

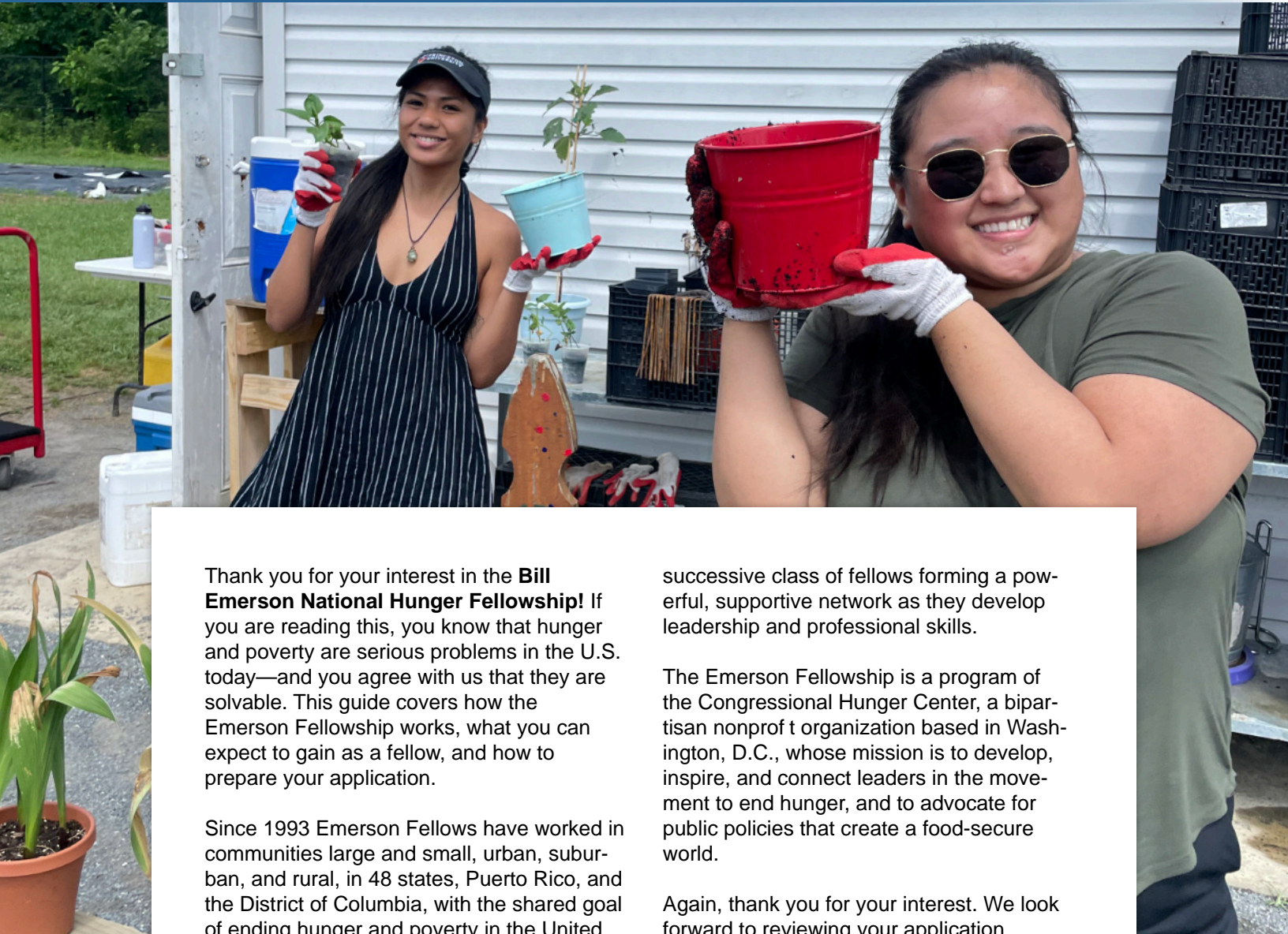


BILL EMERSON NATIONAL HUNGER FELLOWSHIP



2026-2027 Program Overview

Introduction



Thank you for your interest in the **Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship!** If you are reading this, you know that hunger and poverty are serious problems in the U.S. today—and you agree with us that they are solvable. This guide covers how the Emerson Fellowship works, what you can expect to gain as a fellow, and how to prepare your application.

Since 1993 Emerson Fellows have worked in communities large and small, urban, suburban, and rural, in 48 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia, with the shared goal of ending hunger and poverty in the United States. Nearly 600 Emerson fellows have completed the program, gaining extensive experience in effective solutions to hunger while expanding the capacity of nearly 300 local, regional, and national organizations. We partner with a range of organizations that focus on addressing the root causes of hunger and poverty. At the heart of the fellowship is the cohort experience, with each

successive class of fellows forming a powerful, supportive network as they develop leadership and professional skills.

The Emerson Fellowship is a program of the Congressional Hunger Center, a bipartisan nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., whose mission is to develop, inspire, and connect leaders in the movement to end hunger, and to advocate for public policies that create a food-secure world.

Again, thank you for your interest. We look forward to reviewing your application.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Jackson".

Tony Jackson
Director
Bill Emerson National
Hunger Fellowship Program

28th Class Emerson Fellows Julie Noreene Bautista (left) and Tenzin Dhakong, volunteering at the Farm at Kelly Miller urban garden in Washington, D.C.

THE HUNGER CENTER'S APPROACH



Hunger is a multifaceted and far-reaching problem—and the movement to end it should be, too.

We believe that governments, nonprofits, educational institutions, corporations, philanthropy, and individuals all have a role to play, and a variety of approaches and strategies are required to solve hunger and poverty.



Any lasting solution to hunger must be led by people with first-hand experience.

We invest in developing the leadership of people who have experienced hunger and poverty as designers, implementers, and evaluators of anti-hunger programs and projects.



Breakdowns in understanding and differences in perspective on the root causes of the problem stand in the way of scalable solutions.

We focus on bridging the gap between community-based work and public policy, highlighting the ways that each can inform and strengthen the other.



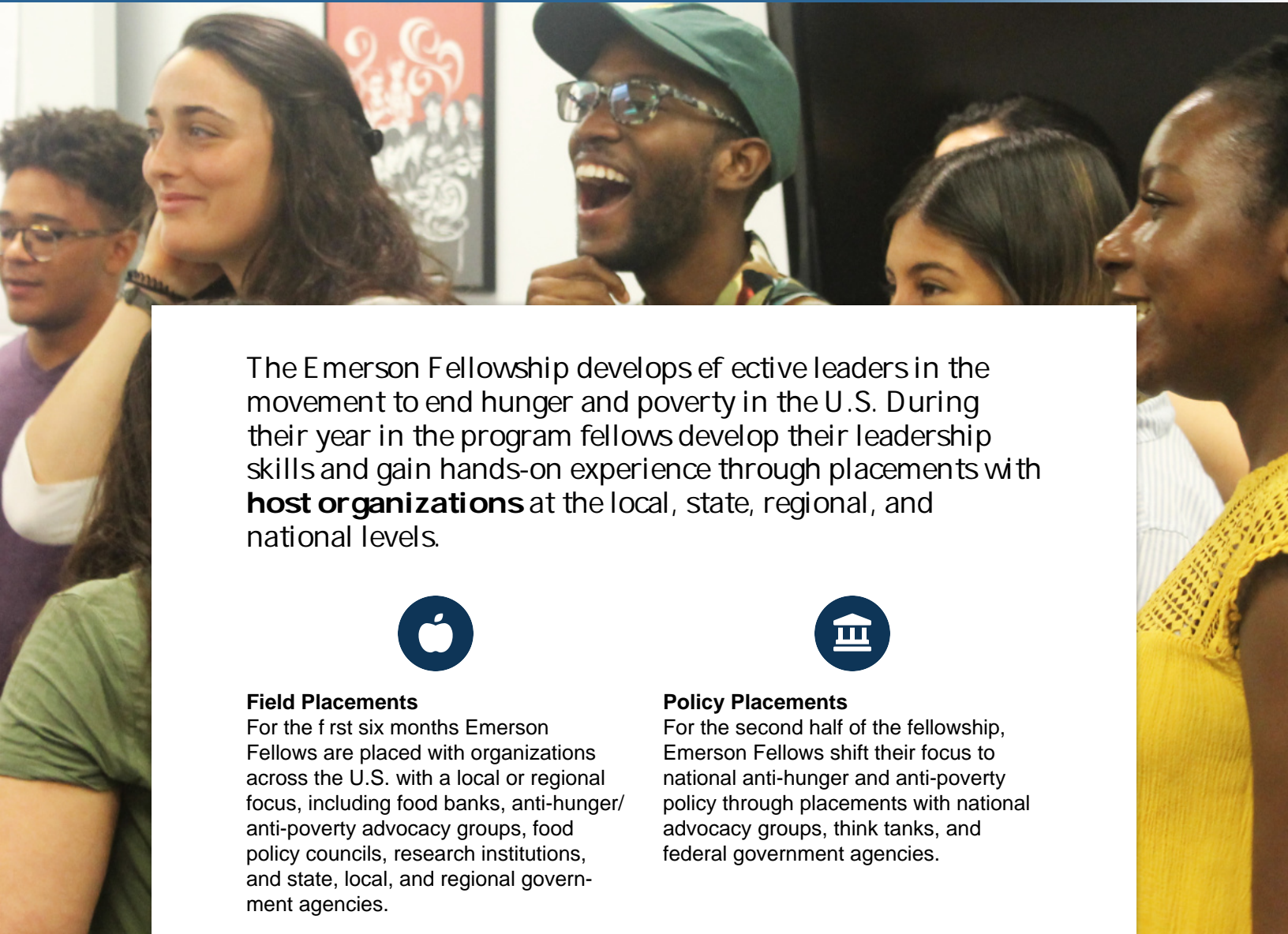
*Representative **Bill Emerson**
(right) with his colleague and friend
Rep. Mickey Leland*

WHO WAS BILL EMERSON?

Rep. **Bill Emerson** (January 1, 1938 – June 22, 1996) was a Republican congressional leader who crossed party lines to bring lawmakers together in the fight to end hunger and poverty. Emerson was first elected to Congress in 1980 to represent Missouri's 10th district and was re-elected seven times until his death in 1996.

His tireless bipartisan work during his tenure in Congress advanced numerous anti-hunger initiatives, including The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act, which was named posthumously in his honor. The Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship serves as a living legacy to his steadfast leadership and dedication to ending hunger, and Rep. Emerson's bipartisan approach to legislation forms the foundation of our work.

How Does the Fellowship Work?



The Emerson Fellowship develops effective leaders in the movement to end hunger and poverty in the U.S. During their year in the program fellows develop their leadership skills and gain hands-on experience through placements with **host organizations** at the local, state, regional, and national levels.



Field Placements

For the first six months Emerson Fellows are placed with organizations across the U.S. with a local or regional focus, including food banks, anti-hunger/anti-poverty advocacy groups, food policy councils, research institutions, and state, local, and regional government agencies.



Policy Placements

For the second half of the fellowship, Emerson Fellows shift their focus to national anti-hunger and anti-poverty policy through placements with national advocacy groups, think tanks, and federal government agencies.

Host organizations apply to host Emerson Fellows through a competitive process. Fellows are matched with their placements by Emerson Program staff based on several factors, including the fellows' interest and experience. Throughout the year, fellows are sup-

ported with comprehensive staff-led learning events and professional development opportunities. Fellows form a powerful cohort, sharing their successes and challenges and learning from one another on both professional and personal levels.

24th Class Emerson Fellows during a training session at their orientation, August 2017.

KEY PROGRAM DATES

September 2026
Orientation for 33rd Class

October 2026
Fellows begin working at field placements



Late April 2027
Fellows begin working at policy placements

August 2027
Fellows complete policy placements;
fellowship ends

From top: **Sophia Charlot** ('22) at orientation; **Leslie Rios** ('21) at Houston Food Bank; **Sofia Hinojosa and Mariama Badjie** ('20) prepare to present their field work.



December 2026
Fellows attend a mid-field gathering to reflect and share experience.

Mid-April 2027
Policy Learning Event: fellows present key findings from their field placements and debrief their experience



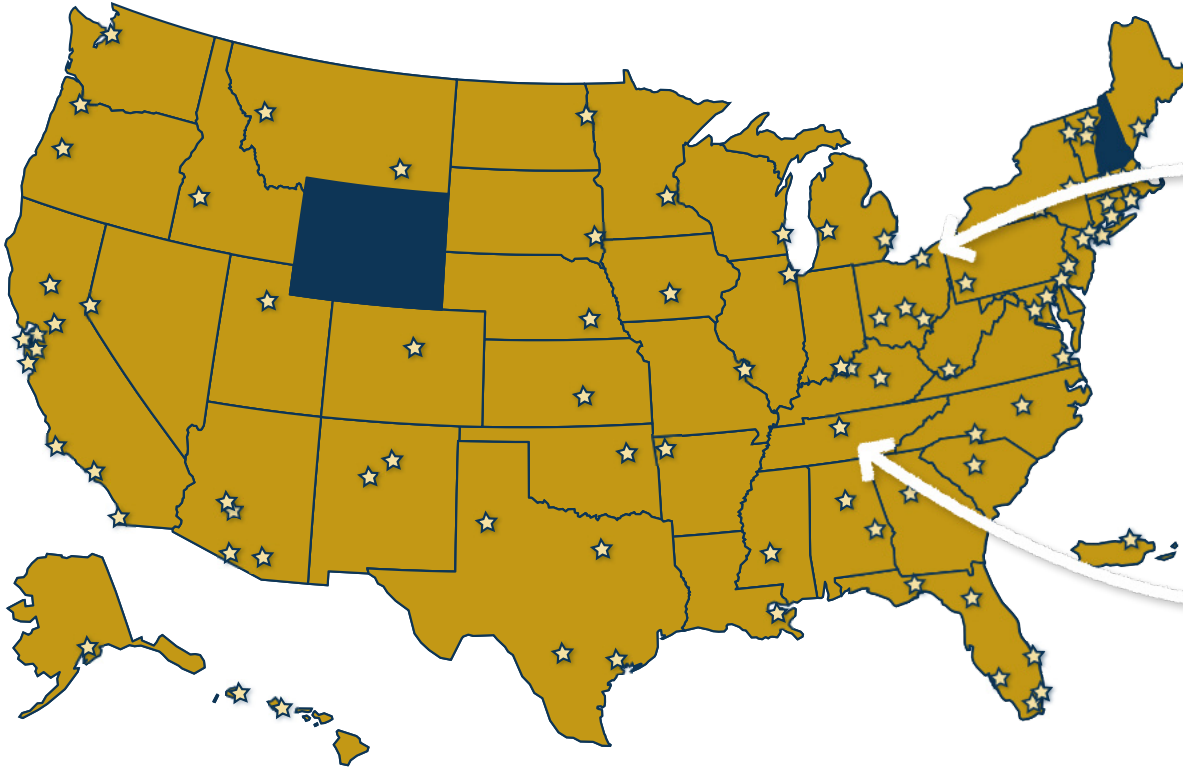
"My time as an Emerson Hunger Fellow was the perfect stepping-stone from my previous direct service and local advocacy work to national-level policy. As a soon-to-be MPP student, this program has helped me get my foot in the door and build a strong foundation of knowledge and skills to fight issues of hunger and poverty on a broad scale."

Alekya Prathivadi ('19)

FIELD PLACEMENTS

From October to March, Emerson Fellows are placed at community-based organizations around the country who use a variety of approaches to combatting hunger and poverty on the local, state,

and regional level. From advocacy and outreach to research and analysis, projects started by fellows continue to have an impact years after the they have completed their fellowship year.



Taylor Unoki ('23) was placed with Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio, where she created a Landscape Assessment that gathered data on demographics and social determinants of food insecurity such as healthcare, food deserts, and housing to identify gaps where Second Harvest could focus its resources.

Margaux Johnson-Green ('20) was placed with the **Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee** in Nashville, where she developed a survey for participants in the Commodity Supplemental Food Program to collect firsthand accounts of the program's accessibility for people aged 60 and older.

WHERE WILL I BE PLACED?

Fellows do not select their placements, but are matched to host organizations based on their interests and experience, the host organizations' needs, and other factors.

Since 1994, Emerson Fellows have worked at placements in **48 states** plus **Puerto Rico** and the **District of Columbia**. Past placements have included food banks, advocacy organizations, food policy councils, local and regional government agencies, and more.

POLICY PLACEMENTS

From April to August Emerson Fellows are placed with host organizations that focus on national anti-hunger and anti-poverty policy.

Fellows' work can include research, outreach, advocacy, and public education projects supporting national initiatives and campaigns.



WHERE WILL I BE PLACED?

Like with field placements, fellows are matched to their policy placements by program staff. Matches take into account the fellows' interests, field placement experiences, and career goals, as well as the host organizations' needs and other factors.

Since 1994 Emerson Fellows have worked with **over 100 policy-focused host organizations**. Past placements have included national advocacy organizations, think tanks, research institutions, federal government agencies, and more.

Heather Street ('20) was placed with the **Duke University World Food Policy Center** where she created a report that illuminated the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the emergency food system, detailing needs, barriers, actions, and successes, and giving recommendations for moving from a charity to justice model.

Emily Hwang ('20) was placed with the **U.S. Department of Agriculture** where she researched best practices for school lunch period times and supported staff to ensure that over 30 million children could still access school meals during the Coronavirus pandemic.

TRAINING AND SKILLS

During their time in the fellowship, Emerson Fellows receive extensive professional and leadership development training.

Orientation

The fellowship begins with a comprehensive orientation exploring the history of hunger and poverty in the United States, including their root causes, and the importance of focusing on root causes in anti-poverty work. Orientation is also a time for community-building among the fellows.



Midfield Gathering

Midway through their field placements fellows come together to reflect on their experiences in the field and discuss their key insights about solutions to ending hunger and poverty.



Policy Learning Event

In March fellows reconvene to process their field experiences and participate in intensive policy training. Fellows learn how national public policy is developed and implemented, and the roles of the federal government, advocacy groups, lobbyists, think-tanks, and other organizations in the legislative process. Fellows also receive briefings from experts on the status of current hunger and poverty policy issues.



KEYS TO LEADERSHIP

Like all programs and projects developed by the Congressional Hunger Center, the trainings for Emerson Fellows are designed using our **Leadership Capabilities Model**. This model identifies eleven core capabilities of an effective leader grouped into three interlocking categories which build upon and reinforce one another: **develop self**, **lead with others**, and **create change**.

Members of the 30th Class at policy learning event in Washington, D.C., February 2024.

A POWERFUL NETWORK

Emerson Fellows form a supportive, tight-knit learning cohort from the very first to the very last day of the program.

The Emerson Program creates an environment that fosters open dialogue and encourages fellows to learn from the diverse collection of experiences within their class. After the fellowship ends each

cohort joins the network of Emerson alums, now nearly 600 strong, by sharing resources and engaging with current and past fellows as trainers, speakers, supervisors, and mentors.



"I've grown and learned so much from fellows, Hunger Center staff, and the Emerson alum network. The fellowship has provided me with great work experiences, great friends, and an amazing network of experts to lean on in my future career."

Pierre' Collins ('19)

Current and former Emerson Fellows from across the program's three decades at the 2024 Hunger Leadership Awards in Washington, D.C.

FINANCIAL PACKAGE AND BENEFITS

Financial Package

The Hunger Center establishes its financial packages for fellows based on their location, taking into consideration the cost of living at both the field and policy placements. One resource we consider when setting financial packages is the [MIT Living Wage Calculator](#). Emerson Fellows typically receive financial packages of **no less than \$50,000** over the duration of the fellowship..

Graduate School Partnerships

Emerson alums pursuing masters' degrees in public health or public policy at select institutions of higher learning are eligible for significant discounts on tuition. As of 2023 the Hunger Center maintains partnerships with **Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College** and the **University of Virginia's Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy**.

Other Benefits

Emerson Fellows also gain:

- Membership in a dynamic learning community of fellows;
- Connection to an extensive network of alums, partners, and experts;
- Experience working with community and policy leaders;
- Training, mentoring, and leadership development; and
- Project management experience.



INDEPENDENT CONSULTANTS

Emerson Fellows serve as independent consultants and **not** as employees of the Hunger Center or their host organizations. This means that **fellows are expected to secure and finance their own health insurance, and to save for and pay their own taxes**. Accordingly, health care costs and taxes are among the factors we take into consideration when determining fellows' financial packages.

Hunger Center staff can provide Fellows with some limited guidance and share resources, but if you have not worked as a contractor and managed self-employment taxes before, we **strongly recommend** doing some research on your responsibilities under the law before you submit your application. We suggest starting with this information from the [Internal Revenue Service](#).

*28th Class Fellows **Alexandra Wilson** (left) and **Tenzin Dhakong** at orientation in Washington, D.C. **Yesenia Jimenez** ('19) speaks on a panel at the National Anti-Hunger Policy Conference.*

AFTER THE FELLOWSHIP

After their fellowships end, alums use their experience to determine how they can be most effective in ending hunger and poverty.

Many join organizations working to eradicate hunger and poverty, while others go on to pursue Master's degrees, law school, or medical school.

Wherever they go after the fellowship, alums know how to be effective agents of change for a hunger-free world.

In a 2017 survey Emerson alums reported how the fellowship made an impact on their life:

94%

said taking part in the fellowship made a **significant impact** in their personal development.

88%

said the fellowship made an impact in their ability to **lead with others**.

88%

said the fellowship made an impact in their ability to **create change**.

95%

would recommend the Emerson Fellowship to others.



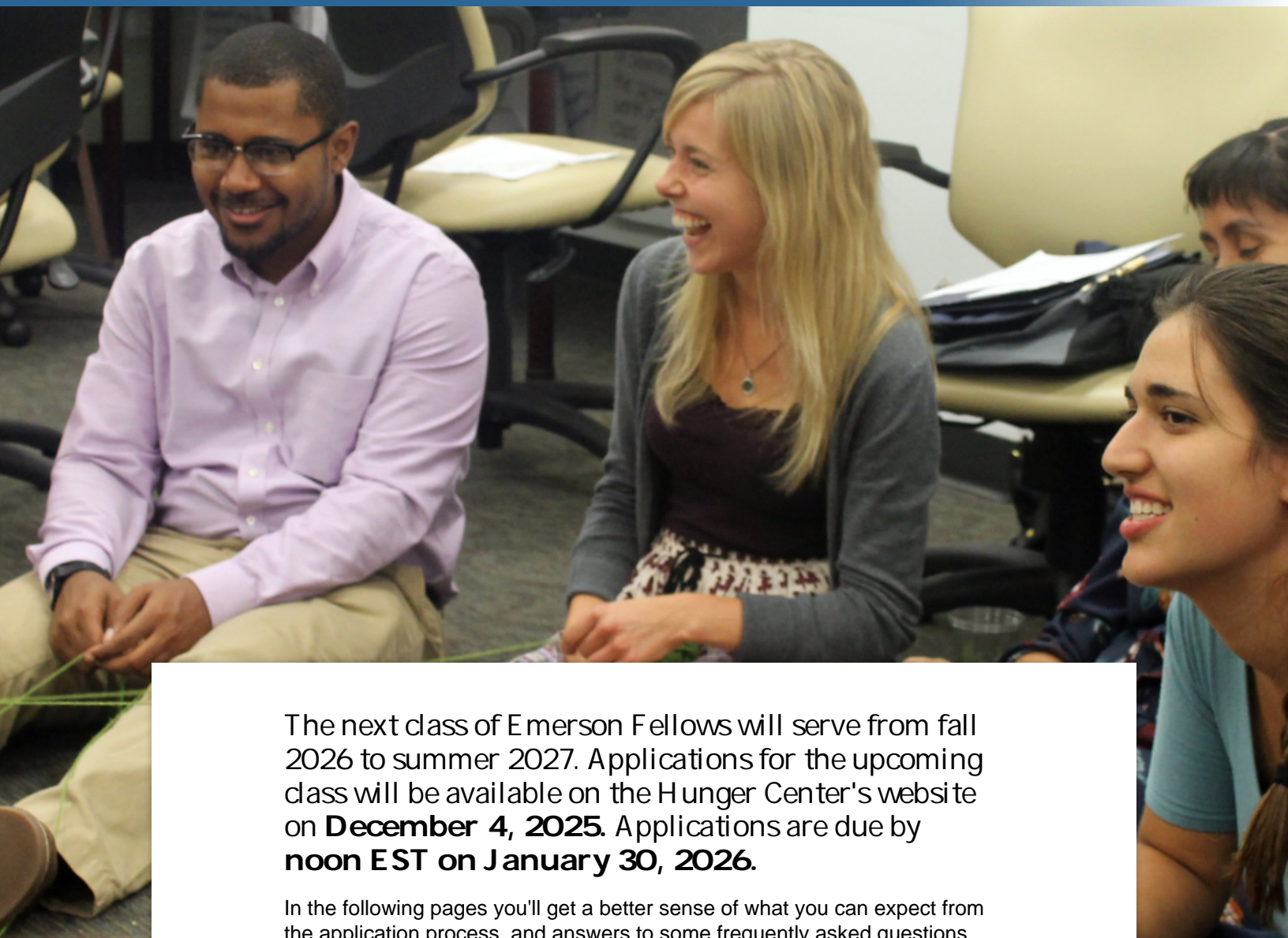
"The fellowship has been great opportunity to understand how nonprofits function and what my role will be in the fight to end hunger. With the skills I have gained, I was able to secure a job at a nonprofit in my hometown. I will be doing the work I'm passionate about and serving my community by taking community concerns and turning them into policy action."

Keisha McVey ('19)

Alum Riani Carr ('21) speaks on an awardee panel at the 2025 Hunger Leadership Awards.

PART II

How Do I Apply?



The next class of Emerson Fellows will serve from fall 2026 to summer 2027. Applications for the upcoming class will be available on the Hunger Center's website on **December 4, 2025**. Applications are due by **noon EST on January 30, 2026**.

In the following pages you'll get a better sense of what you can expect from the application process, and answers to some frequently asked questions.



"The fellowship was invaluable to cementing my career in the nonprofit sector, particularly working on issues of food insecurity and poverty."

Christina Martinez ('12)

Fellows from the 21st Class during field training, August 2014.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Emerson Fellowship applicants generally possess:

- Commitment to ending hunger and poverty in the United States
- Ability to adjust and adapt to new situations
- Commitment to addressing root causes of hunger and poverty
- Demonstrated leadership qualities and skills
- Ability to solve problems in creative and innovative ways
- Enthusiasm for learning from a wide variety of individuals with expertise in the area anti-hunger/anti-poverty space
- Willingness to search for new models in anti-hunger and anti-poverty work
- Lived experience with hunger and poverty
- Experience working in low-income communities
- Excitement about peer learning in a tight-knit community of fellows
- Bachelor's degree, or equivalent experience
- U.S. citizenship or permanent legal residency **(required)**



The 30th Class of Emerson Fellows prepare to meet with Members of Congress, spring 2024.

PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION

Applications will be available on the Hunger Center's website on December 4, 2025. They must be submitted [via the website](#). Applications must be received no later than noon EST on January 30, 2026. Follow the steps below to get started:

1

Assemble your supporting materials. Submit, **as a single pdf**, the three documents outlined below. Applications that do not include all three documents will not be considered.

- A one-page **resume**;
- A one-page **personal statement**, single spaced, which addresses the following:
 - *What values, experiences, or perspectives have shaped your interest in the Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship?*
 - *What particular qualities, knowledge, experiences, and skills will you contribute to your potential field and policy placements?*
 - *How do you expect this fellowship to contribute to achieving your professional goals?*
- A one-page response to the following **short essay questions** (each response should be single spaced and half-page in length):
 - *How have your community work and life experiences changed your perspective on hunger and poverty over time?*
 - *What role do you believe government plays, or should play, in addressing complex social problems such as hunger and poverty?*



Top: **De'Sean Weber** ('18, 2nd from right) at a ribbon cutting ceremony for a healthy corner store in Jersey City, New Jersey. Bottom: 28th Class Fellows **Amira Iwuala** and **Morgan McKinney** at their placement with Community Farm Alliance in Berea, Kentucky

TAKE OUR ADVICE...

Your supporting materials are the soul of your application—make sure you're putting your best foot forward! [Read our tips on how to improve your written responses and make your application shine.](#)

2

[Fill out the application form on our website.](#) The form contains questions about your skills, interests, and demographic information.

3

Complete your application by submitting your supporting materials through the website.

APPLICATION TIMELINE



December 4, 2025

Application form available by this date [on our website](#).



January 30, 2026 by noon EST

Deadline to submit applications.



February 2026

A selection committee of fellowship alums review applications; Hunger Center staff select semi-finalists.



March 2026

Semi-finalists invited to online group interviews with program staff.



April 2026

Finalists invited to online individual interviews with program staff.



May-June 2026

Emerson Fellows are selected and notified of acceptance on a rolling basis.



Early July 2026

Fellows notified of their field placements.



Late September 2026

33rd Class assembles in Washington, D.C. for orientation.

Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, Washington, D.C.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Fellows from the 27th Class at the conclusion of their fellowship, July 2021.

Can I choose my field and policy placements?

No. Fellows are matched with both their field and policy placements by Emerson Program staff. Prior to starting each segment of the fellowship, fellows are invited to provide their preferences for topical interests, work environment, and the skills they would like to use or learn during their upcoming placements. Staff consult these preferences, as well as the host organizations' requirements and expectations, when matching fellows and placements.

Where do the Emerson Program and the Congressional Hunger Center get their funding?

Both the Emerson Program and the Hunger Center are supported through a combination of federal, corporate, and philanthropic grants, and individual donations. Last year the Emerson Program received support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), C&S Wholesale Grocers, the Kroger Co. Foundation, and Albertsons Companies Foundation.

How do alumni of the Emerson Fellowship stay connected to the program and the Hunger Center?

Emerson Fellowship alumni stay connected in many ways. The Hunger Center encourages the fellows to think of themselves as being Emerson Fellows for life. Alumni serve the program directly as application reviewers, trainers, coaches, and supervisors at both field and policy placements. Alumni also help spread the word about the program to potential fellowship applicants, share job opportunities with the fellowship network, and organize social gatherings and reunions. And, following the fellowship, alumni continue to work to end hunger and poverty.

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you've got questions about the fellowship or the application process that this guide doesn't answer, contact Program Director **Tony Jackson** at tjackson@hungercenter.org



Congressional Hunger Center

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Have questions not covered by this guide?

Contact Internships and Recruitment Coordinator **Emily Irsik**

at eirsik@hungercenter.org

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Photo of Martin Luther King Jr Memorial courtesy [SonderQuest](#)

Photo of Rep. Emerson and Rep. Leland courtesy [Marty LaVor](#)

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Cover Photo: 32nd Class Emerson Fellows at orientation in Washington, D.C., fall 2025.

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