

RAY KINSLAND LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE:

**Using evaluation to understand the
learning to impact continuum.**



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INTRODUCTION

In April 2024, the Ray Kinsland Leadership Institute (RKLI) commissioned Context Matters Research and Consulting to assess their youth and adult culturally-based leadership programs. RKLI wanted to learn more about:

- Program origins and what has changed/stayed the same over time (investigate the missions of the programs as well to see if we need to revise them). Including significant foundational information regarding the creation and development of each program as well as information on the learning continuum.
- How we got to where we are with the programs and their current state.
- Determine if the programs have been successful thus far in creating selfless leaders rooted in Cherokee values and culture.
- Look into the future at least 5 years - where do we want the programs to be, planning based on assessment and goals.
- The best ways to evaluate the programs in the future to continue determining success.
- Collecting testimonials from participants and alumni.

The goal of this report is to answer the questions posed by the organization in the bullets above, tell the story of the Ray Kinsland Leadership Institute and provide recommendations based on our data collection and analysis to support the planning and assessment of programs in the future.



TELLING THE STORY OF THE RAY KINSLAND LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

History

In 1996, under the leadership of Joyce Dugan, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) purchased 309 acres of land that included the Kituwah town site and mound. In 1997, Harrah's Cherokee Casino opened. In 2000, the second amendment to the Tribal State Compact was signed which established the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, led by Susan Jenkins. One of the programs that now make up the Ray Kinsland Leadership Institute started when Susan Jenkins realized that kids from Cherokee, many of them "had never been out of Cherokee." Coming from the Kellogg Foundation, Susan was familiar with their [EARTH University](#). Through a grant to the extension service, Jenkins, a few Foundation staff, and Cherokee youth took a group of students, now known as RKLI's Youth Cultural Exchange Program, on their first trip to Costa Rica.

In 2005, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation hosted a convening around leadership on the Qualla Boundary. Conversations about leadership initiatives carried into 2006. The choice was made to start leadership programs for the youth. As a result, the Cherokee Youth Council (CYC) and Jones Bowman Leadership Award program were established in 2007. An original Cherokee Youth Council member recounted the first meeting of CYC, "I remember the first meeting being at the Preservation Foundation in the boardroom, and there were five or six of us, and I knew two of them, but the others I didn't know, because we were all from the surrounding schools."

Youth who have participated in CYC talked about how it felt to "have a voice." When talking about the inception of CYC, one adult RKLI participant told us "I think the youth voices [are a lot of times] overlooked [...] not necessarily taken for granted, but I think just maybe discounted a lot." Therefore the CYC

and Jones Bowman programs were created to empower young people through Cherokee culture and reconnect them with the community.

Once the youth programs were established, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation hosted another convening in 2009, this time around adult leadership. The attention to adult leadership was intended to “provide new ways for Tribal members to learn Cherokee history and culture and develop leadership competencies” (Report to Board Dec 09 rev 003).

Conversations about the adult leadership program brought in talks of a “youth-through-adult continuum [...] to help current and future generations of Cherokee people honor their tradition by living in a selfless manner and also learn to practice modern leadership skills” (2010 CPFdn annual report).



Each program was established through the work of the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, with several of the programs being housed within the Foundation for a time. In 2016, the Ray Kinsland Leadership Institute was established to house all four programs under the same organizational umbrella. Combining the programs, which before had each been managed by disparate organizations in Cherokee, allowed for a more coherent and cohesive continuum of leadership development through Cherokee culture. Throughout this report, we will describe the ways that the RKLI curriculum and methods of engagement center the reality that Cherokee people experience of walking in two worlds, that of the modern, westernized world and that of Cherokee culture. RKLI honors this dichotomy by teaching the seven core values, the concept of selfless leadership, and supporting Cherokee language development through various approaches and perspectives. The curriculum









has both changed and stayed the same over the last 18 years. We compiled the following list of topics by researching documentation, including program agendas; Cherokee Preservation Foundation annual reports; news articles related to Cherokee programming; and data collected in one-on-one and focus group interviews with people in founding conversations and programs. This list looks very similar to the inaugural list shared in the 2012 Cherokee Preservation Foundation's annual report describing the curriculum covered in the very first program.

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- Introduction to Leadership Learning
 - Cultural Values
 - Social Systems and Gender Roles
 - Cherokee Language
 - Governance (including visits to Cowee Mound and Tribal Council Building)
 - Healthy Living, including Farming, Foods, Medicines and Cooking
 - Language Learning, including Tribal language revitalization programs across the country
 - Artistic Expression, including Art, Craft, Music and Dance
 - The Natural World and the Environment
 - Sports and Recreation, Storytelling and Humor
 - Indigenous Peoples, including commendable Tribal leadership
 - Initiatives, community programs, Tribal heroes
 - Historical and Contemporary Cherokee Leadership, Tradition & Change

In looking at original agendas, curriculum material, and interview and focus group conversations with people who were part of early programs, it is clear that while the topics are similar, the manner in which curriculum is delivered has changed. An approach that was prescriptive and included learning objectives, has shifted to one that is learner-driven, aligns more closely with Cherokee values, and prioritizes learning and retention for participants (Brown, Roediger & McDaniel, 2014; Fink, 2013).

Individual Impact

Here is a list of topics most frequently cited by RKLI participants as having a significant impact on their lives:

-  Decolonization
-  Elder knowing
-  Knowing oneself
-  Generational trauma
-  Teaching each other
-  Community
-  Cherokee language
-  How to speak up (and be an advocate)

One theme that was consistent throughout our data collection process was the role that colonization has played in the lives of the Cherokee people and consequently the value of decolonization. One interviewee said “the cultural knowledge [of Right Path] is what lights me up about the program because

the colonizers wanted us to suppress everything about us that make us Cherokee as an indigenous people.”

Throughout our data collection process, participants referenced the knowledge gap that has happened amongst the Cherokee people. One participant explained, “there’s a big gap in the people that have the knowledge.” Another participant elaborated, “It’s not storytelling, it’s history [...] it was the way we handed down our knowledge. I guess at a certain time when [elders] kind of started dying out that there were just a few less that were doing those types of things.” Understanding that there are fewer elders and consequently, less elder knowledge being passed down was a key takeaway for many RKLl participants, something that has been a driver to want to learn more and share it with their community. As a participant said, “it’s important to have those people who can be knowledgeable about our culture and if we don’t then it’s gone.”

It was clear that RKLl programs help participants know themselves better. As was mentioned in the Learning Experience section, leadership in the curriculum is not just about leadership skills, but also about the Cherokee way of life. One participant explained:



“We didn’t just sit around cooking beans for 13,000 years, we knew what to do. This is how you apply that knowledge into being who you are. And that is what these programs are teaching. They won’t just be teaching pottery, they will be teaching who we are. They won’t be learning the language, they’ll be figuring out a way to interpret the world easier and better and more proficiently.”



Character building and personal growth is a hallmark of RKLl. For instance, one participant said, “going on the trip pushed me way outside of my comfort zone and honestly I was miserable, but it also helped me understand more about who I am as a person.” It is important to also point out the vehicles through which participants found themselves: the pottery lessons, the history,

lessons, the mound visits, and the many other ways that presenters, mentors, and staff share what they know about Cherokee culture.

Several participants referenced generational trauma and how learning more about it impacted their lives by helping them understand themselves and connect more deeply with Cherokee peers who have similar backgrounds. One Right Path participant explained, “we spent time on generational trauma which created a real, strong, authentic connection. It really set us up to lean on each other more.” Additionally, several participants cited the half day generational trauma workshop as one of their favorite lessons.



So many participants talked about taking what they learned in RKLI programs into their homes and workplaces. One participant explained, “my department at work was trying to do some cultural studies and I was able to share more about our people. I used what I learned from [the RKLI program] to tell my department about how our culture is based on problem solving and we’re always willing to help each other.” Several other participants told similar stories about sharing what they learned with their coworkers, their kids and their community of friends.

Participation in RKLI programming was also seen to be a key connection point for participants. At the November community event, it was clear that attendees knew each other and described their links as a result of the various RKLI programs in which they participated. The bonds and community that participants feel as a result of engaging in RKLI programs is an outcome of RKLI participation. For example, one adult participant said, “It was nice to have a group of people I didn't already know to participate with. I really liked the friendships and connections I formed. I know I can call up anyone I'm in [RKLI program] with and we will help each other with whatever we need. We have a deeper relationship.” Most participants spoke about their journey learning the

Cherokee language. Several CYC and Jones Bowman participants spoke about going to high school where Cherokee language and culture was not taught. For instance, one participant told us, “you don’t get as much exposure to like, language, or crafts or anything like that at my high school. So that’s why I got into the Youth Council program.” Many participants spoke about wanting to understand the Cherokee language better. Others linked being able to speak Cherokee to being “culture keeper” as well as how it connects to the Cherokee way of life. Others see it as an anchor for maintaining Cherokee culture at large, like when one participant said: “I hope that my generation can preserve and bring back the Cherokee language. There are less than 100 fluent speakers and once the language dies, don’t we go with it?”

Many participants spoke about feeling more empowered through their experiences with RKLI programs. One participant told us “[my RKLI program] changed my life.” They went on to mention the lack of elders who can share knowledge and that “that alone has made me” be more approachable, learn more, and share more. Another participant told us “seeing other native people who went to college ... helped me so much in deciding to go. It gives me hope. If they can do it, I can do it.”

Participants referenced other skills that they developed as a result of their RKLI experiences: public speaking, resolving conflict, connection to the land and ancestors, spiritual practices, Cherokee traditions (stick ball, stomp, ribbon skirts, bean bread etc.), listening, etc.

Community Impact

Throughout our conversations, we heard references to a “resurgence” or “renaissance” of Cherokee culture currently taking place on the Qualla boundary. Participants alluded to the idea that members were less proud of their Cherokee identity in the past. For instance, one participant told us “when I was growing up, people didn’t want to take the [classes on] Cherokee language. People made fun of me for choosing it as an elective.” When we looked back at the history of the Cherokee people, it made sense that being Cherokee did not carry a sense of pride. During the boarding school era, speaking Cherokee was a punishable offense. The impact of the boarding school era can be seen in participants’ descriptions of what it was like to be Cherokee on the Qualla Boundary at that time. This resurgence of pride in

Cherokee history and identity is impacting the health and wellbeing of Cherokee residents. One participant told us “when I was in school everybody wanted to be a gang member and now everybody wants to be Cherokee.”

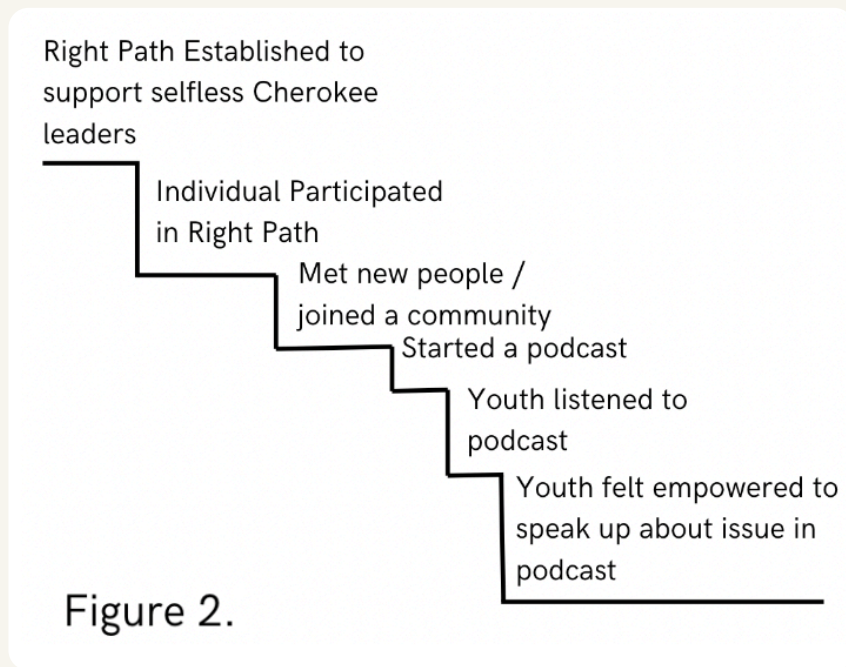
In addition to RKLI participants, we also interviewed community members who had not participated to get a better impression of RKLI’s community impact. A community member told us “the programs that RKLI are doing are really important to helping [kids grow up] with the frame of mind of knowing themselves [...] to get us all in that frame of mind that our culture is important to maintain, preserve, and carry on.” RKLI programs are not only successfully preparing selfless leaders, they are also providing participants an opportunity to grow and experience the Cherokee way of life, and in turn share those learnings with their local communities, which ultimately impacts the entire boundary. The programs of RKLI directly impact the individuals who participate in a variety of ways, and there is evidence that the broader Cherokee community has benefited from the attention and thoughtfulness of the RKLI curriculum and learning experience.

On November 18, RKLI held an event for alumni and community members, during which we asked attendees to participate in ripple mapping sessions as well as provide their thoughts on various images and prompts about Cherokee culture. Ripple mapping is a process that starts with participants’ experiences (e.g. attending CYC), and then maps out the ways that that experience started a chain reaction, like a wave. The mapping process involves thinking through questions like: who benefitted and how from that experience and

what changes do you see in your community. The ripple mapping exercises gave us a great example of the community impact of RKLI. One participant



explained how they had met someone who had similar interests in their Right Path cohort and that connection led to them starting a podcast. During this same conversation, another individual spoke up and mentioned that their child had heard the podcast and it gave them the perspective and motivation to speak up about something at school. The ripple map for this can be found below in Figure 2.



This ripple is just one example of the community-wide ripple effect that is taking place through the work of RKL (and other Cherokee cultural organizations). RKL is a cultural hub that does not gatekeep. In order to counteract the effects of the boarding school era, this kind of holistic and abundant

approach to sharing knowledge is needed.

All of this ties directly into being a selfless leader and touches on the nuance and depth of weaving together leadership and Cherokee culture, living in two worlds. One participant explained, “selfless leadership is probably the number one thing that RKL is trying to promote. It’s this idea that as leaders we need to think about the good of the community. Just not putting yourself first when making decisions.” While RKL’s programming is about individuals participating and engaging with the curriculum, it is also so much about the good of the community and touches far more people than only direct participants.

Looking into the Future

The Cherokee Preservation Foundation created a number of culturally-based leadership programs over 12 years ago with the express goal of creating “a growing pool of citizens who embrace traditional Cherokee values and have a commitment to selfless leadership in the local community.” With the creation of RKLI to house all those programs in 2016, they have been quite successful in meeting their goal. Participants come out of programs feeling more empowered as selfless leaders, having a greater appreciation for Cherokee culture, and feeling more connected to their land and community.

RKLI has brought the preservation of Cherokee culture back to the forefront of participant's lives and been a significant driving force in this cultural revitalization. Participants are using what they've learned with their families, at their workplaces, where they volunteer, and as a tool to gain a better understanding of themselves.



“I have used what I learned in Right Path in my day-to-day job responsibilities. I've started looking at my work through a different lens and considering what is helpful and what might be harmful. The work around generational trauma has helped me be more compassionate and understanding. I realize now that someone who I've known my whole life may have had a very different home life than me and there are a lot of things that could impact that.”

“These programs have brought me closer to my culture. And looking back on it, that means everything to me. That's what sets me apart from other people and that's what makes me interesting.”

“I've seen my son take pride in being a Cherokee person because of his participation in CYC.”





“It'd be nice in the future that we had participants or alumni from these programs and every single major branch of like, you know, leadership, or influence, [...] in all areas of this community.”

“Before I participated in these programs, I would never have thought of myself as a person who can lead or teach anybody anything. I never thought of myself as a person connected enough or, or smart, knowledgeable enough, I just didn't feel comfortable. But because of the programs and what they've taught me and my experiences, it's just such a fulfilling experience, then I felt like I could, you know, be a leader.”



It's imperative that RKLl builds on the work of the last 17 years to continue bolstering the preservation of Cherokee culture. Because, as one participant said, “There's not a lot of people who can teach people about our legends, our arts and crafts. Someone who embodies a deep understanding of our cultural roots.”

We asked every participant about their vision for the future of Cherokee and RKLl. Many spoke about the relationship between the two, and others spoke about specific parts of Cherokee culture that they wanted to become more visible.

RKLl program alumni recognize that, “it's going to be a long time before the community actually realizes some of the things that participants of these programs, the effect that they've had on the community.” They went on to say, “I can think of at least three or four things going on [...] that've come through this program, but it's gonna be a long time before [it's] [...] realized. [I hope we'll be looking at] at a lot of chiefs on the wall, [and] the last four all be Right Path members.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose of the Group Project

While there is no formal purpose for the group project, through the data collection and research phase of this evaluation we determined that the purpose of the project is to provide participants with an opportunity to practice consensus decision making, give back to the community, practice selfless leadership, and model the seven core values.

Each program requires that participants complete a community group project. In nearly every interview or focus group conversation we had the group project came up, often hearing from participants that it was a difficult experience. One program alumni said, “the group project felt like it was too big and too much.” Participants



are instructed to come up with their groups' project together; staff cited that often cohorts have a hard time coming up with the focus of the project and then settling on a single focus. Another participant acknowledged that some of the struggles associated with the group project could be because “everybody works differently, different personalities, different work ethics, personality clashes, different mindsets.” While that is true, it’s important to acknowledge that RKL staff do a good job managing those personal differences. One participant shared that, “Tara did a great job at managing

the conflict within the group project. She would pull out the specific people having the conflict and give them space to breathe and talk about it. It's really what allowed us to finish our project.

Based on what we learned through data collection we believe that the group project for each program could benefit from more connection between the learning happening throughout with the practical application of those learnings required of the group project. To support that effort we recommend building more scaffolding for the group project to create a bridge between participants' experience of their program's core curriculum and the application and integration of those learnings. This recommendation is based on learning theories like Bloom's and Fink's significant learning, which delineate between different kinds of learning; and the emphasis learning scholars like (Buldu, 2010; Fink, 2013; Havnes, Smith, Dysthe, & Ludvigsen, 2012); place on the importance of learning environments that make learning visible.




Providing logistical scaffolding will help as well. An example of this would be facilitating the conversation where participants choose the group project or assigning various roles for the project (ie: a note taker who records notes, shares them with the group, and communicates deadlines; a conflict specialist who, with the support of the program leadership, can intentionally guide fellow participants through disagreements; a culture keeper who can be responsible for making connections to Cherokee history and convening participants to brainstorm ways to highlight that connection etc.). These roles give participants tangible opportunities to practice and take ownership of the skills they are learning in the core curriculum.

Threshold Concepts as a Curriculum Scaffold

Just as the RKLI program supports its participants in living in two worlds, it seems appropriate to support the curriculum in a similar fashion. Threshold concepts are a holistic way of making learning more visible. They were first developed from a research project in England around the "characteristics of effective teaching and learning environments in undergraduate education" (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015, 2). What is so helpful about threshold

concepts is that they are not intended to be a checklist, but instead be used as guiding principles that can inform curriculum and assessment. A key tenet of threshold concepts is that “learning them happens over time at varied levels of understanding.” They aren’t prescriptive and don’t impose what needs to be learned, but rather are a way to loosely pencil in some lines within a learning experience, with the ability to erase, rewrite and maybe erase again.

Another way to understand threshold concepts is as an articulation of shared beliefs that help name what we know and how we can use what we know in service of Cherokee culture. Threshold concepts are often described as something that, once understood, changes the way that a person thinks about a topic. Some examples of threshold concepts from other learning domains are:

-  Writing – All writers have more to learn; writing can be practiced and improved
-  Information literacy – Authority is constructed and contextual
-  Photography – Photography is an art of selection rather than invention

Some threshold concepts that could apply to RKLI programs are:

- 01** Selfless leaders know themselves
- 02** People learn differently
- 03** I am complete
- 04** Being Cherokee today is shaped by the history of its people
- 05** As a Cherokee person, you’re walking in two worlds
- 06** Being a selfless leader means doing what is needed

The purpose of statements like these is to not prescribe what and how participants learn, but to provide a general beacon around which participants can orient themselves. One of the things that was clear from our data collection, as we talked about in the Learning Experience section, is that RKLI, its curriculum, its staff, its programs, “show not tell.” Threshold concepts are the closest thing to that while still providing learners with support.

Revisions to Jones Bowman

Participants and staff both agree that Jones Bowman is the most problematic program in the RKLI umbrella. Unlike the other programs, Jones Bowman hasn’t “clicked” into place yet. Nearly everyone we spoke to agreed that the structure of Jones Bowman is difficult to sustain given the geographic spread of participants. Because students are attending universities across the nation, program meetings must be virtual and RKLI has to contend with varying time zones; additionally, the program relies heavily on mentors who are only able to exert a limited amount of influence on the student’s engagement. In the case of the other RKLI programs, meeting



regularly in person and the relationships that develop among participants helps engagement; additionally, Jones Bowman has been without a staff person. We witnessed first hand the role that Tonya, Tara, and Levi have on the engagement of RKLI participants. Our conversations with and observation of staff, mentors, and participants illustrated the need for the support Jones Bowman intends to provide. One interviewee told us “we encourage travel for these kids but don’t show them how to do it.” The Cherokee youth leaving the

boundary for college have reported that it can feel like a hard transition to go from a small, close-knit community, to being in a sea of students at a university in a place where they don't have the support of friends or family.

Expand the Learning Continuum

The primary feedback that we heard was: I wish RKLI could reach more people. It is clear that one of the secrets to the success of RKLI's programming is that its culturally responsive model emphasizes small cohorts and participant led learning. It is not realistic to expand the core programs without negatively impacting the experience. Instead, we recommend RKLI expand the established learning continuum to include prospective participants and their nominators along with deeper alumni engagement. Expanding the learning continuum provides the opportunity to reach more participants without compromising RKLI's model.

There were both nominators and participants who requested increased transparency around the selection process. Nominators would like to know how they could support their nominees in the process, particularly when they are not accepted into the program. Participants would like more clarity about what they could do differently. Feedback is one of the top learning tools in supporting learning. In this case, nominees and participants are asking for formative feedback, or information given to improve learning (rather than telling applicants if they have passed, succeeded etc.).

We see this as an opportunity to lengthen and enrich RKLI's learning continuum. Engaging people in the nomination stage of the process expands the way you support your mission and can increase the readiness of participants when they begin their program.

Engaging alumni in a number of ways will continue to support RKLI's mission and expand the opposite end of the learning continuum. A starting place could be to create an alumni committee that participates in the formative feedback process. The committee could come together twice a year to review (anonymous) open-ended evaluation responses. This could also involve a rubric. We suggest using a single point rubric rather than an analytic one, as

analytic rubrics are much more labor intensive and restrictive. A single point rubric lists general criteria in the middle and provides instructors or committee members with a place to write “concerns” on the left side and “whats working” on the right. The website cultofpedagogy.com has a great, short outline about rubrics [here](#). The alumni committee can then have a third meeting in which they meet with staff to brainstorm ways to support programming based on what is learned from engaging in the formative feedback process.

Suggested Evaluation Process

We recommend augmenting the current evaluation process in order to understand the nuances and reach of RKLI’s impact. First, we recommend using the current evaluation forms as a learning tool for participants to utilize throughout each session. These help complement the teaching done during the session and provide another modality with which participants can interact with the information.

To measure the impact of the program we suggest using a more targeted evaluation and doing it one month after the lesson is taught so you can include questions about various ways the teachings show up in participants’ lives paired with a pre-, mid-, and post-evaluation form with strategic questions used to track growth. Finally, we strongly recommend digitizing the evaluation process for easier access and implementation of evaluation results.



Succession Planning

Over half of the people we interviewed said some form of:



“The entire community knows that [RKLI is] a resource because they get asked to help with other events and things, almost like consultants, to help to make sure things are done the right way or that they're discussed the right way. I think that is a testament to what they have accomplished over time. That the community knows they can reach out to them for help with education or with anything.”



It came up time and time again that RKLI participants and members of the community are incredibly impressed with the job RKLI leadership is doing. People can see that they have a vision, are very committed and responsive to the community, and respect the work they are doing. It's clear that so much of what is special and “works” about what RKLI is doing comes back to the people in charge. In this regard, we see an opportunity for leadership to work on a succession plan that ensures RKLI's vital programming can continue even if new leaders are in place. Having a succession plan in place ensures continuity not only for program participants, but also the greater community. As previously covered in this report, the work that RKLI has done has permeated the EBCI and is at the forefront of ensuring preservation of the Cherokee culture for generations to come. It would be a disservice to the community and the Cherokee people to not fortify this organization for growth and success into the future.

Succession planning looks like having procedures in place and codifying ways of doing from current leadership and also engaging your alumni in a meaningful way.

Marketing

There are a couple specific ways that marketing RKLI more clearly and holistically can increase the ability to find participants who are the right fit, which is why we suggest a coordinated, far-reaching marketing strategy. One reason people cited for not participating in programs is because they didn't know they existed, and another is because they didn't think the program was "for them." Some people felt like they were too old to participate, others felt too young, and in the youth programs there is a perception that they are for only high achieving students.



Resources

It is clear that in order to continue implementing programs, tracking/evaluating them, and engaging with alumni in a way that adds to the deep impact on participants and increases the community impact, RKLI needs more resources.

The work that is being done at RKLI is special. Participants finish and they are changed. They are more connected to their culture, more committed to preserving their history, and know themselves more deeply. The work happening within the walls of the RKLI building is rippling out to the family of participants: grandparents are speaking Cherokee language with their grandchildren, parents are taking their families to sacred sites, people are engaging more in indigenous art – all because of their time in these programs. In order to preserve the spark RKLI has lit within the community,

the leadership of RKLI needs to be able to focus on the big picture. A strategic plan will help, but they need the space to continually think strategically to ensure the organization is staying on track and aligned with where they hope to go. This will require more staff to take some responsibilities from Tonya, Tara, and Levi so that they can spend time engaging in the strategic work that is necessary for RKLI to continue to grow.

CONCLUSION

The Ray Kinsland Leadership Institute (RKLI) has established itself as a transformative force in the preservation of Cherokee culture and the development of selfless leadership among its participants. This evaluation underscores the profound impact of RKLI's programs on individuals, families, and the broader Cherokee community. Through its culturally rich curriculum, immersive learning experiences, and commitment to fostering leaders who embody Cherokee values, RKLI has demonstrated its pivotal role in promoting cultural revitalization and leadership excellence.

Participants consistently report a deeper connection to their Cherokee heritage, improved self-awareness, and an increased capacity for advocacy and community engagement. Beyond individual growth, the ripple effects of RKLI's work are evident in workplaces, schools, and community settings, amplifying their influence and advancing their mission.

However, challenges remain, including the need for greater structural support, improved marketing strategies, and enhanced scaffolding for group projects. Addressing these challenges will ensure that RKLI's programs remain accessible, impactful, and aligned with the evolving needs of the Cherokee community.

Looking forward, RKLI's vision of fostering leaders who can navigate both traditional and modern worlds is both timely and essential. By implementing strategic recommendations—such as digitizing evaluations, enhancing the

Jones Bowman program, and deepening alumni engagement—RKLI is well-positioned to sustain and expand its impact. With continued support and thoughtful adaptation, RKLI will not only preserve Cherokee culture but also equip future generations with selfless leadership skills, ensuring a thriving Cherokee legacy for years to come.

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