

MY

2015-2025

COMM-

UNITY,

MY

*Celebrating a decade of the
Community Leadership Institute*

SHINE

In the Puget Sound Region, we are on the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish Nations, including the Duwamish, Muckleshoot, Nisqually, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Suquamish, Puyallup, and Tulalip Tribes. We honor with gratitude the land itself and the diverse Coast Salish people, many of whom still fight for Federal recognition, who have stewarded this land since time immemorial and who continue to steward this land today in resistance to colonization.

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Celebrating CL9 at 10

A DECADE OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP



WORDS BY
*Dr. Eric Opoku
Agyemang*

& COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Dear Community

*What a joy and deep honor it is to welcome you to the Community Leadership Institute's 10-Year Anniversary Impact Booklet, **My Community, My Shine!** This book is more than a look back. It's a living, breathing tribute to the fierce love, radical imagination, and tireless work of more than 150 grassroots leaders across Washington State who dared to believe that their voices mattered—and made it true.*

Since launching in 2015, Sage's Community Leadership Institute (CLI) has trained and elevated emerging leaders of color to become power holders and policy shapers across King, Pierce, and Clark Counties. Together, we've turned vision into action, and action into lasting systems change—all rooted in equity, racial justice, community, and cultural pride.

In these pages, you'll find stories of resilience, brilliance, and heart. From organizing for housing justice and equitable transit to reshaping climate and land-use policies, our CLI alumni are not only at decision-making tables, they're transforming them. Over 80% of our graduates have served or are currently serving on boards, commissions, and task forces across city, county, and state levels. Many others are now executive directors, community strategists, and policy influencers, leading with courage, care, and a commitment to future generations.

This 10-year milestone gives us a beautiful opportunity to say: Thank you.

To the founders of CLI, including the visionary Ubx Gardheere and Senator Rebecca Saldaña, your seeds of possibility have grown into a thriving, statewide ecosystem of leadership.

To every Sage staff member past and present, every program manager and coordinator (special shout outs to Myani, Amanda, and our current powerhouse Francis), and every facilitator who's poured wisdom and warmth into each cohort, this celebration is yours too.

We lift up our heartfelt gratitude to our funding partners, including Seattle Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Inatai Foundation, Community Foundation of Southwest Washington, the Cowlitz Tribe, and Progress Alliance, for believing in community-led change and investing in leadership that looks like us and leads like us.

And this book? It would not exist without the phenomenal efforts of Sibongile Chadyiwa of Rose Austin Consulting, our amazing Sage team (Khristine Cancio, Philip Pantaleo, Dr. Francis Abugbilla), and our brilliant designer Nicole Ramirez—thank you for capturing our story with creativity and love.

As you turn each page, we invite you to smile, reflect, laugh, and maybe even shed a tear. These stories are about transformation of people, of places, of systems and they remind us that change is possible when we build it together.

Here's to ten years of CLI—and to the next ten, rooted in joy, justice, and collective power.

With gratitude and excitement,
Dr. Eric Opoku Agyemang
Leadership Programs Director
Puget Sound Sage & Sage Leaders

What is the Community Leadership Institute?

SAGE'S COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

program that *supports, trains and places* low-income communities to sit on local boards in a values-based curriculum focused on

Launched in 2015, the six-month fellowships focus on issues such as *housing, land use, transit, climate* and help fellows learn the nuts and bolts of local government, including *budgeting, parliamentary procedures, and storytelling*, and *communication* skills.

The fellows undergo a six-month mentorship program. After they graduate, they are automatically placed on a national network where they meet quarterly to network, share best practices on policies that they are working on. This provides the *groundwork for achieving solutions* based on

CLIP INSTITUTE (CLI) is a fellowship
for emerging leaders from BIPOC and
boards and commissions. CLI is rooted
in racial and social justice.

The fellowship trains emerging leaders in issues
of equity, and economic development. Graduates
engage in government processes, such as *municipal*
and *lawmaking*, as well as *advocacy*,

and a mentorship program after graduation. When
part of the *alumni network (over 170)*,
they have fun activities, and share updates
with the community. The goal of CLI is to lay *long-term*
foundations based on community needs.

Ten Years of Impact



2015

CLI program launches

Founded by Ubax Gardheere



2015-2016

2016

First cohort graduates

Managed by Myani

Vancouver CLI expansion exploration

2020

Alumni Network Oversight launched



2019-2020



2020-2021



2021-2022



VCLI
2024-2025



2024-2025

2017

Over 80% of CLI alums serve on boards and commissions



2017-2018

Eric Opoku Agyemang joins CLI

2018



2017-2018

CLI 10-Year Vision developed

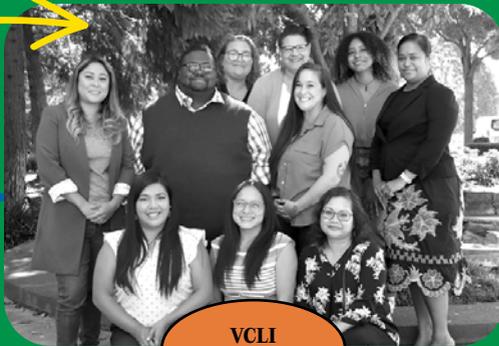
Community Give-Back project launched

2019

CLI Knowing Me, Know You & Retreat Launched

2022

Vancouver CLI launches



VCLI 2022-2023

Francis Abugbilla joins the CLI team



VCLI 2023-2024



2023-2024

A Decade by the Numbers

We have a strong statewide alumni network of over 170 CLI fellows who meet quarterly to share progress, ongoing policies, and support one another.

Number of Alumni

177

140
CLI FELLOWS

KING & PIERCE
COUNTIES

37 VCLI
GRADS

CLARK
COUNTY

OVER 80%

of our alumni have served or are currently serving on strategic boards and commissions from city to state levels.

The remaining

20%

of our alumni have gone on to serve in strategic community leadership roles including **Executive Directors of policy advocacy organizations, leading and organizing city to statewide actions, and serving in local to statewide governments.**

Others have served in elected positions including city councils while some have managed campaigns of statewide elected leaders.

Here is a list of just a few of our alumni bringing change to our communities:

Alumni in Public Service and Public Policy

Jonathan Chen

WA Environmental Justice Council

Nichelle Curtis-McQueen

WA Dept of Children Youth and Families

Alumni in Non-Profits

Cinthia Vasquez

Washington Bus

Patience Malaba

Housing Development Consortium

Rebecca Zapata

Skyway Coalition

Siobhana McEwen

Southwest Washington Equity Coalition

Got Green

Washington CAN

Alumni Elected to Office

Mohamed Abdi

City Council, Tukwila

Mpiima Mugambe

Lynnwood City Council Candidate

Corry Hing

Campaign Manager for WA State Rep.

Specific Policies Initiated or Supported by Alumni

Nichelle's Social Work Legislative Policy

Siobhana's National Award

Patience Malaba's \$100K Award

**OVER
90%**

of fellows report deepening their self-confidence during the fellowship and serving on the boards and commissions

**OVER
95%**

*"This is what I have
seen waiting for all my
life to do."
- Duana Johnson*

of fellows are matched with community leaders as their mentors.
Some alumni mentor current fellows.

Alumni and fellows have shared that the program is a safe space where they can feel free to be themselves and to share without being judged.

Some indicated that CLI, especially the retreats, set a tone of collaboration and a sense of unity which facilitates trust and bonding.

Boards and commissions that the alumni have served or are currently serve on

WA Environmental Justice Council

National Association of Social Workers (NASW)-WA State Chapter Legislative Action Committee

Seattle LGBTQ Commission

King County Conservation Futures Citizen Oversight Committee

King County Housing Authority Board

King County Board of Ethics

Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission

King County Best Starts for Kids Advisory Board

Move Seattle Levy Oversight Committee

Vancouver Housing Authority

Community Advisory Committee, HEAL Act Community Capacity Grants: Washington State Department of Health

National Association of Social Workers (NASW)-WA State Chapter Legislative Action Committee

Seattle Planning Commission

Seattle Women's Commission

King County Accountable Communities of Health

Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board

King County Children & Youth Advisory Board

Sandy Williams Connecting Communities Program Community Advisory Council

Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

Clark County Association of Realtors®' (CCAR) Diversity Committee

King County Human and Civic Commission

Seattle Community Police Commission

Seattle Community Involvement Commission

City of Federal Way Diversity Commission

Commission on Immigrant and Refugees Affairs, Tacoma

What does CLA mean to you?

In our interviews with our fellows from the last ten years, they spoke consistently about these themes:

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

ENVIRONMENTAL

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

GOVERNANCE

POLICY ADVOCACY

HOUS

PUBLIC SPEAKING

BOARDS & COMMIS

AUTHENTICITY

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

REPRESENTATION

JUSTICE

RACIAL EQUITY

TRANSIT

CONFIDENCE

SING

MENTORSHIP

SSIONS

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

NETWORKING

SYSTEMIC CHANGE

INTERSECTIONALITY

OUR FELLOWS, THEIR STORIES

Stories of our fellows and their impact

We interviewed 27 alumni to help us understand the breadth of CLI's impact to our fellows and their communities over the last decade.

FEATURED FELLOWS

2015-2016

- 18 Julio Sanchez
- 20 Abdi Yussuf

2017-2018

- 22 Tiffany Chan
- 24 Taylor Tibbs

2018-2019

- 26 Nichelle Curtis-McQueen
- 28 Siobhana McEwen
- 30 Thanh Nguyen

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- 34 Mohamed Abdi

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- 42 Grace Chai

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- 46 Anthony Ives

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- 60 Mpiima Mugambe

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- 64 Tasha Slater

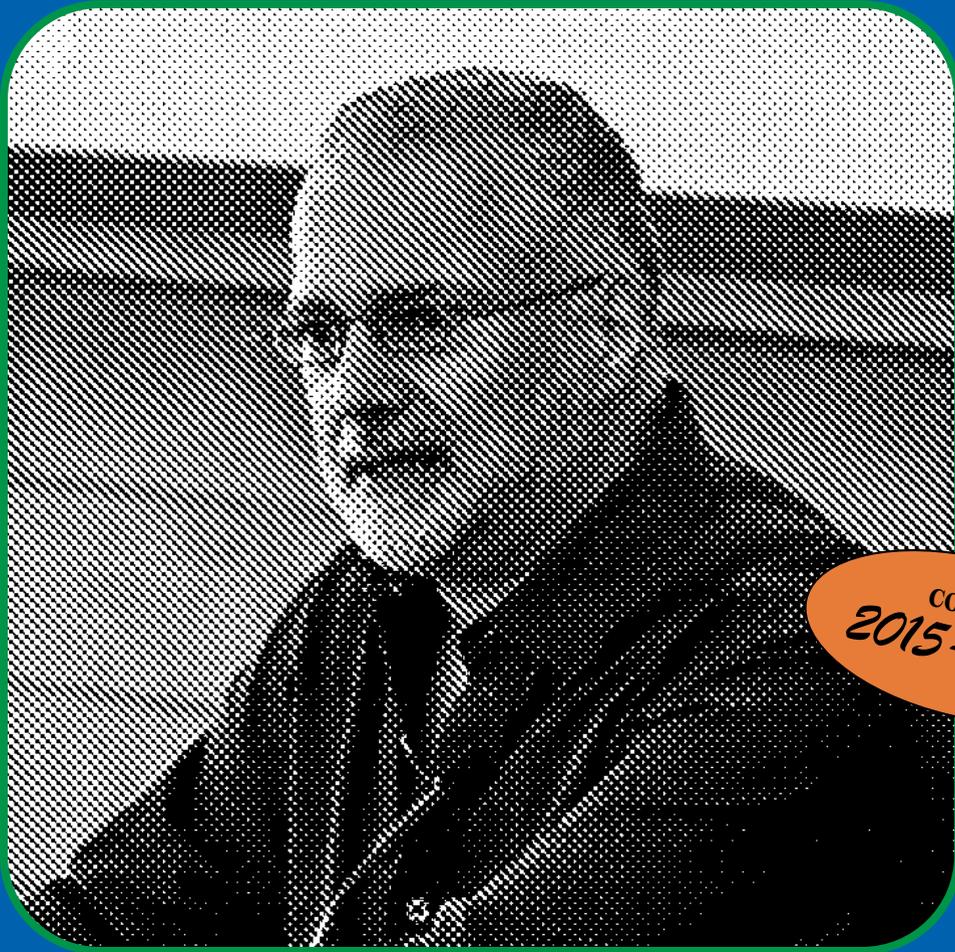
2024-2025

- 66 Daaniya Iyaz
- 68 Favian Mares
- 70 Guadalupe Hurtado

2024-2025 VCLI

- 72 Rashan Williams
- 74 Eduardo Torres

JULIO SANCHEZ



COHORT
2015-2016

Fundamental radical change is not going to happen because of the next election... There has to be a progressive base that's built upon, and that's where CLI comes in.
- Julio

Julio Sanchez joined the very first cohort of the Community Leadership Institute (CLI) in 2016. Originally from Puerto Rico, he moved to Seattle in the mid-nineties and has lived here ever since. He describes himself as naturally curious and never felt tied to a single career path. Instead, he explored various volunteer opportunities and community causes, including activism around affirmative action and environmental justice. His involvement with LELO and Got Green eventually introduced him to the leadership program.

Julio's decision to join CLI stemmed from a desire to find direction and purpose. At the time, he was grappling with uncertainty about his future and saw CLI as a chance to gain knowledge and clarity. "I couldn't figure out what I wanted to do with my life, and CLI looked like a good opportunity to help me take the next step." He was particularly drawn to the program's focus on municipal boards and commissions, areas he had little prior exposure to but recognized as influential in shaping community life.

One of the most impactful aspects of CLI for Julio was the depth and diversity of knowledge shared at every session, and he appreciated the program's emphasis on understanding power structures and how communities can engage with them. A memorable session on leadership challenged traditional notions of authority and introduced the concept of servant leadership, a philosophy that centers the growth and well-being of their team. This prompted Julio to reflect on everyday acts of leadership within his own community. "I started thinking about what my mother does, who's a member of a community organization. Whenever there's an event, she's the first one to volunteer to cook and by doing so she creates spaces where people come together, talk and share. That's a base of power, because when things need to get done, those very same people are the ones who step up."

Following CLI, Julio served for nearly a decade on the Seattle Planning Commission, a

role he pursued after learning about its influence in the city and realizing how little visibility it had among community members. He also continued to serve on the board of Got Green. These experiences taught him that lived experience is a valuable qualification for civic leadership, even without formal credentials. Julio emphasized that anyone from the community, regardless of education or job title, has something meaningful to contribute.

CLI also helped Julio articulate complex issues in policy discussions. For example, during a Planning Commission debate about preserving the character of Wallingford, a neighborhood in North Seattle, he raised critical questions about whose memories and experiences were being preserved, challenging assumptions about urban development and equity.

Julio has remained actively engaged with CLI over the years, serving as a mentor, speaker and panelist. Initially skeptical about mentoring, he came to understand its value through his own mentors, who supported him with quiet confidence. Julio now sees mentorship as a way to instill belief in others and expand the circle of leadership.

Julio's proudest achievement is his persistence—continuing to show up and contribute, even without a clear destination. CLI, he says, opened many doors professionally, helping him find a place in civic life.

City, county, government institutions...
CI gave me the skills and the literacy to
engage with those systems effectively.
- Abdi



COHORT
2015-2016

**ABDI
YUSSUF**

Abdi joined first cohort of the Community Leadership Institute. His work spans over a decade of community organizing, culminating in the founding of the Somali Cultural Center in 2020—the first Somali-led arts, culture, and activism nonprofit on the West Coast—where he currently serves as Executive Director.

Abdi heard of CLI while working as an organizer for SEIU Local 6, where he felt limited in achieving lasting policy change despite successful worker organizing. “I kept running into the same problem. I could organize workers, get them fired up about issues and successfully get them to unionize, but when it came to actually changing policy or lasting wins, I felt like I was missing a critical piece.” Around the same time, he was witnessing how displacement was heavily affecting BIPOC communities in Seattle and South King County, with families and businesses getting pushed out further.

He was drawn to the program’s philosophy, particularly Eric’s quote, “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu.” For Abdi, CLI was the missing piece. The program equipped him with the technical knowledge of municipal systems, budgeting, land use, and strategic partnerships, which he saw as essential for creating long-term structures for communities that can help them thrive for generations. “City, county, government institutions... CLI gave me the skills and the literacy to engage with those systems effectively.”

The most impactful CLI session for Abdi was on equitable transit-oriented development, which centers around the idea of ensuring low-income residents and communities of color are not displaced and instead benefit from new development of public transit in their neighborhoods. The session proved invaluable and shaped his future work when he later joined Puget Sound Sage as the Equitable Development Organizer.

Abdi played a key role in organizing communities in South Seattle to establish Seattle’s Equitable Development Initiative (EDI) in 2016, a landmark initiative that provides funding and capacity building for community-led development projects, particularly affordable housing, community centers and cultural hubs. He also led the organizing

around the new proposed light rail station in the South Graham Street neighborhood, ensuring that community priorities are centered and community institutions remain intact.

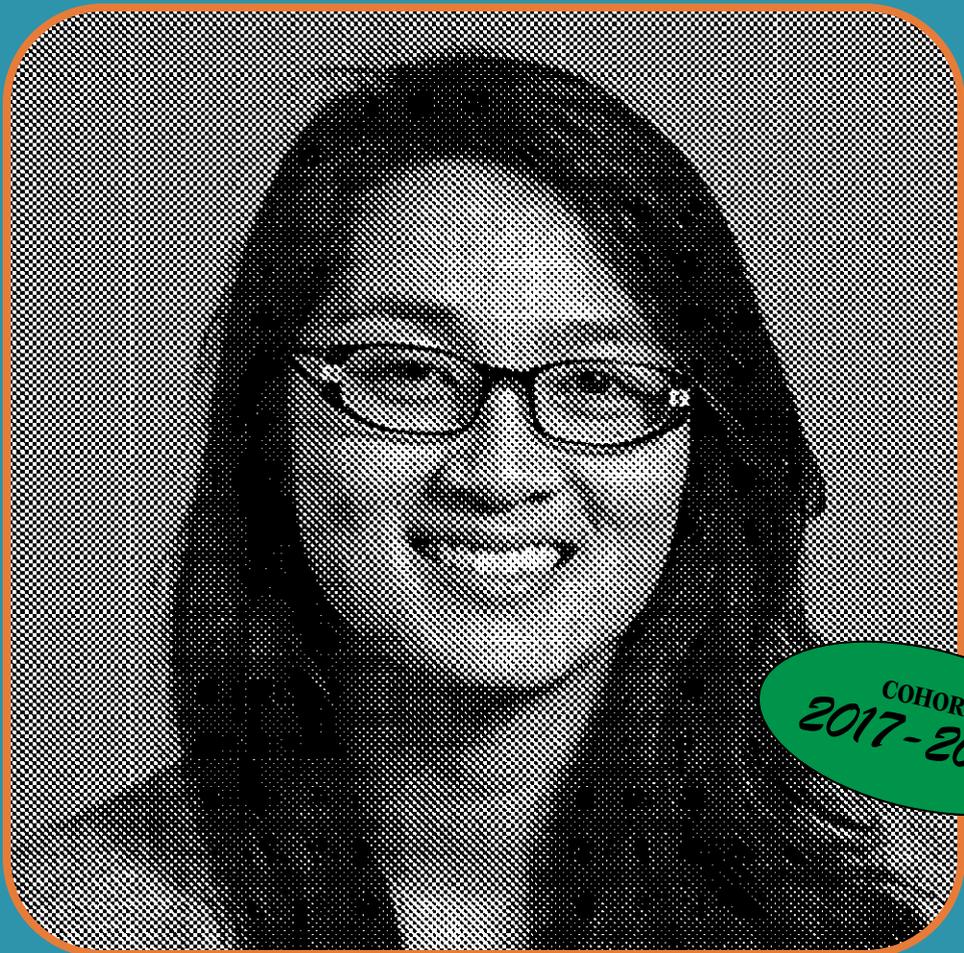
Abdi served on the Community Advisory Board for EDI for two years, where he helped direct over \$25 million toward affordable housing, cultural centers, and childcare facilities. He emphasized that while representation matters in these spaces of power, structural power is more critical in order to create more decision-making spaces that center community voices.

CLI shifted Abdi’s approach from reactive organizing to proactive institution-building. It gave him confidence to bridge different worlds—speaking at city council meetings, lobbying with elected officials, while facilitating poetry circles with elders. He now integrates policy knowledge and budget analysis into his leadership at the Somali Cultural Center.

The Somali Cultural Center currently runs programs like “Healing Through Buraanbur”, a traditional form of Somali poetry and dance. They also hold a speaker series with Somali authors, run Know Your Rights workshops, and facilitate mutual aid efforts for the community. “Preserving Somali culture and creating space isn’t separate from political work—it’s foundational to sustainable political power.” Abdi is most excited about his current work on securing a permanent cultural space to preserve Somali traditions and foster intergenerational learning.

Abdi sees CLI not just as professional development but as training for building lasting institutions. He envisions CLI scaling its model nationally, continuing to build a leadership pipeline that enables communities to govern themselves and control resources for generations.

TIFFANY CHAN



I was mostly siloed in environmental spaces, and what surprised me in CLI was learning was how our issue areas and our movements are all connected.
- Tiffany

Tiffany joined CLI in 2017, encouraged by her peers at the Environmental Professionals of Color (EPOC) in Seattle, a space for people of color working in the environmental field to connect, share information and provide support. She was drawn to the CLI's tangible and hyper-local approach to leadership, "It's continuous learning and an embodied practice of leadership where it's not just done in a silo or with books, but with people too. I think some programs I've been part of are very academic or intellectualized. With CLI it's humanized – it's based on our lived experiences and things that matter to our communities."

One of the most transformative aspects of CLI for Tiffany was learning about the different types of civic boards and their functions, demystifying what had previously seemed like inaccessible bureaucratic spaces. "For the most part it seemed like boards kind of had like a stuffy feeling to them, and it usually consists of people who don't look like me or come from the same background as me. But on learning that there are boards that do weigh in and give recommendations on money or policy, or things that affect our infrastructure, I wanted to be part of that."

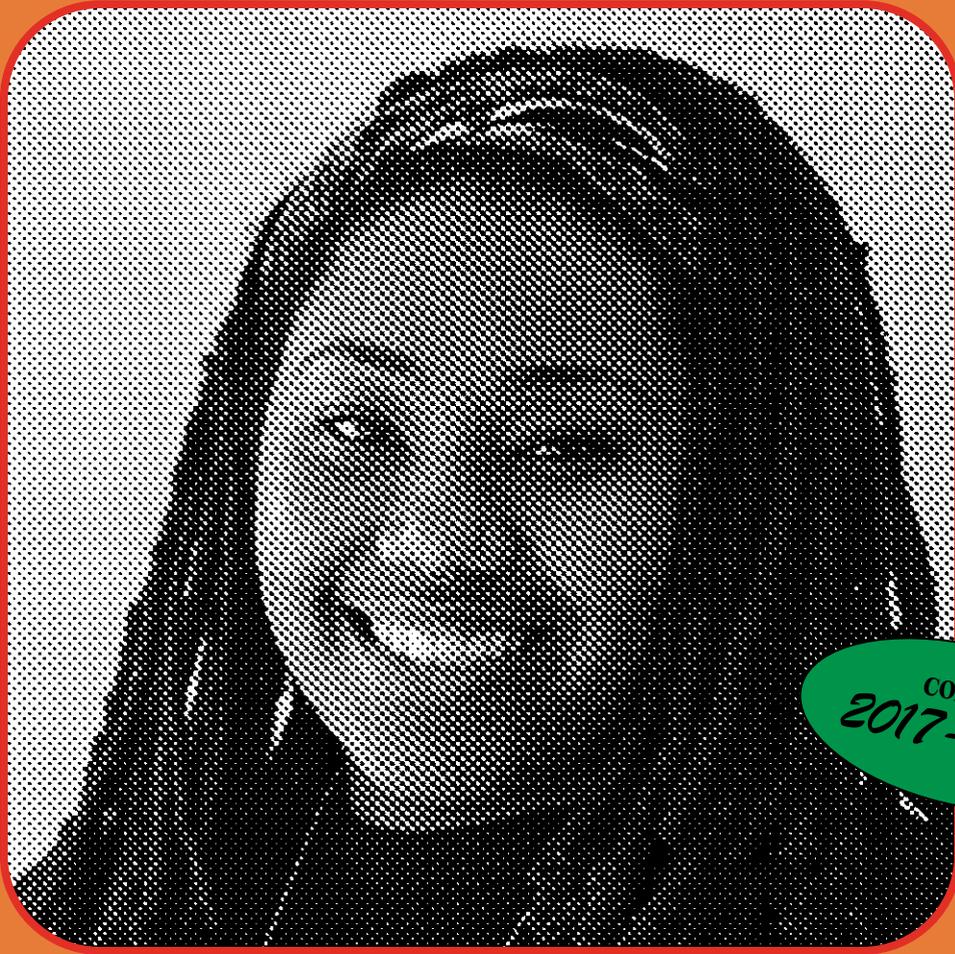
After graduation, Sage staff encouraged her to apply to the King County Conservation Futures Committee (CFT), which reviews applications seeking funding for parks and open spaces. The committee then makes recommendations to the King County Executive and Council. She served on the committee for five years.

During her tenure, Tiffany contributed to significant shifts in how the board approached equity. A key example was the implementation of a match waiver policy, which allowed community-led projects, especially those from under-resourced areas, to access funding without the traditional 50% financial match. This means that organizations serving historically excluded communities applying for the grant do not have to have 50% of the money needed to acquire an open space. This change, influenced by the Open Space Equity Cabinet,

made green space funding more accessible and equitable. "Being on the board, it really helped me experience and see the effects of legacy... how much our work matters—not just now, but in the long term."

Tiffany credits CLI with sharpening her understanding of intersectionality, how environmental justice is connected to issues like housing and health. "I think I was mostly siloed in environmental spaces, and what surprised me in CLI was learning was how our issue areas and our movements are all connected." A memorable session on Robert's Rules of Order also stood out to Tiffany for its practical value, equipping her with the tools and language to navigate and influence formal decision-making spaces effectively.

After five years, Tiffany stepped down from the committee and helped prepare the next CLI alumni to come in. She currently serves as the State Capacity Building Director at the League of Conservation Voters. Her work focuses on strengthening local and state-level environmental and democratic initiatives, emphasizing the importance of community-driven change.



COHORT
2017-2018

TAYLOR TIBBS

I feel like sometimes I'm trying to convince people that we all have rights, and at CLJ those weren't things that we were questioning and we're able to go deeper like, what does environmental justice have to do with education? What's the best strategy in this moment to build power with our communities?
- Taylor

Taylor Tibbs graduated from the Community Leadership Institute 2017 and currently works at City Year serving Seattle and King County, an education-focused nonprofit that supports students in under-resourced communities in reaching their full potential.

Their motivation to join CLI stemmed from their longstanding commitment to education equity and a desire to ensure that young people feel supported and valued in their communities. Taylor recognized that participating in local boards and commissions was a strategic way to influence systemic change and challenge the traditional image of leadership, spaces in which they previously associated as mostly occupied by white men. The program's cohort model also appealed to Taylor, offering a space to learn collaboratively and re-imagine what leadership means.

A pivotal moment that pushed Taylor toward applying to the program was a dismissive interaction with a director who told them not to worry about organizational processes. "I was a program manager at the time asking questions like, what's going on with this budget? Where's this money coming from? How come? I don't think they meant to be condescending, but they told me, "That's not your job to worry about that." You know sometimes all you need is that one person to tell you No to set a fire within you? I was encountering a lot of that rhetoric in non-profit leadership, so I decided to find the information myself." Within CLI, Taylor found a community of peers asking similar questions and had knowledge to share with one another.

Taylor appreciated the intentionality of their CLI cohort and the depth of conversations, especially around race, class and gender. They were surprised by the types of conflicts that arose during these discussions and how the group navigated them with care and curiosity. For Taylor, CLI provided a space where foundational needs and rights were not up for

debate, allowing for more nuanced discussions around justice and creating impactful movements. "I feel like sometimes I'm trying to convince people that we all have rights, and at CLI those weren't things that we were questioning and we're able to go deeper like, what does environmental justice have to do with education? What's the best strategy in this moment to build power with our communities?"

Taylor has served on several boards, including Northwest Strive, which supports young men through basketball and community building, and the Krista Foundation for Global Citizenship, where they were Board President. Their CLI experience was instrumental in preparing them for leadership, especially in navigating challenges related to race and power dynamics.

From their board experiences, Taylor learned the importance of mapping power and building collective community. They emphasized the need for multiple people from marginalized communities to join boards together to avoid isolation and maintain accountability. "It can be a lonely experience for someone if it's their first time on a board. The instinct is to quiet themselves and look at the landscape before they act. I've been fortunate enough to be on boards where I've known at least one other person, which made me feel safe to be myself." CLI helped Taylor develop the confidence to speak up, challenge harmful ideologies, and uplift others in leadership spaces.

*I got the opportunity to meet amazing humans
that are doing all kinds of different work,
and we all had the same vision as far as
social justice, but we all come from different
backgrounds. - Michelle*

NICHELLE CURTIS- MCQUEEN



COHORT
2018-2019

Nichelle Curtis-McQueen is a dedicated public servant and educator, currently serving as Associate Superintendent at Echo Glen Children's Center and as an adjunct professor at St. Martin's University. She also chairs the Legislative Action Committee for Social Workers in Washington State and serves on the Human Services Commission for the City of Federal Way. Her passion for macro-level social work and policy advocacy led her to the Community Leadership Institute (CLI), which she discovered while during her master's program.

Nichelle was drawn to the Community Leadership Institute because of its focus on social justice areas like environmental justice, housing, and transit—fields she wanted to explore beyond her primary work in criminal justice and rehabilitation. She valued the program's alignment with her career goals and its emphasis on community-based leadership.

One of the most impactful aspects of the program for Nichelle was the diversity of her cohort. "I got the opportunity to meet amazing humans that are doing all kinds of different work, and we all had the same vision as far as social justice, but we all come from different backgrounds." The deep relationships that she formed with her cohort enriched her understanding of global perspectives and reinforced her commitment to inclusive leadership.

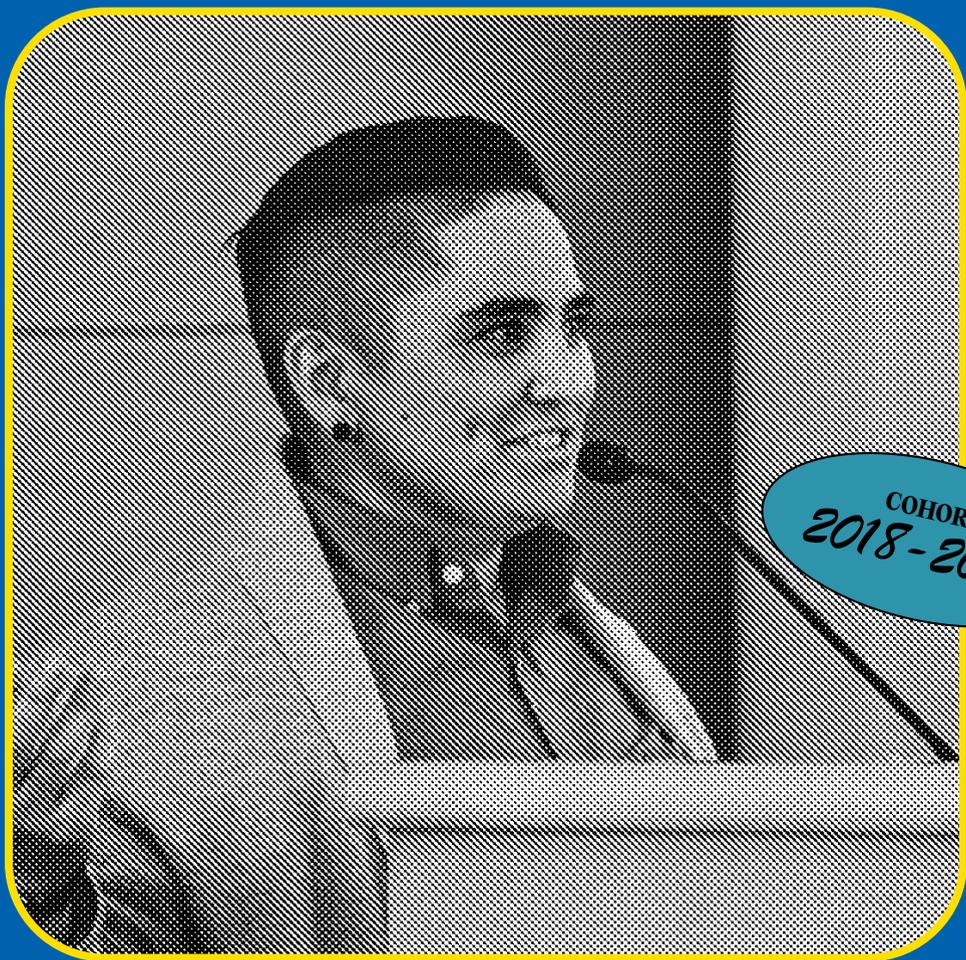
When asked of a memorable experience during her time in the program, she shared a story about a fellow who regularly brought her young grandson to sessions. The child became a beloved part of the cohort, which to her represents the welcoming and familial atmosphere of CLI. "It was just so much fun to have this child be part of our cohort. I still talk to that fellow, and I've had dinner with them and the little boy. Of course he's significantly older now, but I'm like, I remember when you were just a little nugget running around all over the building where we were doing our sessions!" Nichelle emphasized how this environment allowed her to be her authentic self, especially as a Black woman navigating predominantly white professional spaces.

Her involvement in local boards and commissions has been equally transformative. After serving on the Diversity Commission, she

joined the Human Services Commission to more directly influence funding decisions for nonprofits in Federal Way. She is passionate about ensuring resources stay within the city and are used for tangible services that serve the community. "I love doing that work because we really had to be intentional on who we award money to. Compared to Seattle, we don't have as much funding, so being very intentional and prioritizing nonprofits that are serving the community in Federal Way is very important to me." Her advocacy also extends to addressing homelessness and supporting youth in her district.

As chair of the Legislative Action Committee, Nichelle has led efforts to pass bills that improve the social work profession, including joining the Social Work Compact to ease licensure across states. She is also pushing for alternative licensure pathways to address inequities in standardized testing.

CLI gave Nichelle the confidence to consider running for public office—something she once thought was beyond reach. She credits the program with helping her grow both personally and professionally, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment. She remains deeply involved in the program as a founding member of the CLI Alumni Committee, organizing events to maintain connections and support new fellows.



COHORT
2018-2019

SIOBHANA MCEWEN

I don't think CIJ opens doors for anybody, but it gives people the confidence to open the door for themselves. -Siobhanna

Siobhana currently serves as the Executive Director of the Southwest Washington Equity Coalition (SWEC) and is deeply involved in community organizing and policy advising. During the interview, she shared that they were in the process of launching Love and Justice Alliance, a political organization that aims to build progressive BIPOC political power in Southwest Washington.

She first came across the Community Leadership Institute through Eric, a fellow graduate student in social work who also leads the program. She was excited to be part of a group of emerging leaders of color but was initially hesitant as she was still understanding her biracial identity around the time. The daughter of a Scotch Irish blue-collar worker from Chicago and a Guyanese immigrant, she grew up in a small rural town in western Nebraska where not many neighbors looked like her. “On the census box when it asks your race, I’ve always checked “other.” I didn’t know if it would be okay for me to apply to the program or if I would be accepted or welcomed.” In the end she felt the opposite. Siobhana found CLI to be a welcoming and affirming environment that helped her embrace her identity as a queer person of color and build confidence in her leadership.

One of the most surprising aspects of CLI for Siobhana was realizing how little she knew about municipal governance, urban planning, and the economic forces shaping local communities. “I used to teach social studies and political science, so I thought I had a good understanding of politics, but I realized I didn’t know much about how cities or counties work.” A memorable session on equitable land use and transit-oriented development introduced her to the systemic inequities in housing and urban planning. When she and her wife moved to Vancouver around the pandemic, she brought the lessons she learned from CLI into her work in Vancouver.

Siobhana has contributed extensively through advisory roles, including the Interstate Bridge Replacement project and Vancouver’s

Comprehensive Plan. These roles allow her to influence decision-makers and advocate for community benefits, aligning with her strategic approach to leadership. Her involvement with SWEC began during the pandemic when she was working at the Council for the Homeless and was appointed as her organization’s representative.

Her background as a CLI alum proved invaluable and serendipitous when SWEC explored launching a cohort of the Community Leadership Institute in Vancouver. “I kept telling Eric years ago, there are leaders of color outside King County who desperately need this information.” Her deep belief in expanding CLI beyond King and Pierce County led to the successful establishment of VCLI in 2022, which has graduated its third cohort this year. She emphasizes the importance of adaptive leadership and the humanistic approach that CLI fosters, especially among BIPOC leaders.

Reflecting on her leadership journey, Siobhana is most proud of helping others see their potential and step into leadership roles. “I don’t think CLI opens doors for anybody, but it gives people the confidence to open the door for themselves.” CLI shifted Siobhana’s path from clinical social work to policy and advocacy and grounded her in a supportive community that continues to uplift and connect alumni across the state.

Siobhana envisions CLI expanding statewide, with satellite programs in places like Yakima and Wenatchee, creating a network of progressive leaders of color. As an executive director and community organizer, her current focus is on supporting others and being present for her family.

CLI has really lived up to the promise
of being a family. I know I feel welcomed.
-Thanh

THANH NGUYEN



COHORT
2018-2019

Thanh Nguyen is a Vietnamese Chinese immigrant raised by a single mother. She was the first to finish high school and college in her family. She has lived in low-income housing for a while and was fortunate enough to now own a condo with her mother. Because of her lived experience, she is very passionate about housing and homelessness advocacy and currently serves as an operations and grants manager at an advocacy fund focused on just that.

Thanh was drawn to the Community Leadership Institute because of its unique approach to leadership development—particularly its emphasis on tangible outcomes like placement on local boards and commissions. “CLI has a unique aspect where it’s not just about rhetorical leadership. They also provide you an outlet, and this is in the boards and commissions.” Unlike other programs, for her CLI offered not just training but pathways to civic engagement, which Thanh found especially valuable given her previous challenges in joining municipal boards without insider knowledge or connections.

Thanh appreciated the community-oriented nature of the program. She highlighted the lasting relationships formed across cohorts and the sense of belonging that continued beyond graduation. One standout session for her was on municipal budgeting, which demystified financial processes and emphasized the importance of understanding how funding aligns with board priorities.

Since graduating, Thanh has served on two key committees: the King County Re+ Zero Waste Committee and the Puget Sound Regional Council Equity Advisory Committee. The former challenged her to explore intersections between housing and environmental justice, while the latter allowed her to apply equity principles to regional planning and policy, roles which deepened her understanding of strategic advocacy and the importance of speaking with intention within leadership spaces.

Thanh described CLI as a confidence booster, helping her embrace vulnerability and curiosity in her leadership journey. She learned that asking questions and admitting gaps in knowledge can be powerful tools for collective

growth. “There’s a level of transparency in leadership that CLI has really given me—that it’s okay to not know, it’s okay to ask questions.” CLI also helped her navigate predominantly white professional spaces by affirming her introverted leadership style and encouraging authenticity over performative engagement.

Her involvement with CLI extended beyond the program. She served as a mentor for future cohorts and joined Sage Leaders’ Political Leadership Council, which centers grassroots community leaders in the decision-making process of endorsing BIPOC electoral candidates in Washington. Thanh’s experience on the endorsement board taught her to evaluate candidates holistically, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, and to prioritize values and vision over perfection.

Thanh’s reflections on leadership centered on authenticity, strategic engagement, and servant leadership. She expressed pride in advocating for meaningful racial equity within her organization, even when it meant challenging performative practices. CLI helped her align her values with action and reinforced the importance of reevaluating those values over time.

Thanh envisions CLI expanding its reach, increasing staff capacity, and enhancing mentorship through group formats and state-wide gatherings. She underlined the importance of continued community-building and creating spaces for alumni and current cohorts to connect meaningfully. “CLI has really lived up to the promise of being a family. I know I feel welcomed.”



COHORT
2019-2020

MARTHA LUCAS

*CSI to me is a family.
-martha*

Martha currently serves as the Executive Director of the Washington State Coalition of African Community Leaders (WSCACL). With a background in political science and demography, Martha has long been involved in community service, particularly with immigrant and refugee populations. Her decision to join the Community Leadership Institute stemmed from a desire to refresh her understanding of political structures and enhance her leadership skills, especially as she transitioned into more formal leadership roles.

At the time of joining CLI, Martha was navigating the challenges of nonprofit leadership and changes around the discourse on social justice. She found the program to be very helpful in updating her understanding of modern terminology around oppression and systemic barriers. CLI also introduced her to the importance of environmental justice and intergenerational communication, which became invaluable as she began working with youth programs.

One of the most impactful sessions for Martha featured a discussion around the challenges of sustaining community movements when the funding ends. This inspired Martha to implement sustainable practices at WSCACL, including compensating volunteer leaders and integrating professional development into sub-granting processes. These initiatives aimed to build long-term capacity within community organizations.

Martha's leadership journey has been deeply influenced by her personal experiences, including the legacy of her father, whose quiet contributions to education in his home country inspired her to pursue meaningful community work. She joined WSCACL after being invited by a co-founder during a vulnerable period in her life and quickly recognized the coalition as a space to bridge generational and cultural gaps within African communities.

In addition to her role at WSCACL, Martha has served on several municipal boards and commissions, including the Seattle Community Involvement Commission (CIC) and the King County Refugee Advisory Council. These roles, often initiated through community connections, have expanded her network and deep-

ened her understanding of civic processes. She emphasized the importance of networking, noting how relationships built through CLI, and other leadership spaces have facilitated collaboration and resource sharing across communities.

Martha credits CLI with opening doors professionally and personally. The program's brand recognition and alumni network provided her with credibility and access to opportunities, including grant review panels and civic commissions. She has remained engaged with the CLI network through alumni mixers, collaborative projects, and by encouraging her team members to participate in the program. "CLI to me is a family. It's one of my families."

Reflecting on her leadership journey, Martha takes pride in empowering others, especially those who may not initially see themselves as leaders. She values a management style that allows individuals to grow through experience, including making and learning from mistakes. Her advice to prospective CLI participants is clear: join with an open mind and a willingness to grow. The program offers not just training, but a lasting community and a foundation for impactful leadership.

MOHAMED ABDI



COHORT
2019-2020

CLI changed my life. It made me a better man, a better leader, and a better community member. - Mohamed

Born in a refugee camp in Nairobi, Kenya, Mohamed Abdi and his parents came to Tukwila when he was five months old. As the oldest of eight, Mohamed was a natural born leader. As young as fourteen, he was lobbying bills in Olympia on immigration, education and homelessness as a student representative. In school, Mohamed was a mentor, a varsity captain, and a student body president advocating for his peers in his school district.

In his junior year of college, he joined a mentorship program that introduced him to the Community Leadership Institute (CLI). Encouraged by his mentor, he applied to the program just before the deadline and was accepted, a decision he describes as life changing. CLI played a pivotal role in Mohamed's leadership development. He was inspired by the program's authenticity, the strength of its community, and the dynamic leaders he learned from every session.

As he was going through the leadership program, Mohamed started to think about what he wanted to do after college, with an idea of someday maybe running for office. Mohamed was struck by how the CLI empowered its participants, giving people of color the space to dream and build power together. He greatly credits CLI with giving him the confidence, tools, and network to pursue public office.

In 2021, Mohamed became the youngest City Councilmember in Tukwila's history at the age of 24. His campaign was supported by his CLI network, including alumni who helped with door-knocking and advocacy. He emphasized that his motivation to run stemmed from a desire to honor his parents' sacrifices, uplift his community, and inspire youth.

Throughout his career, Mohamed has served on numerous boards and commissions, including the King County Youth Advisory Board and Teach for Tukwila. These roles

allowed him to advocate for youth, mental health, and immigrant communities. One of his proudest achievements as a councilmember is securing federal funding to support asylum seekers living in tents in Tukwila.

Mohamed remains deeply engaged with the CLI Alumni network, offering mentorship and support to new cohorts. In 2024, he was hired at Sage Leaders to serve as the program manager for the Local Elected Leadership Institute (LELI) program, a peer support space for BIPOC elected officials to learn from one another and share the struggles of being one of the few people of color in positions of power.

Throughout the interview, Mohamed emphasized the importance of youth voice, representation, and staying true to one's identity. "Be yourself," he advised future CLI applicants. "Fall hard on your strengths." He also highlighted the value of loyalty and giving back, noting that CLI is more than a program—it's family.

For Mohamed, CLI was a launching pad. It not only helped him deepen his policy knowledge and build a network of changemakers, but it also reinforced his commitment to service and his belief in the power of community-led leadership.



Senator Rebecca Saldaña (former Puget Sound Sage Executive Director) helps host the 2015-2016 cohort kick-off event.



2019-2020 cohort graduation.



Alumni gather for kayaking and a summer BBQ.



BARBARA TISI

COHORT
2020-2021

I had a longing for community... to find places where I felt like I belonged or had people that looked like me but were also making a difference. -Barbara

Barbara's journey into joining the Community Leadership Institute was driven by a desire to gain leadership experience in a time of professional burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. She moved to Seattle from Minnesota initially for graduate school but also found it difficult to find community. To her, CLI provided both.

Barbara was deeply impressed by the intentionality and supportiveness of the CLI community. She found the program to be more than just leadership training, but it was a gateway to meaningful relationships, mentorship, and ongoing opportunities. "I had a longing for community...to find places where I felt like I belonged or had people that looked like me but were also making a difference." She highlighted how CLI staff were instrumental in helping alumni with board application reviews, reference letters, and networking.

One of her most memorable experiences was a session where she met the director of a board she now serves on. That connection blossomed into mentorship and eventually a board position, illustrating how CLI not only equipped her with tools but also directly connected her to impactful opportunities.

Since graduating, Barbara has served on several boards and commissions, including:

- **Sea Dog Society:** An environmental justice organization focused on conserving the Salish Sea and Puget Sound, working closely with Indigenous communities.
- **Participatory Budgeting Committees:** She served as an advisor for Greater King County and Seattle, representing areas like White Center and Federal Way.
- **Minimum Wage Advocacy in Tukwila:** She volunteered to educate residents, knock on doors, and mobilize support for the successful passage of the law.
- **Sage Leaders' Political Leadership Council:** She participated for multiple years to better understand electoral processes and community representation.

Barbara's motivation for joining these boards stemmed from a desire to stop being a passive observer and instead become an active voice in her community, and CLI gave her the confidence and skills to do so. "Before CLI, I didn't know how to be on a board. I didn't know if I was a leader. I didn't know what that meant." She shared how the program helped her understand the complexities of decision-making and the importance of grassroots work.

Her leadership in the Tukwila minimum wage campaign was particularly transformative where she learned the power of persistence, clear communication, and meeting people where they are. CLI's curriculum helped her feel qualified and empowered to take the initiative and mobilize her network effectively.

Barbara remains actively engaged with the CLI network through alumni events, coffee meetups, and ongoing collaborations with fellow cohort members. She values the continued growth of the program and the strong sense of community it fosters. CLI, she says, gave her more than she expected—tools, confidence, and a lasting support system.

Reflecting on her journey, Barbara is proud of being a voice for her community and inspiring others to lead. CLI helped her grow as a leader and pushed her out of her comfort zone. She envisions CLI expanding nationally or even globally, continuing to empower more leaders and communities.

DANIEL KIM



COHORT
2020-2021

I'm someone who is passionate about nature conservation, and now construction, creating places where people interact and gather. Things that are assets to the community. - Daniel

Daniel is second-generation Korean American and a passionate advocate for environmental conservation. Though he initially pursued a career in the field, his path eventually led him to establish a commercial construction company. “I’m someone who is passionate about nature conservation, and now construction, creating places where people interact and gather. Things that are assets to the community.” His projects focus on creating “third spaces” like restaurants, gyms, and cafes: places that foster human connection.

Daniel’s decision to join the Community Leadership Institute (CLI) was deeply influenced by the social and political upheaval during the COVID-19 pandemic, including movements like Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate. Feeling a strong desire to make a local impact, he saw the program as a stepping stone to better understand civic engagement and local governance. At the time, he lacked a support network or guidance on how to get involved in public service, and CLI filled that gap by offering both knowledge and community.

Despite CLI being entirely virtual around that time, he found the program transformative. He was particularly inspired by the realization that ordinary people, even those without political backgrounds, could make meaningful contributions to their communities. One of the most memorable aspects of CLI for Daniel was the emotional openness fostered by the facilitators. The program emphasized soft skills like active listening, empathy, and understanding group dynamics, skills Daniel now finds invaluable in his role on the King County Conservation Futures Advisory Committee, a position he joined earlier this year. There, he’s learning how public funds are allocated for conservation projects and how to navigate differing viewpoints within a committee setting. CLI’s training helped him approach these discussions with diplomacy and a collaborative mindset.

Daniel’s leadership journey has also been shaped from balancing the tension between his work in the construction industry and his passion for environmental advocacy. He shares why he decided to pivot to construction, “What I realized is with me having an environmental background, some land management and real estate experience, and my father being in construction for 40 years...construction is one of the heaviest leads in environmental degradation why not combine all three and make an impact through creating sustainable built environments?” As a member of the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties, he also often finds himself advocating for sustainable practices like LEED certification and alternatives to natural gas, aiming to influence change from within.

Daniel dreams of using his construction expertise to build environmentally conscious schools and recreational spaces that reconnect people with nature. He’s especially proud of projects like a barber school in Capitol Hill and a teppanyaki restaurant in Olympia, both of which have become vital community hubs.



COHORT
2020-2021

GRACE CHAI

I came through CLI a few years out of undergrad trying to solidify what my role is in advancing racial equity work. I was particularly interested in grant making as a means to move resources to grassroots movements. -Grace

Grace Chai was born and raised in Renton and Bellevue and lived in Seattle for over 10 years, then moved to New York City last summer to pursue a master's degree in public administration. She joined the Community Leadership Institute (CLI) seeking clarity and direction in her work, particularly in grant making and land use policy.

Around the time of applying to the program, Grace faced challenges common to emerging leaders—piecing together contract work and volunteer experiences while trying to prove her capacity to lead. “I came through CLI a few years out of undergrad trying to solidify what my role is in advancing racial equity work. I was particularly interested in grant making as a means to move resources to grassroots movements.” She found the program’s goal of training leaders to serve on boards and commissions to be astute and understood how it played into the larger political strategy of the organization.

CLI offered her a structured curriculum to build a more technical understanding of land use policy, zoning, and what an equitable development strategy looks like, as well as a vast and supportive network that helped her build confidence and skills. Grace recalled several memorable sessions from the program, including presentations on Seattle’s history of redlining, its budgeting processes, and the power dynamics that exists within local boards and commissions. A standout was the power mapping session, which she later adapted for her own facilitation work in philanthropy reform. She shared that she goes back to her notes every so often, finding them a valuable resource as she navigates new contexts like her current graduate studies.

Shortly after completing CLI, she served as a grant making program manager at King County’s Department of Natural Resources and Parks, facilitating an advisory committee responsible for scoring applications and making grant recommendations. She found CLI’s curriculum to be very helpful in that new role, understanding the dynamics of committees and how to work with it effectively to move racial equity work forward. Grace was particularly proud of her work shaping the

committee’s evaluation criteria to prioritize community leadership and equity, a more innovative approach than what the agency had ever done before, which had ripple effects across its other grant making programs. Later, she joined the Washington State Department of Health’s Community Advisory Committee for Environmental Justice grants, helping award over \$11 million in capacity-building funds across the state.

Grace emphasized the importance of CLI’s mentorship program, particularly her relationship with Sage’s former Policy Analyst Giulia Pasciuto, which continued beyond CLI and supported her transition into roles at Seattle’s Equitable Development Initiative. She also contributed to CLI’s hiring processes and shared board opportunities with the network, staying engaged through referrals and outreach.

Grace reflected on her leadership journey with pride, noting her role as a consistent advocate for innovation and accountability within government institutions. CLI helped her feel less isolated and more connected to a broader vision of change, and her experience on Sage Leaders’ Political Leadership Council (PLC) was formative, highlighting the strategic value of a BIPOC-led election endorsement board and the importance of co-designing processes. Despite the challenges of organizing within government, she remains committed to equity work and plans to return to Seattle after completing her MPA.

REBECCA ZAPATA



COHORT
2021-2022

*A lot of us came in thinking we
were there to learn, later
realizing we were also there to be
the teachers. -Rebecca*

Born and raised in Seattle's Beacon Hill neighborhood, Rebecca's life has been shaped by displacement and gentrification leading her to settle in Skyway, a community where her family has lived for decades and where she now raises her children. Her connection to Skyway is both personal and professional, rooted in years of volunteering and working in local schools. She currently serves as the Executive Director of Skyway Coalition, a nonprofit organization that centers community-led growth to uplift and protect the Black and brown unincorporated community of Skyway.

Skyway Coalition was founded in late 2019 by a group of long-standing community organizations that came together to address systemic issues like housing insecurity and economic disinvestment in the community. Rebecca was the coalition's first hire, initially serving as coalition manager before stepping into the executive director role. Under her leadership, the organization is launching the Skyway Resource Center, the first community-owned and operated development in Skyway. This milestone reflects years of organizing and advocacy, and Rebecca described the upcoming grand opening as a major moment for the community.

Rebecca joined CLI during her first year as executive director, drawn to the cohort-based learning model and the program's alignment with her work in equitable development, affordable housing, and community empowerment. She appreciated the opportunity to learn alongside peers who shared similar values and challenges, and she found the guest speakers—many of whom were directly involved in policy and advocacy—especially relevant. One of the most surprising aspects of CLI for Rebecca was the realization that the cohort itself was a source of deep learning. “A lot of us came in thinking we were there to learn, later realizing we were also there to be the teachers.”

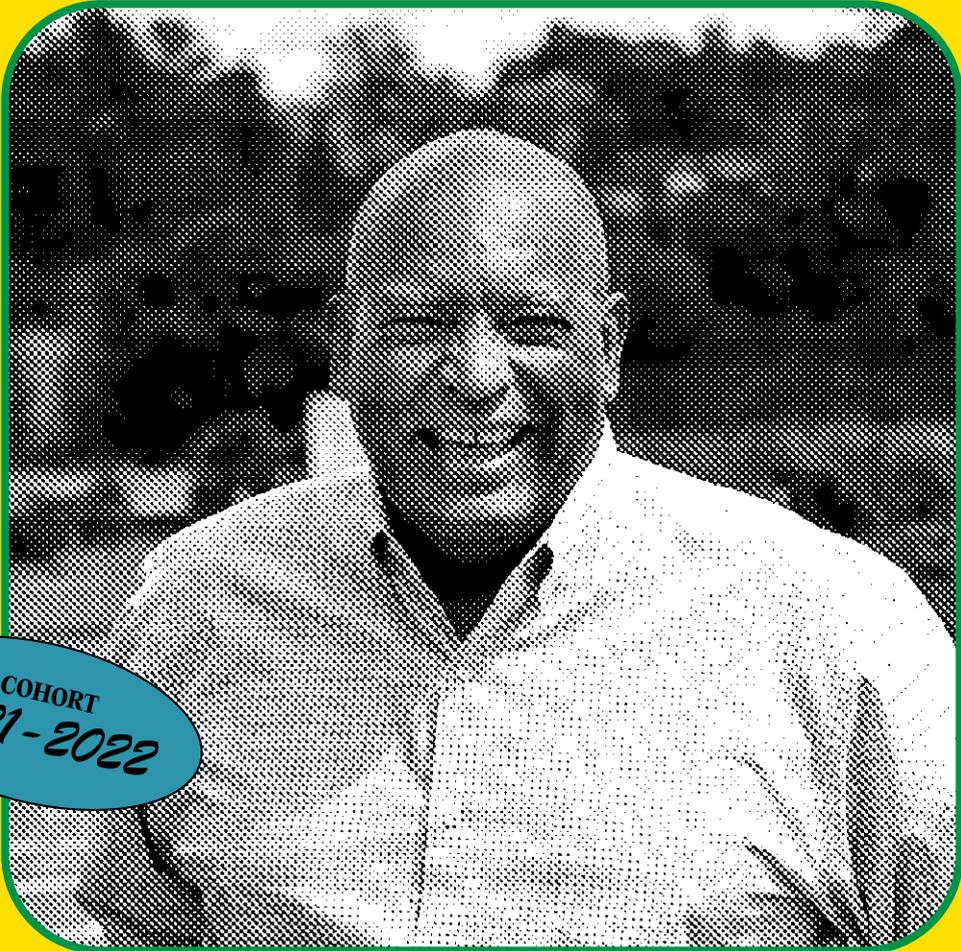
Rebecca has actively participated in community planning efforts, hiring panels, and

advocacy initiatives. Notably, she served on the King County Equitable Development Initiative's community planning workgroup and helped shape proposals that led to significant investments in Skyway, including \$10 million for a community center and \$5 million for affordable housing.

Rebecca emphasized that having a seat at the table is only the beginning. Many systems still operate in ways that marginalize community voices, and she has experienced firsthand how community input can be overlooked or used as a checkbox rather than a catalyst for change. The fellowship helped her understand these dynamics and equipped her with tools to advocate more effectively. She spoke candidly about the challenges of stepping into public leadership roles while still learning and expressed pride in her resilience and willingness to grow through discomfort.

Rebecca envisions CLI growing to include multiple cohorts and programming that highlights the real-time work of participants. She hopes the program continues to be well-funded and responsive to the evolving needs of community leaders.

There's a reason why I proudly display the CLI certificate in my office. It meant something to me.
-Anthony



COHORT
2021-2022

**ANTHONY
IVES**

Tony Ives, Executive Director of Kitsap Community Resources (KCR), brings a rich and unconventional background to his leadership role. Formerly a Wall Street professional managing one of the world's largest public pension portfolios, Tony transitioned to community service after 9/11, joining the Peace Corps and working in Honduras. His ongoing commitment includes annual trips to Honduras, where he supports sustainable tourism, scholarship programs, and school development in Garifuna communities.

At KCR, Tony oversees a wide range of services including weatherization, Head Start, housing development, homelessness assistance, and Meals on Wheels. His primary focus, however, is building relationships across organizations in the county to foster collaboration and resource sharing. He's proud of his role in connecting nonprofits and government agencies to better serve marginalized communities.

Tony joined CLI in 2022, shortly after becoming Executive Director in late 2021. He was the first Black executive director of an organization that has been around for nearly 60 years. He was drawn to CLI because it offered leadership training in a space centered around BIPOC leaders—something he had never experienced before. CLI provided a rare opportunity to engage with peers who shared similar lived experiences, fostering a sense of comfort and camaraderie that was missing in predominantly white professional environments. “There’s a reason why I proudly display the CLI certificate in my office. It meant something to me.”

One of his proudest achievements is the formation of a housing consortium in Kitsap County. This coalition includes KCR, Kitsap Mental Health, Bremerton Housing Authority, and others, working together on over 35 housing projects. Tony's role involves securing funding and fostering partnerships, including with the Department of Commerce and the

Suquamish Tribe. He's especially proud of reestablishing trust with the tribe after previous leadership damaged the relationship.

CLI's impact on Tony extends beyond professional development. It reinforced the importance of advocacy and visibility in public office. He sees CLI as a pipeline for BIPOC leaders to enter influential roles and believes the network is vital for mutual support and collaboration. He remains engaged with CLI alumni and appreciates the safe space it provides for open dialogue and shared learning.

Tony's leadership philosophy centers on building trust and uniting communities rather than dividing them. His work in Honduras reflects this ethos, where he helped establish a coffee co-op, environmental education programs, and sustainable tourism initiatives. These projects have had lasting impacts, including producing agronomists and doctors from scholarship recipients.

Tony envisions CLI continuing to evolve and adapt, especially in the face of political challenges. He believes CLI must remain energetic and responsive, cultivating leaders who reflect the diversity of their communities. He emphasizes the importance of being seen and not fearing leadership, especially for younger generations.

I want to make sure I'm setting down firm pillars for those coming after me in seven generations, to have a better future for them to look forward to. - Duana

DUANA RICKS -JOHNSON



VCLI COHORT
2022-2023

Duana is an Indigenous woman from the Lakes Band of the Colville Tribes who grew up mostly in foster care in Washington. She is a disabled veteran and a survivor of domestic violence and trafficking. Her lived experiences have fueled her passion for housing justice, Indigenous rights, and community empowerment. She shares about her four children and one grandchild, “It’s important that I advocate, to leave behind a better place for my children and my grandchildren.”

Fleeing from her abuser led her and her children to become houseless numerous times, but they found a safe place and community in Vancouver. Duana’s decision to apply to the Community Leadership Institute was motivated by a strong desire to serve her community, particularly those who are facing similar challenges. Around that time, she was also appointed to a local board but felt she lacked the knowledge around certain protocols and language that govern boards.

She shares that CLI’s session on Robert’s Rules of Order equipped her with the tools and confidence to advocate effectively and influence formal decision-making spaces, emphasizing how this knowledge empowered her to avoid tokenization and assert her voice meaningfully. Through CLI, she also built a strong network of peers who continue to support each other in their advocacy work.

Since completing the program, Duana has served on numerous boards and commissions, including the Vancouver Housing Authority, the Vancouver Affordable Housing Board, Bridgeview’s Board of Directors, an organization that connects low-income families to essential resources like housing. Her advocacy extends to the Washington State Low Income Housing Alliance and Native Northwest Chamber. Duana has testified on multiple bills at both state and federal levels, including legislation supporting trafficking survivors and establishing a cold case unit for missing Indigenous

women. She credits CLI with helping her craft compelling narratives that resonate with lawmakers and the public.

For Duana, CLI gave her the confidence to share her story and advocate for change. This year she traveled to Washington, D.C. to lobby against federal budget cuts affecting veterans and low-income communities. She is now working to launch her vision called Saving Seven, a shelter for trafficking survivors and youth aging out of foster care, rooted in Indigenous values of intergenerational impact.

She shares the idea behind the name, “In Native culture, we see the things we do cause ripple effects, and we see those effects in seven generations. I want to make sure I’m setting down firm pillars for those coming after me in seven generations, to have a better future for them to look forward to.”



VCLC COHORT
2022-2023

HEATHER SHEPPARD

*CLI helped me fill in a lot of
blanks, especially how things work
systemically. -Heather*

Heather grew up in a small conservative town in rural Oregon, an upbringing that shaped the trajectory of her life. “I was raised by my single mom, and we were very poor,” she says. Being a mixed-race woman in a predominantly white community, Heather struggled with her identity and belonging. The trauma she faced growing up led to severe mental health and substance abuse issues and incarceration. These experiences inspired her to eventually become a social worker and dedicate her life to advocating for systemic change.

Heather joined the first Community Leadership Institute cohort in Vancouver in 2022, an experience she described as transformative. Encouraged by a mentor, she joined to build confidence and deepen her understanding of policy and advocacy, but being in the program did more than just that. CLI helped her embrace her multi-racial identity and recognize her place in leadership spaces. “I definitely have benefited from the privileges of being white and having a white family, but I never felt like I fit in either space. Everyone in my cohort was so welcoming and reassuring.”

She was particularly impacted by sessions on community development and housing policy, which revealed the hidden complexities of zoning laws and their role in perpetuating inequality. It opened her eyes to the intricacies of affordable housing, funding mechanisms, and the power of local government decisions. She described it as a moment of “seeing behind the curtain,” realizing how much influence seemingly mundane policies have on people’s lives.

Heather has since served on several boards and commissions, including as Board Secretary for Proud Ground, a community land trust supporting first-time homeownership for BIPOC and low-income families. She is also part of a community advisory team with the Washington State Department of Commerce, influencing housing policy. These roles have taught her the significant power and authority

boards hold, and the importance of understanding formal governance structures like Robert’s Rules of Order, something she credits VCLI for preparing her to navigate.

Heather currently works as the Equity and Collaborative Impact Manager at Southwest Washington Accountable Community of Health (SWACH). Her advocacy work includes organizing community members to testify in Olympia for rent stabilization and housing justice. She emphasizes the importance of reducing barriers for community members, like transportation and childcare, to ensure diverse voices are heard in policymaking. The CLI network has been instrumental in this work, providing a strong support system and opportunities to connect and collaborate. “We stick together when we do this work. We all come together to help each other.”

Heather remains deeply engaged with the VCLI community, recruiting alumni for committees and advocacy efforts. She values the network’s shared mission and mutual support, which has extended to national advocacy, including lobbying in Washington, D.C. Reflecting on her leadership journey, Heather is most proud of empowering her community to advocate for themselves. She sees her role as a facilitator, helping others access the tools and spaces they need to create change.

TERRELL BERRY



VCLI COHORT
2022-2023

I've always been one of the people that's more behind the scenes, just doing the work, but I wanted to figure out ways that I can excel as a leader in my community. - Terrell

Originally from Long Beach, California, Terrell has spent the past decade in the Pacific Northwest as a social worker advocating for underserved communities. He currently serves as the Chief Impact Officer leading the Family Homelessness Initiative at the Council for the Homeless in Clark County.

Terrell's decision to join Community Leadership Institute (CLI) was inspired by his connection with Siobhana McEwen, a CLI alum and work colleague, and his desire to grow as a community leader. Terrell saw CLI as an opportunity to step into visible leadership roles. "I've always been one of the people that's more behind the scenes, just doing the work, but I wanted to figure out ways that I can excel as a leader in my community."

He was particularly drawn to how the program centers BIPOC leadership, which contrasted with the traditional predominantly white, male leadership training models he had encountered. His cohort was composed mostly of queer women of color, which offered diverse perspectives that enriched his understanding of leadership.

As a Black professional in Clark County, Terrell sought BIPOC spaces who had similar values. CLI helped him access spaces previously closed to him and provided a supportive network that empowered his growth. He was surprised by the program's breadth, covering topics like environmental justice, housing, and transportation, which broadened his interests and knowledge.

One of the most memorable sessions for Terrell was on the history of racism in Clark County and the Pacific Northwest. It deepened his understanding of the region's racial dynamics and helped him contextualize the passive-aggressive racism he often encountered. This session shifted his perspective and strengthened his resolve to advocate for equity.

Since graduating, Terrell has served on several boards and committees, including

community grants committee, the Clark County Volunteer Lawyers Program, and the Pawsitive Ripples Effect Project—a nonprofit blending youth development with animal rescue and nature-based healing. These roles align with his values and allow him to support underserved populations through legal aid, philanthropy, and mental health alternatives.

CLI's leadership training equipped Terrell with tools like power mapping, which he applied in advocacy efforts such as rent stabilization in Clark County, sharing information and mobilizing support. He credits CLI with helping him navigate difficult conversations and understand the importance of boundaries and collaboration.

Despite limited capacity due to his responsibilities as a foster parent, Terrell remains engaged with the CLI network through speaking at panels, personal connections, social media. He values the authenticity and adaptability of CLI alumni, who often defy traditional leadership norms and bring lived experience to their roles.

Terrell is most proud of his growth in public speaking, having developed a personal style that blends humor and cultural references. Terrell envisions CLI expanding statewide and even internationally, becoming a recognized institution for cultivating leaders of color.



VCLI COHORT
2022-2023

NICKEIA HUNTER

CL helped me understand that not only do I have a purpose, but there is a whole group of people willing to help me fight. - Nickeia

Nickeia is a deeply committed activist and community leader who balances her professional role as a business agent for the Western States Regional Council of Carpenters with extensive advocacy work. She serves on numerous boards and commissions, including the ACLU of Washington, the Clark County Justice Group, and the Washington Coalition for Police Accountability. She is also the co-founder of the Racial Justice & Police Misconduct Clinic (RJPMC), which supports families impacted by police violence.

Nickeia joined the CLI program in Vancouver in 2022, seeking to strengthen her public speaking skills, build confidence, and become more comfortable sharing her story, particularly about her brother who was killed by police. “I wanted to push myself to talk more in spaces and places about my brother without crying. Not that it’s bad, I just don’t like crying.”

Although she initially questioned whether she belonged in the program given her already extensive leadership experience on boards and commissions, she soon realized that CLI offered valuable growth opportunities for individuals at all levels. The program helped her navigate uncomfortable spaces, find her voice, and build confidence in advocating for her community.

One of the most impactful aspects of CLI for Nickeia was the sense of community and support it fostered. She highlighted the importance of networking and the camaraderie among participants, which extended beyond the program through ongoing mentorship, events, and collaborative opportunities in advocacy. She was particularly inspired by a session that introduced her to “Crush Your Goals” cards, a deck of inspirational quotes that encourage people to achieve their goals. “I took a card, and it was the day that I needed that message. I really liked that, so now I got 3 decks myself, and I hand them out to folks in my work.”

Nickeia emphasized that CLI helped her understand the importance of collective action and mutual support, even when individuals have different missions. She believes that progress is made in small, meaningful steps—what she calls “scoots and skips”—and that building community is essential to achieving systemic change. “I’m a carpenter and with carpenters, everything is unified. It takes each person to do their part to build a whole. I look at life like that, and CLI helped me understand that not only do I have a purpose, but there is a whole group of people willing to help me fight.”

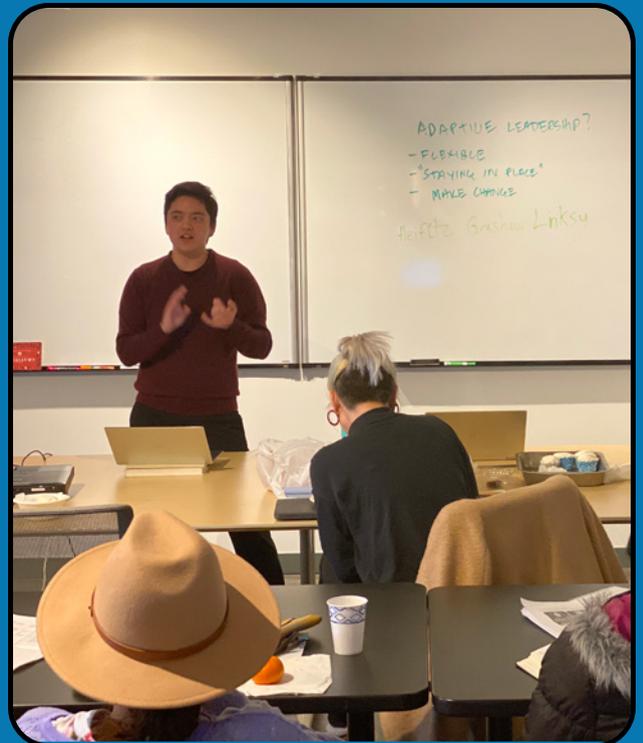
Her advocacy is deeply personal, rooted in the trauma of losing her brother and the desire to ensure justice for others. She has been instrumental in policy reform, including contributing to the passage of the first fourteen police misconduct bills in 2021. While much of her policy work predates CLI, the program reinforced her belief in her purpose and provided tools to continue her work more effectively.



The 2023-2024 cohort pose with facilitators Aretha Basu, Sage's Political Director, and Jamie Stroble of Noio Pathways.



Giulia Pasciuto of Seattle EDI and Howard Greenwich, Sage's Research Director facilitate a session on Land Use and Planning.



Fellows present about themselves during a "Knowing Me, Knowing You" session.



The 2021-2022 cohort at their outdoor graduation.

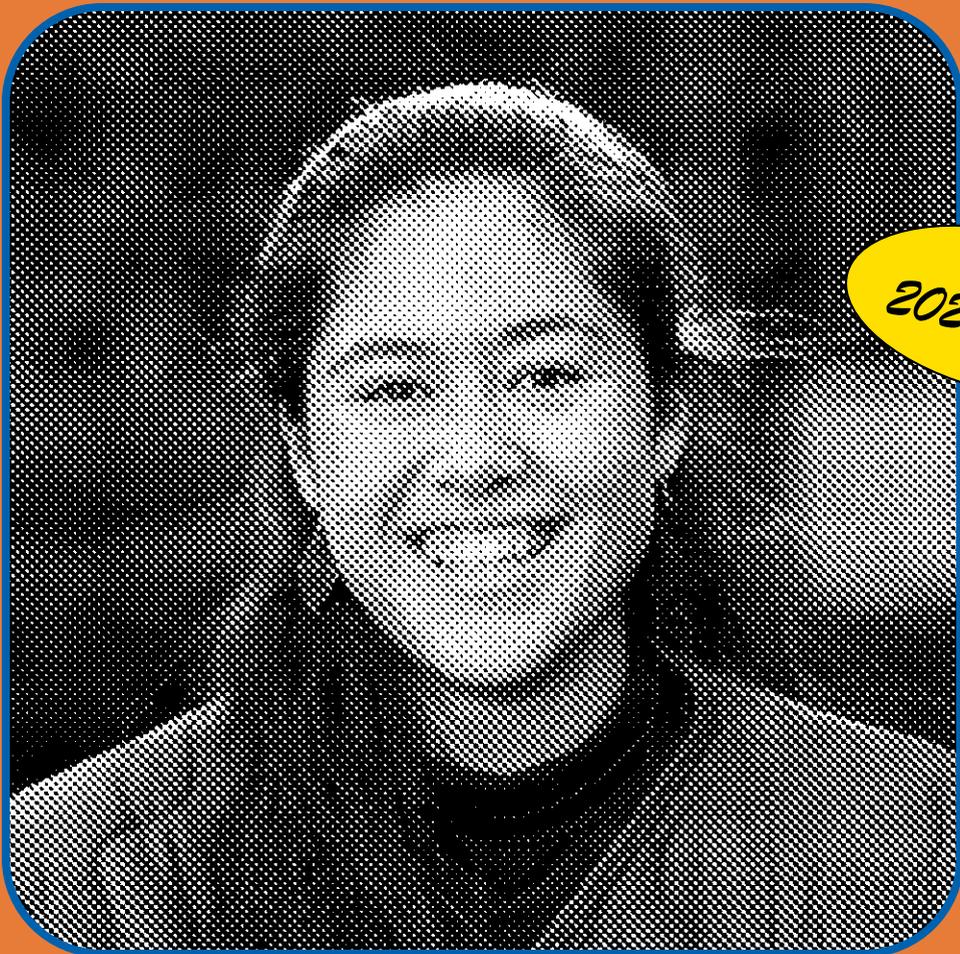


Our 2021-2022 cohort celebrate their graduation with food and a special gift, a Kente sash.

CLI makes creating meaningful change feel a lot more feasible. I was surprised by how expansive the network is and how supportive everyone is.

- Tatiana

TATIANA BROWN



COHORT
2022-2023

Originally from Virginia, Tatiana moved to Seattle in 2021 to pursue concurrent master's degrees in public health and public administration at the University of Washington. Her academic focus on health systems, environmental policy, and population health laid the foundation for her advocacy work.

Tatiana's involvement with CLI was sparked by a call from Francis, a former colleague at UW and current facilitator of the CLI program, who initially asked her to share the fellowship with her network. Intrigued by its values and community-centered approach, she applied and joined alongside two friends. Despite a demanding schedule—including her practicum, thesis, and leadership roles in the community—Tatiana made time for CLI, drawn by the opportunity to build community with like-minded leaders and deepen her skills in collaborative governance.

One of the most impactful CLI sessions for Tatiana was on climate justice, led by Jamie Stroble and Debolina Banerjee. It provided her with foundational knowledge and validated her lived experiences and community-based expertise. This session also catalyzed her involvement with the Washington State Environmental Justice Council, where she was appointed as the youth representative and later became co-chair.

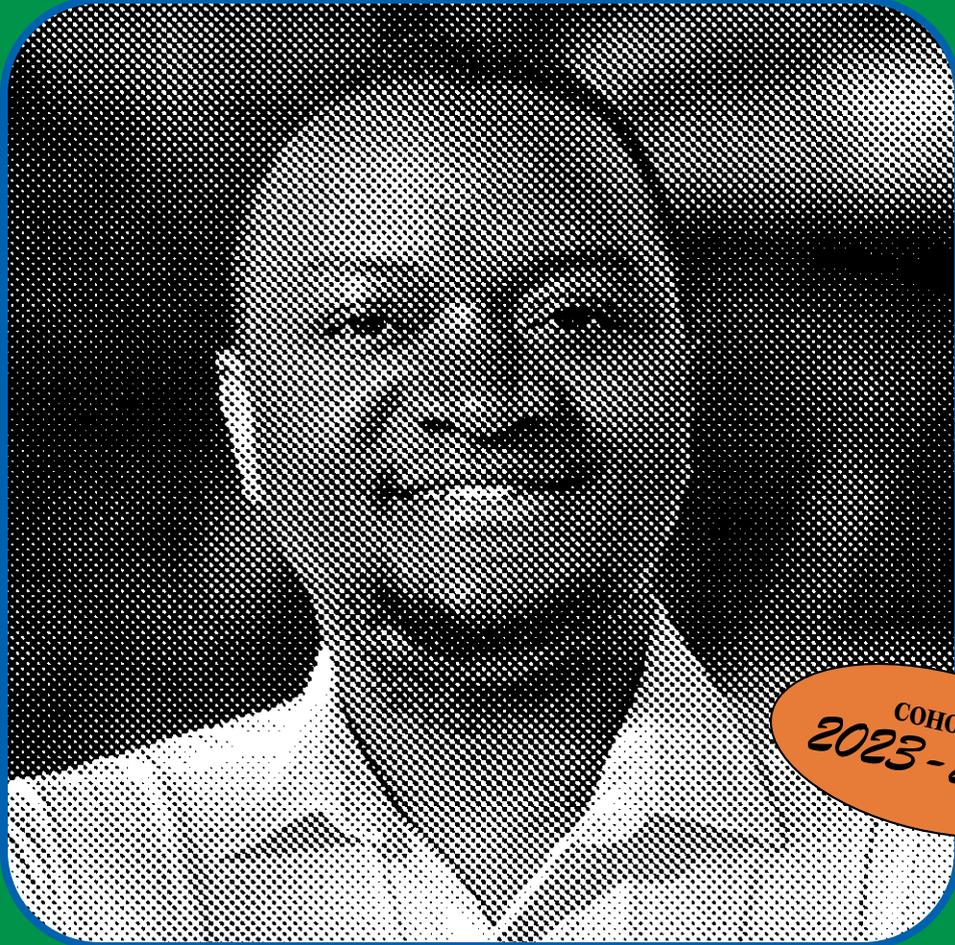
Tatiana's work on the Council involves advising state agencies on implementing the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act, a law passed in 2021 that aims to address environmental justice issues across the state. She also advocates for budget priorities and responds to community concerns, such as the lack of clean drinking water in Toppenish. Tatiana spoke candidly about the emotional weight of this work, describing moments of frustration and disillusionment, especially when community needs were met with bureaucratic inertia or budget cuts. Yet, she emphasized that CLI offered her hope and resilience. "CLI makes creating meaningful change feel a lot more

feasible. I was surprised by how expansive the network is and how supportive everyone is."

CLI gave Tatiana access to influential networks and bolstered her confidence in leadership. Being in CLI's supportive spaces helped her embrace her full identity—including her mixed-race background and experiences with privilege and marginalization. "CLI helped me come to terms with those aspects of my story, owning all aspects of myself and understanding that I am here not for myself, but for other people."

She reflected on the importance of storytelling and vulnerability in justice work and has leaned into writing, producing a thesis on deep democracy and a book that blends poetry and art to explore grief, resilience, and community care. Her work challenges dominant narratives and emphasizes the need for governance that is rooted in the lived experiences of marginalized communities.

Since graduating from CLI, Tatiana has remained actively engaged with the network. She has spoken at cohort events, attended alumni mixers, and collaborated with CLI members across various initiatives. Tatiana described CLI's impact on her life in one word: "profoundly." The program helped her navigate complex questions about power, representation, and authenticity, and it continues to shape her leadership journey in transformative ways.



COHORT
2023-2024

MPIIMA MUGAMBE

The CLLI fellowship was a really great way to not only network but build a little bit more technical understanding of land use policy, zoning, and what an equitable development strategy looks like - Mpiima

Mpiima is a social worker who currently serves as a clinical supervisor with the Downtown Emergency Service Center's Mobile Crisis Team. He's actively involved with Immigrant Guide, a non-profit organization that supports immigrant families in Washington State and contributes to projects in Uganda, including a theater initiative addressing gender-based violence.

He first learned about the Community Leadership Institute through a virtual event during the pandemic. To him, the actions of the current presidential administration along with the social uprisings taking place felt like a wake-up call for him to step up. "It made me think twice about my role in the community, like an invitation to step up into public service. I needed to be on those tables where decisions are made." He saw the CLI as a great space for BIPOC individuals interested in civic engagement and leadership.

One of the most impactful aspects of the CLI program for Mpiima was learning about housing and transportation inequities, and how policies often favor investors while leaving taxpayers and vulnerable populations at a disadvantage. He learned how to critically look at how policies and developments are implemented, "For example, we just had a light rail station built. How was the money raised? Who ultimately benefits? It was a surprise to learn so deeply about these everyday aspects, but it also motivated me."

Mpiima is actively working to establish the African Diaspora Commission for the State of Washington, a collaboration he felt CLI greatly prepared him for. The commission aims to represent African immigrants and diaspora communities at the state level, promote business opportunities, and ensure their voices are heard in policymaking. His motivation stems from the lack of representation and the harmful narratives often directed at immigrants. "Hearing all this narrative against immigrants, we need our voices to be heard, and one of the ways is to serve on a commission at the State level. That way we can directly advise and give

our opinions to the Governor's office for policies that will benefit our immigrant communities."

He also credits CLI with equipping him with the tools and confidence to engage in policy advocacy, including a recent trip to Washington, D.C., where he and his team lobbied for increased funding for HIV/AIDS research and harm reduction programs. He emphasized the importance of housing and wraparound services in reducing HIV transmission rates. CLI's training in advocacy, policy analysis, and public speaking played a crucial role in his effectiveness during these engagements. Previously, he contributed to national policy efforts, including work with the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs and advocacy for Senate Resolution 807, which condemned human rights abuses in Uganda.

Mpiima contemplates on leadership journey and what he's most proud of: "I'm most proud of my ability to reflect. Any leader who reflects is able to lead with humility because they are able to look back on the steps they've taken and make corrections without fear. I've been able to identify my weaknesses through reflection, my limitations and strengths. To be able to acknowledge them and make changes."

PAUL PORTER



I'm a person that doesn't believe in pride...I'm happy to just be in a space and have the ability to contribute to my community and be a voice and a face for others while holding the door as long as I can for more folks to come through. - Paul

Born in Portland, Paul moved to Vancouver, WA when he was five years old and has lived there ever since. Currently serving as the Associate Planner of Equitable Development for the City of Vancouver, Paul also holds roles on the boards of the NAACP Vancouver and The Foundation, a local nonprofit focused on reducing recidivism and dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. His work spans youth mentorship, equity advocacy, and leadership development, including his advisory role for the Black Student Union at Evergreen High School.

Paul's decision to join the Community Leadership Institute was inspired by a desire for mentorship and community connection, particularly among peers of similar age and background. "It's good to be able to talk to somebody and get that affirmation that, hey, you're not in this alone, and other people are experiencing this." Encouraged by his mentor, Paul found CLI to be the perfect fit for his growth. He emphasized the importance of mentorship in affirming experiences and navigating professional spaces where BIPOC individuals are often underrepresented.

One of the most impactful sessions for Paul was a workshop on power mapping, which helped him strategize and conceptualize diverse approaches to problem-solving. He appreciated the program's emphasis on serving on boards and commissions, reinforcing his commitment to public service and leadership. His transition from operations director to board member at The Foundation and his long-standing aspiration to be a public-facing figure for the NAACP were both strengthened by CLI's teachings.

Paul also discussed his equity work with Evergreen Public Schools, where he runs workshops through his consulting firm to empower students to advocate for themselves authentically. These workshops focus on helping students articulate their experiences without compromising their identity, especially in spaces where they may feel the need to code-switch.

A standout advocacy moment for Paul was organizing students and families to speak on a school board resolution on immigration and deportation. With support from CLI connections and community organizers, they successfully influenced the school board to work with affected families and students to revise the resolution. This effort highlighted the power of collective voice and the importance of representation in policymaking.

Paul continues to stay engaged with the CLI network, encouraging others to join and contributing to its growth. He values the alignment of goals among CLI alumni and the ongoing support they offer each other. For Paul, CLI has provided him with a trusted network for mentorship, collaboration, and growth.

Paul expressed gratitude when reflecting on his leadership journey, recognizing his role in holding doors open for others. He advises future CLI participants to lean into vulnerability, acknowledging it as a strength, and to be open to both learning and teaching. Paul envisions CLI evolving into a rich, intergenerational network of leaders sharing their stories and mentoring others, creating a lasting impact across Washington and beyond.

VCLI COHORT
2023-2024



TASHA SLATER

There's like a little bit of fear of maybe like getting lost in the bureaucracy, and this was a really good opportunity to remind myself what my goals are, what my values are within community. - Tasha

Tasha is a dedicated public servant working in affordable housing for the City of Vancouver. In her role, she manages federal and local funds for nonprofit organizations and advocates for equitable distribution of resources, particularly to historically underserved communities. Her commitment to equity extends beyond her role. She co-founded a BIPOC Employee Resource Group and co-chairs the DEI team within her department, aiming to improve retention and hiring practices for staff of color in local government.

Tasha worked in the non-profit sector for a decade before starting a career in government. Her motivation to join the Vancouver Community Leadership Institute stemmed from a desire to stay grounded in her values during the transition from nonprofit work to public service and make systemic changes within her local government. “There’s like a little bit of fear of maybe like getting lost in the bureaucracy, and this was a really good opportunity to remind myself what my goals are, what my values are within community.” The program offered her a space to reconnect with community, build relationships, and reaffirm her leadership goals.

One of the most rewarding aspects of CLI for Tasha was the depth of relationships formed within and outside her cohort. Despite limited session times, participants were able to be vulnerable and build trust quickly. A particular session that stood out for her was led by Alishia Topper, Clark County’s Treasurer, who emphasized the importance of understanding government finances and advocating for flexible, community-centered funding—an insight that continues to influence Tasha’s work.

Since graduating, Tasha has taken on several leadership roles. She joined the Community Advisory Committee and Housing Subcommittee in Washougal, where she lives, to influence local housing policy and promote diversity. She also serves as Treasurer for the Northwest Association of Community Development Managers, serves as a member of Southwest Washington Equity Coalition (which partners with Sage Leaders to facilitate the CLI program in Vancouver), and participates in

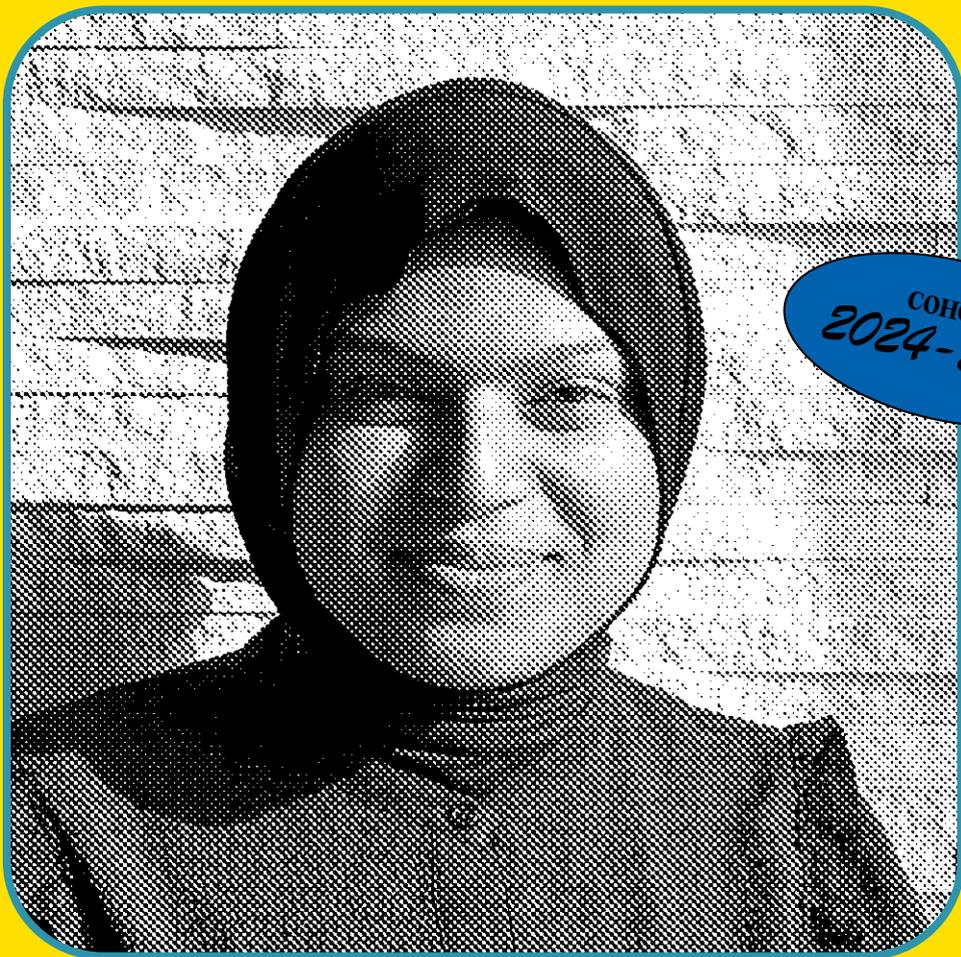
committees at Southwest Washington Accountable Community of Health (SWACH), a local nonprofit that focuses on health equity and policy.

CLI empowered Tasha to step into spaces she previously felt unqualified for, challenging the notion that expertise or titles are prerequisites for leadership. She now embraces opportunities with confidence, including speaking engagements and panel discussions, and advocates for inclusive hiring and anti-racist practices within her department. Her leadership has prompted her department’s leadership team to engage in anti-racist learning, demonstrating the ripple effect of her advocacy.

Tasha remains engaged with the CLI network through a cohort group chat and frequent interactions within the small community of Vancouver. She values the sense of belonging and sees CLI as a catalyst for uplifting BIPOC voices. “CLI kind of gave me an obligation to give back. I want to support and help build up younger BIPOC people.” She envisions CLI becoming a well-known leadership pipeline, with alumni in influential roles across Vancouver and Clark County, especially in rural areas.

Though she doesn’t see herself running for office, Tasha is passionate about supporting CLI alumni who do. Her experience in government has made her more aware of the challenges within political systems, but also more committed to fostering change from within.

DAANIYA IYAZ



COHORT
2024-2025

This entire experience has been really eye-opening for me... it's step one. There's so much more for me to do and learn. - Daaniya

Daaniya Iyaz was born in South India but has been living in King County in Washington for most of her life. As the Climate Preparedness Project Manager in the King County Executive Climate Office, Daaniya's professional focus is on helping communities prepare for climate impacts, particularly extreme heat. Her personal passion lies in addressing the disproportionate effects of climate change on marginalized communities and advocating for environmental justice.

Daaniya's motivation to join the Community Leadership Institute stemmed from a desire to bridge the gap between institutional planning and tangible community impact. She expressed frustration with how a lot of academic and professional efforts often fail to reach the most affected populations. "What I really wanted to learn more about is how, as a community member, how can we step up? How can we affect change? But also, how can we build bridges and build connections within other community members?" Living in Duvall for the past few years, which is a predominantly white and rural area, further fueled her interest in learning how to create inclusive opportunities and build community infrastructure in underrepresented spaces.

Throughout the program, Daaniya gained foundational skills in community organizing, advocacy, and strategic planning. She was particularly impacted by sessions on power mapping and municipal budgeting, which revealed the complexity and intentional opacity of local governance. These sessions helped her see organizing as a strategic, learnable skill rather than what she previously thought of as a purely emotional or reactive process.

One of the most memorable aspects of CLI for Daaniya was the sense of solidarity and vulnerability among her cohort. She recalled a climate justice panel where international impacts were discussed, resonating with her own experiences and those of her community. The empathy and humility of the panelists left a lasting impression which reinforced for her the importance of shared narratives and collective action.

Daaniya also spoke about her involvement in advocacy efforts, such as opposing Initiative 2117, which threatened to overturn Washington's Climate Commitment Act. CLI equipped her with tools to communicate effectively, navigate her dual role as a government employee and community advocate, and engage in strategic storytelling. She also participated in local organizing around Palestine, applying CLI's lessons to mobilize her community and influence policy.

Daaniya is exploring opportunities to serve on boards and commissions, particularly those focused on planning and civil rights. She values CLI's mentorship program and hopes to be paired with local leaders whose expertise she admires. She envisions CLI evolving into a vibrant, collaborative space where communities can bring challenges, priorities and receive support from a network of skilled and empathetic individuals.

Ultimately, Daaniya sees CLI as a source of hope—a place where people of color can reclaim their narratives, build resilience, and lead change. "I think we're feeling a lot of angst and fear in this current administration, but seeing examples from community, and the work CLI has uplifted, I think it gives a lot more hope that you know people have done this before. We'll get through it again. But it's going to be a lot of hard work to get there." Though she feels like she's just beginning her journey, Daaniya's experience with CLI has laid a strong foundation for impactful leadership rooted in justice, empathy, and strategic action.

When you give people of color the opportunity to be great, they will not only take it, but they will also do so much with it. -Favian



FAVIAN MARES

Favian is a passionate advocate for educational equity and social justice. He currently works as a Latino and Hispanic Admissions Counselor at the University of Washington, with a focus on recruiting and engaging students from Eastern and Central Washington.

Originally from the Yakima Valley, which is a predominantly Latino agricultural community, Favian brings his lived experiences into every facet of his work. He serves as a bilingual volunteer for Legal Counsel for Youth and Children (LCYC) and runs a program called FEEDBACK through the UW, which provides educational workshops and mentorship for young students in underserved communities in rural Washington.

Favian joined the Community Leadership Institute (CLI) in 2024, inspired by a desire to root himself in community and gain tools for grassroots advocacy. He was drawn to the program's holistic approach, which he described as not just offering a seat at the table but rebuilding the table to reflect all voices equitably. At the time, he was living in Yakima and was motivated by the stark contrast in access to resources between urban and rural areas, particularly in addressing food deserts.

He recalls a particularly memorable session from the program on redlining and city planning that opened his eyes to the systemic roots of inequality in housing and urban development, deepening his understanding of how historical policies continue to shape communities today. This inspired him to apply for a seat at the Seattle Planning Commission, drawn by their focus on using an equity lens on making recommendations to city officials around development. This aligns with his long-term

goal of running for public office, a path he is preparing for through starting law school at Seattle University with a full-ride scholarship this year.

For Favian, CLI gave him not only the tools to articulate the injustices he sees but the resources to navigate them and propose solutions. The program instilled in him the confidence to see himself as a leader in governance, despite not coming from a politically connected background. "Public service is not something that's typical in my community, especially now, finding belonging within a country that doesn't seem to want us here. Being in CLI, in a space that tells you that you belong here and we need you in these positions, allows me to have that confidence."

Favian remains actively engaged with the CLI network through group chats, alumni events, and mentorship connections, highlighting a strong sense of community and mutual support. "My fear was that once the program ends, the momentum also ends. But the network does such a good job in connecting everyone and getting people involved."

Favian envisions CLI expanding statewide, particularly into rural areas like Yakima, so that leadership development for people of color is accessible without requiring relocation.

GUADALUPE HURTADO



COHORT
2024-2025

I wanted to affect change in my community, but I needed the resources to really be able to take that next step forward. - Guadalupe

Guadalupe “Lupe” Hurtado currently works at Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC), a nonprofit that supports people experiencing homelessness and mental health or substance use challenges. With over six years in social services and grassroots community work, Lupe’s dedication stems from a deep desire to uplift the most vulnerable and create systemic change.

Lupe joined the Community Leadership Institute (CLI) to gain the tools, language, and network necessary to transform her lived experience into leadership. “I wanted to affect change in my community, but I needed the resources to really be able to take that next step forward.” Without a traditional educational background, she sought skills to navigate systems and advocate effectively. Particularly as a woman of color, she often felt unheard and overlooked and saw CLI as a way to open doors professionally while also finding community.

Lupe reflected on the unexpected sense of belonging she found in the program. She was deeply moved by the shared experiences and resilience of her cohort, which fostered a powerful sense of solidarity and support. Memorable sessions included storytelling, which helped her reframe vulnerability as strength, and climate change, which expanded her understanding of environmental justice. She also valued learning about power dynamics and how to leverage networks to create meaningful change.

At the time of the interview, Lupe shared that she is actively applying to the Federal Way Human Services Commission, aiming to ensure underrepresented voices are heard in public health and policy decisions. She also hopes to rejoin the Tacoma-Pierce County Anti-Stigma Task Force, where she previously educated medical students on the harms of stigma in healthcare. Her advocacy work includes expanding treatment services, increasing access to affordable housing, and promoting harm reduction strategies. CLI equipped her with the skills to organize messages and

engage policymakers staying grounded in community values.

Post-graduation, Lupe remains engaged with the CLI network through events, retreats, and social media. “The relationships that I’ve made at CLI continue to grow. It’s an important family to be a part of.” She’s built meaningful relationships with fellows, including attending advocacy events related to autism, which personally resonated due to her son’s diagnosis. The compassion and drive within the CLI community inspire her to stay connected and continue growing.

Lupe is proud of stepping out of her comfort zone and embracing new experiences, with CLI helping her bridge the gap between internal motivation and actionable leadership. She now feels empowered to pursue leadership roles within her career and engage with local boards—opportunities she previously thought were out of reach. The program also helped her overcome self-doubt and embrace vulnerability as a source of strength and authenticity. She emphasizes that leadership is rooted in personal stories and values, not traditional credentials.

Lupe envisions CLI expanding statewide and nationally, continuing to center the voices of those most impacted by injustice. She hopes CLI will reach younger audiences through school outreach, providing early access to leadership development and equity-driven education.

RASHAN WILLIAMS



VCL COHORT
2024-2025

To see some of the people in the community who supported me as a youth... to be these to see what we're doing for the next generation... I felt proud in that moment. - Rashan

Rashan grew up in Vancouver, WA and is now a professional youth mentor who dedicates his work to supporting and uplifting young people, particularly those facing significant systemic barriers. His mentorship spans schools, juvenile detention centers, and after-school programs. During this interview, he shared that he was weeks away from the grand opening of Shifted Theory, his own youth mentoring organization and after-school program that aims to break down barriers, instill confidence, and pave the way for a future where every at-risk youth can thrive and contribute meaningfully to society.

Rashan's motivation to join the Community Leadership Institute was driven by a desire to deepen his leadership skills and expand his network, having recently returned to the Vancouver area after years away. One of the most surprising and rewarding aspects of the program for him was the diversity and openness of his cohort, getting the opportunity to learn from people across varied sectors like education, government, and non-profit work. A particularly memorable session from the program focused on redlining and urban development, which sparked his interest in real estate and community ownership. This session underscored the importance of land, legacy, and economic empowerment, inspiring him to educate others in his community about these issues.

He currently serves on several boards, including youth violence prevention advisory committees and as the Community Engagement Chair for the Vancouver NAACP. His involvement in these spaces stems from a desire to create solutions for youth violence and to provide tangible support through events like backpack drives, food giveaways, and free haircuts. He emphasizes the importance of collaboration and interdependence, believing that collective efforts yield greater impact than isolated ones.

CLI has also empowered Rashan to engage in policy advocacy. This year, he participated in trips to Olympia, WA, where he learned how to communicate with state lawmakers and

advocate for juvenile justice reform. The program also provided him with organizational tools, strategic connections, and a broader understanding of leadership. He values the relationships formed through the program and plans to stay engaged by supporting fellow alumni in their advocacy work.

Rashan's leadership is deeply rooted in lived experience. Growing up with an incarcerated father and witnessing the disparity of opportunities faced by his peers, he became passionate about creating equitable opportunities for youth. His work is driven by a belief in the power of exposure, mentorship, and dreaming big. He sees our youth as visionaries and strives to nurture their potential. When asked what he has learned from working with youth, he shares, "Patience to live in the moment. We just have one life, and for some of us, we had to get out of our childhoods sooner, to become an adult much earlier. They taught me how to engage with that youthful self and to have fun."

I think CLI really made me more aware of how little I know, which is great. Because every single month they bring in a speaker who specializes in something different - one time it was a union leader, another a transportation expert, the other time a city planner. And they're part of my network now, so it's good to know that I can reach out to these people individually. -Eduardo



VCLI COHORT
2024-2025

**EDUARDO
TORRES**

Born in Mexico City and raised in the U.S. from a young age, Eduardo grew up in a culturally diverse complex that resided many immigrants and refugees. As a visual learner, Eduardo struggled in traditional school settings and eventually dropped out. He entered the trades, built his own company, and found success but not fulfillment.

Seeking more meaningful work, he transitioned into the nonprofit sector, spending seven years at a federal refugee shelter. After returning to Vancouver, WA, he sought to find out what his community needed. The answer: support for immigrant families. In response, he co-founded a sports program throughout elementary schools in Vancouver during the COVID-19 pandemic and later launched a Latino consulting firm to address the lack of culturally competent services in local government.

Eduardo currently serves as Vice President of Southwest Washington League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), where he focuses on immigrant rights and community empowerment. His work includes organizing rallies, advocating for policy change, and managing committees focused on civil rights, youth, and community affairs. He also sits on several boards and commissions, including the Climate Advocacy Task Force and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) committee, where he helps allocate funds to nonprofits and small businesses.

Eduardo joined the Community Leadership Institute (CLI) to connect with like-minded peers and deepen his leadership skills. Inspired by friends in previous cohorts, he was drawn to the program's accessibility and focus on local issues. Unlike other leadership programs that were expensive or out of state, CLI offered a space for Eduardo to engage in meaningful conversations about leadership, policy, and community development.

Despite his initial skepticism—stemming from a dislike of school and structured workshops—Eduardo found CLI surprisingly enjoyable. He appreciated the interactive environment, the intentional selection of presenters, and the opportunity to ask questions and engage deeply with the material. One of his favorite sessions was “Knowing Me, Knowing You,” which allowed cohort members to be vulnerable, learn about each other, their work and passions in a new light.

Mentorship is a key part of Eduardo's leadership philosophy. He shares that he always looks for 3 types of mentors: someone older, someone younger, and someone who is the same age. He struggled to find the latter. Within the program, he found like-minded peers with whom he could talk about city planning and urban growth. He now maintains regular contact with about seven mentors.

Eduardo is proud of his ability to share what he learns with others. He frequently encourages friends and community members to join boards, commissions, and leadership programs. CLI has made him more aware of how much there is to learn and has inspired him to continue growing and connecting with others



Alumni enjoy bowling together.



Alumni gather for brunch and laughs.



2023-2024 VCLI fellows talk through their ideas during a workshop about Power Mapping.



Our 2023-2024 cohort engage in a session on Equitable Land Use and Planning.



2022-2023 VCLI cohort group discussion.



Sage, SWEC, and Vancouver community leaders enjoy dinner together.



Siobhana McEwen, Vancouver City Councilmember Diana Perez, and Eric at the VCLI graduation.



2022-2023 VCLI fellows speak at graduation.

SHARE YOUR STORY, EMBRACE YOUR CULTURE AND EXPERIENCES, AND USE CLI AS A PLATFORM TO UPLIFT YOUR COMMUNITY. - ABDI YUSSUF

Be present, welcome hard discussions, and commit to self-reflection. - Paul Porter



Say yes to the opportunity even if you feel underqualified; the experience will change your trajectory. - Barbara Tisi

WORDS OF

Stay curious and action-oriented. Let CLI guide you to apply your leadership in the real world. - Tiffany Chan

Be open to new perspectives, trust the process, and use CLI to build lasting community institutions. - Thanh Nguyen

Invest in yourself and allow CLI to help you grow your confidence and connections. - Nickeia Hunter



Think beyond your current role, invest in relationships, and focus on community empowerment over personal advancement.
- Julio Sanchez

Don't let lack of formal education stop you. Come with clear goals and know your story has power.-
Guadalupe Hurtado

Be mindful of your limits. Learn to say no and protect your energy while growing as a leader. - Terrell Berry

Wisdom

from our fellows to future leaders

Participate fully even if your schedule is tight. The experience and network are worth it.
- Heather Sheppard

What advice do you want to share?



Shout-outs from our partners and funders

Our founder, funders, and facilitators
reflect on the impact and power of CLI

The CLI program is a launchpad for community-rooted leadership. I've seen alumni step into powerful roles on boards and commissions, bringing lived experience and accountability into spaces that often lack both. CLI doesn't just build leaders, it builds systems change from the inside out.

Ubax Gardheere, CLI Founder

As a climate justice strategist and educator, I'm grateful that the CLI program continues to build our community power year after year. CLI leaders develop the skills and knowledge to advocate for justice and equity across our local governments in ways that center the perspectives and leadership of those most impacted.

Jamie Stroble, Noio Pathways

The Community Leadership Institute aligns well with Inatai's mission to "transform the balance of power to ensure equity and racial justice across Washington and beyond." Each cohort of BIPOC leaders helps us all get closer to that transformation.

Rubén Peralta, Inatai Foundation

Progress Alliance is proud to support Sage's Community Leadership Institute because we believe that lasting change starts with community-rooted leadership. In order to build a truly representative and equitable democracy, we must intentionally invest in developing and uplifting BIPOC leaders at every level of government. CLI creates opportunities for emerging leaders to gain the skills, knowledge, and networks they need to shape policies and systems that reflect the values and lived experiences of their communities. Building the bench with leaders in our movement is more important than ever. We see many of our First Mile candidates gone through the CLI program. Not only is this a testament to the quality of the program, but the work is essential to advancing racial, economic, and environmental justice in our region; and we're thrilled to uplift Sage Leaders in growing the next generation of leaders.

*Margot Spindola
Program and Engagement Manager
Progress Alliance*

I have returned year after year to CLI to workshop Labor Justice Fundamentals because of the energy and joy the cohorts brings to the movement! We are all connected as workers, and I am grateful to have one piece in building a shared analysis with emerging leaders of color.

Eunice How, Unite Here Local 8

Expand CLI into rural and underserved areas across the state, building a statewide network of BIPOC leaders committed to community-centered leadership.

- Siobhara McEwen

Integrate CLI into broader organizing strategies, with more political education and campaigns for collective action. - Grace Chai

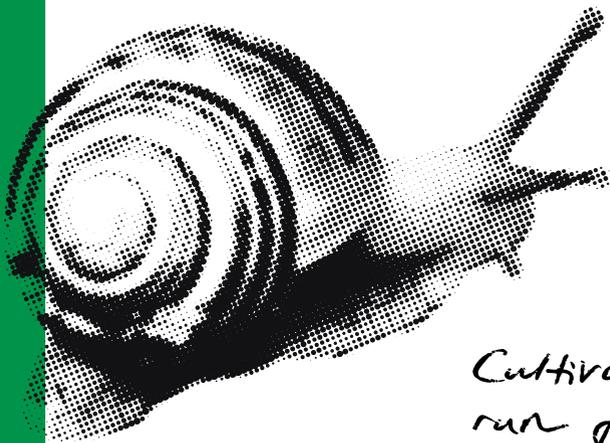
Expand CLI nationally to develop BIPOC leaders and build an interconnected community of changemakers. - Heather Sheppard

FUTURE

Reach agricultural and underserved communities to amplify migrant and immigrant voices. - Nichelle Curtis-McQueen

Build CLI as a hub for collaborative community problem-solving, driven by solidarity and empowerment. - Daaniya Iyar

Cultivate community leaders who can run for office and shape policy, empowering grassroots political change. - Julio Sanchez





Run multiple CLI cohorts at once, include immersive community visits, and enhance alumni engagement through events and showcases.
-Rebecca Zapata

Grow the program to include younger leaders like recent grads and high schoolers, emphasizing collaboration and empowerment to better address community needs. - Rashan Williams

Visions

Fellows imagine the possibilities of CLI

Turn CLI into a national movement led by impacted communities, focusing on youth and education.
-Mohamed Abdi

What's your vision for CLI?



Strengthen CLI as a resource for BIPOC leaders seeking public office, supported by mentorship and a strong alumni network.
-Anthony Ives

Our Collective Vision

A state full of progressive leaders of color at all levels of governance initiating/influencing bold policies and system change that positively impact communities of color and other marginalized communities.

STATEWIDE EXPANSION

COUNTIES WE CURRENTLY SERVE

KING/PIERCE

CLARK

COUNTIES TO EXPAND IN

SNOHOMISH
Everett

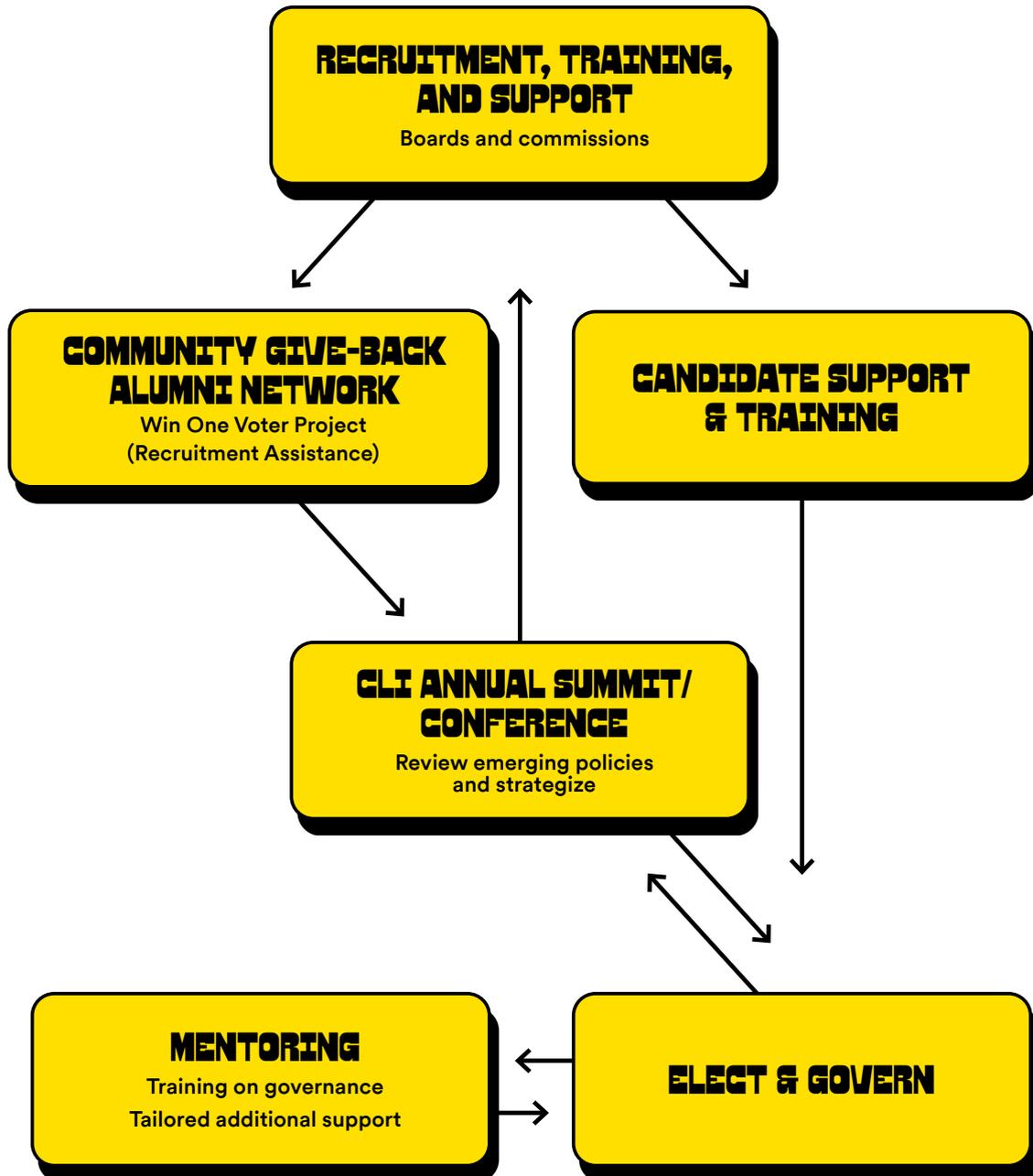
- Swing county
- Strong Native American population
- New transit infrastructure
- A win for ballot initiatives largely depends on Snohomish/King counties

**YAKIMA/
TRI-CITIES**

- Large Latinx population
- Politically marginalized
- Climate impact on agriculture and jobs
- Water safety and access

PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT & PARTNERSHIP

We will achieve systemic change through a vast and interconnected network of community leaders and strategic partnerships.



Acknowledgements

Since its inception in 2015, CLI has equipped emerging leaders of color across King, Pierce, and Clark Counties with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to shape local policies in housing, transit justice, environmental and climate issues, equitable development initiatives, labor justice, among others. As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of CLI, we extend our deepest gratitude to the mentors, facilitators, funders, and board members who have shaped this impactful journey of the program. Over the past decade, your dedication has helped CLI grow into a transformative program that truly equips emerging leaders of color with the tools to drive equitable change in their communities.

From guiding fellows through civic leadership training to providing resources, your support has been the foundation of our success. It opens doors to board and commission seats where equity really matters. Thanks to you, over 80 % of CLI alumni have served or are currently serving on boards, commissions, and key advocacy roles across Washington, bringing community voice into the heart of policy decisions. This milestone belongs to all of you. Thank you for empowering a generation of leaders and helping CLI thrive into the next decade.

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- Space limitations prevent this list from including every individual and group who have contributed to CLI the last 10 years, but regardless, their impact is felt and seen and greatly appreciated.

This book is a living, breathing tribute to the fierce love, radical imagination, and tireless work of more than 150 grassroots leaders across Washington State who dared to believe that their voices mattered—and made it true.

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Join Us

Interested in becoming a community leader or a mentor for emerging leaders? Learn more about the program and send us your questions at sageleaders.org/cli or email francis@sageleaders.org



The first ever Community Leadership Institute cohort pose for a group photo to kick-off the program in 2015

