

What Is The Aspen-Rodel Fellowship Program?

The Aspen Institute-Rodel Fellowships in Public Leadership program, established in 2005, works to enhance American democracy by convening the nation's most promising young political leaders in a casual, bipartisan setting to explore the underlying values and principles of western democracy, the relationship between individuals and their community, and the responsibilities of public leadership.

More specifically, our purpose is:

- to create an open environment in which people of differing political viewpoints can establish friendly and trusting personal relationships that will, over time, reduce the high degree of partisan acrimony that has been so damaging to the ability of our elected officials to work together in the public interest, and
- to refocus attention on those common values that unite us and thus enhance the ability of public officials to find areas of agreement in considering the myriad problems that continually confront a diverse and growing society.

We accomplish these goals through moderated discussions of great works and great ideas, ranging from Aristotle and Thucydides to Locke, Hobbes, and Madison, as well as more contemporary works, ranging from Vaclav Havel and Martin Luther King, Jr., to Virginia Woolf, Ursula le Guin, and Amy Guttmann. While these readings and many more like them form an important backdrop for our discussions, it is the discussions themselves—open, candid, and completely private—that are the true heart of the program.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Rodel Fellowship program is open by invitation only to men and women, ideally between the ages of 25 and 45, who serve in publicly elected office. Chosen on an annual basis, each Fellowship class consists of 24 Fellows: 12 Republicans and 12 Democrats, each an emerging political leader with a reputation for intellect, thoughtfulness, and a commitment to civil dialogue. The 24-month program consists of three weekend-long seminars, each guided by skilled Aspen Institute seminar leaders and held at the Aspen Institute's facilities in Aspen, Colorado; as well as week-long educational trips in both Asia and the Middle East.

The Domestic Seminars are usually held on the Institute's Aspen, Colorado campus and begin on a Thursday evening and end early Monday morning. During the weekend, Fellows spend the majority of their time together, either around the seminar table or in more casual settings such as meals and leisure activities. All expenses associated with attending are paid for by the Aspen Institute and spouses/partners are invited to attend (at their own cost) to join all activities other than the seminar sessions. The three weekend-long sessions are described below:

Political Leadership and the Principles of Western Democracy: Fellows discuss what values lie at the heart of the American form of government and question whether or not the principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution serve our democracy well in the 21st Century. Thought is given to the balance between the ideals of participatory democracy and limited government and whether or not it is necessary to balance the two. . . as well as the meaning of democracy, freedom, and "the good society."

(over)

Democracy, Community, and the Individual: How can American society balance the needs and desires of the entire community with the nation's traditional and constitutional emphasis on personal freedom, individual rights, and individual autonomy? During this seminar, Fellows discuss the whether or not the state is a mechanism constructed by individuals to protect their rights, the feasibility of our government to impose on a citizen's preferences, and what citizens owe each other.

The Ethics and Responsibilities of Political Leadership: During this seminar Fellows explore leadership as a skill and discuss how leaders come to lead, how one determines what is "good" leadership, and the difficulty involved in making choices. Fellows question how one develops a strong ethical framework while serving the public and to what degree it matters whether one's behavior in public office fits some preconceived model of "rightness." How does one decide which goals to pursue? Is effectiveness in achieving the desired goal a legitimate standard for those tasked with the responsibilities of governing?

The International Trips. During their Fellowship, each Aspen-Rodel Fellow is given opportunities to travel on two foreign trips—one to the Middle East and one to Asia. On these educational trips, Fellows meet with high-level government officials as well as with peers in various business, civic, and non-governmental circles to explore regional political, economic, and social developments and discuss the actual and potential impact of these developments on United States policy. As with the domestic seminars, all costs associated with travel on the foreign trips is paid for by the Aspen Institute.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Aspen Institute trustee William D. Budinger, president of the Rodel Foundations, is the program's chief source of inspiration: "The United States," he says, "is founded on two bedrock ideas—freedom and democracy. It's important to make sure our political leaders understand the degree to which America's unique character rests on those two principles." Our goal is nothing less than to begin a reshaping of the American political dynamic.

Former Congressman Mickey Edwards is the director of the Aspen-Rodel Fellowship Program. Edwards served in Congress for 16 years and was chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee, the fourth-ranking Republican leadership position and a member of the Appropriations and Budget Committees. Since leaving Congress, Edwards has taught at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, the Harvard Law School, the Georgetown University Public Policy Institute, and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University.

NOMINATION OF FELLOWS

Candidates should be holding elective public office at any level of American government (local, state, or federal) and should ideally be between the ages of 25 and 45. Individuals cannot nominate themselves for the Aspen-Rodel Fellowship; they must be nominated by recognized leaders of the political, business, or professional communities; by current or former Aspen-Rodel Fellows; or by members of the Aspen-Rodel Fellowship advisory board.