



LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION

LAF Fellowship for Innovation and Leadership

Application Instructions: Recent Olmsted Scholars (named from 2020 to 2025)

The Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF) is pleased to announce the call for applications for its 2026-27 LAF Fellowship for Innovation and Leadership. The year-long fellowship will run from June 2026 to June 2027.

This document provides background information and instructions on the materials needed for recent LAF Olmsted Scholars to apply to be part of the 2026-27 LAF Fellowship cohort.

The full set of application materials (including the employer letter of support and reference letters) must be submitted **by 11:59pm EDT on September 15, 2025**.

For more information about the fellowship, visit: <http://www.lafoundation.org/laf-fellowship>

LAF Fellowship: Recent Olmsted Scholars

This document describes a special tier of the *LAF Fellowship for Innovation and Leadership* that is exclusively available to individuals who were recognized through the *LAF Olmsted Scholars Program* when they were landscape architecture students.

This opportunity is available to LAF Olmsted Scholars, including National Olmsted Scholars and Finalists, who were named in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, or 2025. Individuals named as LAF Olmsted Scholars before 2020 are not eligible for this special tier, but they can apply to the fellowship using the mid-career or senior-level application, as appropriate.

Recent Olmsted Scholars' participation in the fellowship is meant to be exploratory. They may use the fellowship to advance a project or to develop a proposal idea that can be used to pursue future funding. Unlike the mid-career and senior-level Fellows, recent Olmsted Scholars are not expected to take time off to dedicate 3 months' time over the course of one year to pursue their project.

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OVERVIEW

The *LAF Fellowship for Innovation and Leadership* was established to foster transformational leadership capacity and support innovation to advance the field of landscape architecture. The fellowship is an opportunity for landscape architecture professionals to dedicate time over the course of one year to nurture emerging ideas and to think deeply. It is designed as a time to reflect, research, explore, create, test, and develop ideas into action.

Since 2008, the *LAF Olmsted Scholars Program* has recognized over 1,200 landscape architecture students for their exceptional leadership potential. Participation of up to 2 recent Olmsted Scholars in each cohort of the *LAF Fellowship for Innovation and Leadership* is part of LAF's ongoing efforts to support, cultivate, inspire, and build community among these future leaders of the profession.

Recent Olmsted Scholars (those named in the past 6 years) can apply to participate in the fellowship based on a proposed project idea they wish to explore or advance. Selected Olmsted Scholars receive a \$5,000 financial award and participate in three 2.5-day residencies over the course of a year, as well as monthly video calls with their fellowship cohort and facilitators. With the support and guidance of this intergenerational group, the Olmsted Scholars engage in presentations, discussions, mentorship, and thoughtful critique to develop and refine their project idea alongside the mid-career and senior-level Fellows.

The Olmsted Scholars are critical part of the LAF Fellowship and its aims to support leadership growth and intergenerational mentorship. Through this unique program, these emerging professionals can continue to nurture and pursue their passions and interests while advancing projects and ideas with the potential to bring about impactful change for the discipline, the environment, and humanity.

PROGRAM GOALS

As we confront increasingly complex and interrelated environmental, social, and economic challenges of the 21st century, this fellowship brings together a diverse group of landscape architecture professionals to develop and test new ideas in support of a healthier, more equitable, and sustainable world. It is an entrepreneurial investment in the people and ideas that will drive the future of the profession.

The *LAF Fellowship for Innovation and Leadership* nurtures and inspires landscape architecture professionals toward the following goals:

1) Support Innovation in Landscape Architecture

By providing a testing ground with critical review and constructive feedback, the fellowship facilitates the realization of each Fellow's proposed project. Through inquiry that raises supportive questions, Fellows explore, tune, and evolve their ideas. The fellowship provides support and guidance to set goals, overcome obstacles, and identify next steps.

Fellows take advantage of LAF's broad reach and network within the discipline. They present their ideas, engage in critical discussion, and collaborate with leading academics, practitioners, allied organizations, and industry partners. Additionally, Fellows are expected to share their work



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strategically with the public in ways that will increase the visibility of landscape architecture and its role in addressing critical issues.

2) Cultivate Transformational Leadership

Effective innovation requires criticality, courage, and profound insights into the world in which we live. Through readings and discussions, Fellows explore transformation leadership and are tasked with building leadership capacity during their fellowship year. They discover their intrinsic motivation and identify the change they want to see and why.

3) Foster Intergenerational Mentorship

The fellowship also aims to build leadership capacity through intergenerational mentorship. The Fellows and emerging professionals from LAF's *Olmsted Scholars Program* are brought together as a cohort team. Throughout the year, this intergenerational team will present, discuss, and provide guidance and support to each other towards the pursuit of their ideas and future endeavors. This structure fosters camaraderie as cohort participants mentor, inspire, and teach one another.

FELLOWSHIP STRUCTURE

Each year, 3-4 mid-career and senior-level Fellows and up to 2 emerging professionals from LAF's *Olmsted Scholars Program* are selected for the *LAF Fellowship for Innovation and Leadership*. These 5-6 individuals are brought together as a cohort team and participate in the fellowship together under the guidance and support of two fellowship facilitators.

Three residencies form the core of the year-long fellowship program. At the residencies, Fellows present their projects and progress, explore the concepts of transformational leadership, and participate in facilitated discussions. The time between residencies provides an open structure for Fellows to work in-depth on their projects with monthly check-in calls. At the final residency, Fellows share their findings and results with targeted stakeholders in a symposium format.

The final residency for one cohort overlaps with the first residency for the following year's cohort, allowing for more knowledge-sharing and exchange.

FELLOWSHIP AWARDS FOR OLMSTED SCHOLARS

LAF awards up to 2 recent Olmsted Scholar fellowships annually, based on the merit of the applicant pool and available funding.

- Each selected Olmsted Scholar receives one \$5,000 award. The award is distributed in three payments of \$1,666.67 upon successful completion of each Residency. Attendance at residencies is mandatory for payment of funds.
- LAF also provides travel and lodging stipends for each selected Olmsted Scholar to attend the three residencies.



FELLOWSHIP EXPECTATIONS FOR OLMSTED SCHOLARS

- Participating Olmsted Scholars must attend and complete each of the three 2.5-day residencies that take place during the fellowship year.
- Olmsted Scholars must participate in regular (1-2 per month) video calls with the fellowship cohort and facilitator(s). This includes monthly check-ins, a half-day virtual "mini-residency" in the winter, and six leadership conversations throughout the fellowship year.
- Olmsted Scholars should dedicate time outside of their work/school commitments to further their project between and in preparation for the residencies. With the exception of the residencies and monthly calls with the cohort, Olmsted Scholars are not expected to take time off from work or school.
- The Olmsted Scholars' project work is intended to be exploratory. While the fellowship structure and content provide a framework to support the Olmsted Scholar in advancing their project idea or proposal, this is not stipulated. In the early stages of the fellowship, Olmsted Scholars communicate their personal goals and objectives for the year, and these are used to guide and evaluate progress.

PROJECTS

Each recent Olmsted Scholar applies with a concept, idea, or project – in any phase of development – that can be further explored and advanced through participation in the fellowship. The proposed project:

- Should explore topics or solutions that have potential to bring about impactful change to the environment and humanity. They may drive positive change in the world beyond the traditional scope of landscape architecture practice.
- Should contribute to knowledge and innovation in landscape architecture.
- Do not need to be physical in nature; they may be abstract or concrete.
- May be grounded in theoretical or historical investigations; product, program, or business plan development*; new practice or service models; built work; new technology; or other activities.
- May be the project described in the essay submitted as part of the original *Olmsted Scholars Program* nomination if the applicant is still passionate about advancing this project.

**For projects focused on product or business plan development, the applicant must make the case that the business pursuit serves the advancement of the discipline. Individual gain must not be the primary outcome.*



RESIDENCIES

All members of the fellowship cohort (Fellows and Olmsted Scholars) are required to participate in three 2.5-day residencies in Washington, DC. Full attendance and participation in each of the residencies is crucial to the success of the fellowship and is mandatory to receive funding. Travel and lodging stipends are provided.

Residencies consist of presentations, critique, and discussions among cohort members with invited critics that may include academics, practitioners, representatives of allied organizations, industry partners, and current and past members of the LAF Board of Directors.

Residency I: Fellowship Kick-Off

- Deepen commitment of each cohort member to their project pursuit and identify the obstacles in their path
- Establish the cohort as a mentorship and support network
- Introduce “transformational leadership”

Residency II: Fellowship Mid-Point

- Share progress
- Review and critique execution plans and draft dissemination products
- Continue leadership assessment, development, and reflection

Residency III: Final Symposium

- Present project, products, and next steps to the LAF constituents and targeted stakeholders at a symposium event
- Mentor and support the incoming fellowship cohort

VIRTUAL CHECK-INS

Fellows participate in monthly video calls to report on progress and discuss relevant issues. A half-day “mini-residency” is held via video call in the winter. Approximately six additional leadership conversations take place via video call throughout the fellowship year. For these, Fellows are given tailored leadership readings, which they then discuss as a cohort.

Additional discussions and ongoing dialogue are encouraged to enrich mentorship, collaboration, and the overall fellowship experience.



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ELIGIBILITY

- LAF Olmsted Scholars, including National Olmsted Scholars and Finalists, who were named in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, or 2025 are eligible to apply. To check which year an Olmsted Scholar was named, visit <https://www.lafoundation.org/what-we-do/scholarships/olmsted-scholars-program/past-olmsted-scholars>.
- Applicants must be able to communicate in written and spoken English at an advanced/professional level.
- Current LAF staff, members of the LAF Board of Directors, and members of LAF committees are not eligible. Former staff and former members of the LAF Board of Directors and committees who meet the above requirements are eligible.

SELECTION PROCESS

Accomplished and insightful leaders in the landscape architecture discipline serve as jurors to review applications and select the fellowship participants. Applicants selected as finalists are expected to be available for a web-based video interview in December. Those selected for the fellowship will be notified in January.

Applicants will be evaluated on the following:

- Quality of the applicant's submission
- Project's contribution to knowledge and innovation in the discipline of landscape architecture
- Project's potential to increase landscape architecture's role in addressing global challenges
- Feasibility of project objectives
- Potential to expand landscape architecture's leadership capacity into new areas
- Applicant's ability to provide and be open to mentorship, both as a mentor and a mentee
- Potential to advance the applicant's growth and development as a leader

APPLICATION PROCESS

LAF uses SlideRoom as its online application platform and will only accept applications submitted through this system. All application materials (including the employer letter of support and reference letters) must be submitted **by 11:59pm EDT on September 15**.

Visit <http://lafoundation.slideroom.com> to use the system. Once you have created an account, scroll down to select the appropriate application type (Recent Olmsted Scholars), and click "Begin" to start the application process. You may save, edit, and review your work prior to submitting. An application fee of \$10 (USD) must be paid through SlideRoom when the application is submitted.



APPLICATION CONTENTS

Applicants should submit materials that best display relevant work, project goals, and ability to pursue the proposed project. All submissions must adhere to guidelines and deadlines in order to be considered. Additional materials will not be reviewed.

Required Materials

1. **General Application Form:** Complete this online form with basic contact information.
2. **Statement of Intent** (500 word max): Upload a PDF with a brief statement on why you want to participate in the year-long fellowship and what you expect to gain. Clearly state if you intend to use the fellowship to advance a project or to develop a proposal idea for which you intend to seek funding after the fellowship period.
3. **Project Abstract** (200 word max): Upload a PDF with the title and abstract of your project.
4. **Project Proposal** (1,500 word, 3 page max): Upload your project proposal in PDF format. The proposal must be grounded in appropriate literature, practice, and/or observation and include the following sections:
 - **Significance:** Explain what opportunity the project provides for the discipline, landscape architects, and/or sustainable or resilient landscape solutions. Address why there is a need for the proposed project and the intended impacts of the project.
 - **Objectives:** Explain your objectives for the fellowship year to advance the project proposal, and speak to the long-term goals and objectives of the project beyond the fellowship year.
 - **Stakeholders/Target Audience:** Identify people who need to know about the project. This could include, but should not be limited to: people who could be affected by the project, people who could further the project goals, or major stakeholders/decision makers.
 - **Dissemination:** Propose at least one mode to disseminate the project either by the end of the fellowship year or as a future ambition. This could include, but should not be limited to editorials, print journals, online platforms, film, television, or conferences. Please be specific and identify both the type of dissemination products you are looking to create and the audience(s) those products are intended to serve/reach.
5. **Project Schedule** (2 page max): Upload a PDF that shows a work plan with significant milestones over the course of the fellowship year, from June 2026 to June 2027. The schedule should clearly outline the time you will dedicate to the project outside of your formal employment or academic commitments - keep in mind that Olmsted Scholars are NOT expected to take time off from work/school with the exception of time for the residencies and monthly calls.
6. **Reference Letter** (2 page max): Upload a signed letter from a professional reference that addresses your interest and ability to pursue the proposed project.



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7. **Employer Support Letter** (2 page max): Upload a signed letter from your employer or academic supervisor acknowledging their support for you taking time away from work/school to attend residencies and monthly calls. The letter also should address your capacity to pursue the proposed project and speak to the value that your participation and project interest will bring to the fellowship program. If you are self-employed or unemployed at time of application, submit one additional Reference Letter.
8. **Curriculum Vitae** (3 page max): Upload a PDF that outlines your academic and career history, highlighting relevant experience that supports your interest and ability to pursue the proposed project.
9. **Portfolio** (10 page max): Upload one PDF (10MB max) with up to 10 pages of relevant material that further supports your interest and ability to pursue the proposed project. Provide brief descriptions of your responsibility and role within your submitted materials and identify the firm and client and the roles of other contributors and participants, if applicable.
10. **Statement of Commitment to Attend Residencies:** Check the box that acknowledges that by submitting the application, you commit to attend all three residencies:

I state my intent to attend all three residencies should I be selected to participate in the LAF Fellowship. If I fail to attend any of the residencies, LAF has the right to withhold the relevant proportion of the funding, exclude my work from documentation of the LAF Fellowship for Innovation and Leadership, and dismiss me from the fellowship program.

11. **Statement of Accurate and Complete Information:** Check the box that acknowledges that all information provided is true, accurate, current, and complete.

By agreeing to this statement, I acknowledge that all information provided in this application is true, accurate, current, and complete and that, unless otherwise cited, the work included here is my original work. I also acknowledge that if any information I have provided is untrue, inaccurate, not current, or incomplete, or if the work belongs to another, uncited author—either published or unpublished—LAF has the right to reject this application. LAF has the right to notify the jury if they determine that any information provided is false, inaccurate, or plagiarized.

12. **Application Fee:** \$10 to be paid by credit card on SlideRoom.