

Fellows Program in Public Affairs 2009 Graduation - Director's Reflections **By Minden Bennion, Director of the Coro Fellows Program**

For the past nine months, I have had the incredible privilege of working with these twelve Fellows. As the Director of the Coro Fellows Program, I help coordinate their field placements, plan their focus weeks, and conduct their seminars. But more than that, I am a witness to their learning. Together, we have spent over 800 hours in seminars, focus weeks, and intensive overnight retreats. They have demonstrated incredible courage, resiliency, grace, and tenacity. And they have gone above and beyond- when I scheduled their seminar time so tightly that they had no time to address important issues that arose, they met on the weekends for extra seminars. When they saw how the economic crisis was impacting nonprofit organizations, they stepped up for Coro and became the first class to sponsor a table at our Leadership Luncheon while they were in the program. The amount of energy they have put into each other and into Coro is impressive and the impact of the group on each individual is part of what makes this experience so profound.

But there is another great benefactor of their efforts that is largely forgotten. There is no doubt that each Fellow leaves this program with skills, knowledge, and insight they didn't possess when they began nine months ago. But, I want to take a few moments to share not only what they've gained from this program, but also what they've contributed. I want to tell you about their **impact**. The way I see it, the Coro Fellows Program really has a double bottom line: the leadership development of the Fellows AND their impact in the community. While they were working on developing their own leadership, they completed 76 mission-critical projects for organizations and companies all over the Bay Area. Whether they were creating a resource guide for first-generation college students, evaluating a cross-sector disaster preparedness plan, or helping get a president elected, the Fellows lent their time, talent, and energy to Coro's partner organizations. Coro's mission is to create leaders capable of cross-sector collaboration and innovative program solving that stems from an ability to view problems through multiple lenses, challenge their own and others' assumptions, and approach change from a system's perspective. And because of the work Fellows do with our partner organizations, they are simultaneously contributing to *their* missions and creating a magnifying effect that goes far beyond the seminar room.

I often hear people say, "what can you actually accomplish in four weeks?" Well, as any Coro Fellow will tell you- you can accomplish a lot. The Fellows learn to quickly assess new situations, synthesize information efficiently, and create an excellent product in a very short time. From helping to create a just affordable housing policy for the City of San Francisco to researching asylum cases for women who are persecuted in their home countries, the Fellows have impact on their host organizations through not only the project that was assigned to them, but also by sharing their reflections from an outsider's perspective. Those of you who have been Field Faculty know the value a Fellow can add. Through their focused attention, thoughtful questions, and armed with their Coro tools- they leave behind robust work products and insights they've gained from examining your organization and your sector. The work that Fellows contribute is often utilized for years after they leave continuing to add value well beyond their brief tenure. In this way, the Fellows have a ripple effect on the Bay Area community that is magnified by the classes before and after them.

In addition to honoring the Fellows, I want to honor those of you who have made this

program possible. To the Coro staff, board, alumni, and Field Faculty: You have helped provide access, information, and mentorship. You have invested in their learning and for that, we thank you. None of this could have been possible without you. To the Fellows' parents, partners, friends, and loved ones: You have endured as they have endured. You have heard them vent their frustrations and shared their joys. You have been patient in their absence and encouraged them when they were working against deadlines. For all of the ways you have supported them, we owe you a deep gratitude. And lastly, to the Fellows: Thank you for teaching me and allowing me to be a part of your learning. I encourage you to find ways to draw upon your training as you move on to the next chapter of your journey. Practice stepping outside of your comfort zone, ask for honest feedback, engage in dialogue, seek out those you don't agree with, and listen for new understanding. Our world needs leaders like you and we at Coro expect great things!