http://durfee.org/stanton)

# CONCLUSION

By encouraging extraordinary people to explore open-ended inquiry and nonlinear thinking to address complex challenges, among a well-networked group of peers across sector and discipline connected by place, the Stanton Fellowship gives leaders room for experimentation and new perspectives as they refine their vision and reimagine what's possible for L.A.

A fellowship like the Stanton cultivates creative thinking and innovation within and among leaders committed to making a positive impact. We believe this formula for R&D philanthropy has the potential to be replicated and customized in cities across the U.S.

We know from talking to our fellows over the years that it is nearly impossible for busy leaders of change-making organizations to dedicate the time required to think differently and deeper about the challenges they face. Even if they were encouraged by their boards to use general operating funds for a deeper level of inquiry, leaders tell us they would be reluctant to do so. This is especially true of travel and time for open-ended research. Even a small percentage of overall philanthropic dollars invested in R&D could change this.

We have seen a glimpse of what can be accomplished when extraordinary leaders are given the time, space, and resources to think deeply. We have also seen that when we invest in leaders, they invest back in their networks and that the peripheral vision they gain can shift the collective perspective, often yielding tremendous results.

As we look back over the last 10-plus years, and forward to the next, of investing in extraordinary leaders, our commitment to supporting open-ended inquiry - along with the deep knowledge gained from both successes and failures along the way - remains as strong today as it was a decade ago. And it is this commitment that inspires us to share what we've learned with you here.

We hope this is just the beginning of a conversation about philanthropic R&D. As you reimagine what's possible for your grantmaking, we hope that you will consider this approach. Please explore more at [www.durfee.org/stanton](http://www.durfee.org/stanton), and get in touch with us at [claire@durfee.org](mailto:claire@durfee.org) or [carrie@durfee.org](mailto:carrie@durfee.org) if you'd like to have a deeper conversation about what we've learned and continue to learn every day. We would welcome that.

**In the meantime, stay curious.**





## ENDNOTES

- 1 [www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/what-social-sector-leaders-need-to-succeed](http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/what-social-sector-leaders-need-to-succeed)
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Editorial contribution by Lynell George
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Towards A New Generation of African American Leaders in Los Angeles, Marqueece Harris-Dawson
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.







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