

Deanea LeFlore

Class XLII

Chief of Protocol, Mayor's Office of Trade and International Affairs

What was made possible for you through the ALF scholarship?

The feeling that we are all equal and that each of our voices was as important as the other's was an incredibly powerful part of my ALF experience. I love the inclusivity that is the bedrock of ALF.

ALF meetings were utopian scenarios. In fact, sometimes it was hard to come back into the real world after a day with my ALF classmates. Now, however, I have some new tools that I learned from my "utopian experience" that I can use to start recreating that experience for myself and others in my personal and professional life.

In ALF, I learned it was my "duty" to offer my perspective. ALF created a space and an opportunity where each of us is supposed to speak up and where the mentality was "if I don't speak up, then I'm not sharing my gifts." This mindset is not arrogance—it is the mindset of inclusivity and inviting multiple perspectives. ALF has helped me share much more and have a greater appreciation of the value that each of us brings to the table.

Other tools that were taught in ALF included techniques for having better conversations, which were referred to by the acronym "SALSA." I found the S for summarizing to be particularly useful. We have all experienced a disagreement during which someone repeats the same thing many times and in different ways because they think you are not understanding their perspective (and sometimes you may not be). Allow a person to speak one's mind and then summarize what you have heard to confirm you have understood. Once you repeat back what you heard, the person understands that you heard and you can both move on when the conversation gets stuck—it is like a magic trick! It is not enough to say you understand, you must demonstrate it. In addition to summarizing, we also discussed the value of intentionally asking questions (represented by the first letter A). My family perceives me to be a better listener now. I now listen to my family members' stories with intention and that has made a positive impact on our relationship.

Since I've participated in my ALF class, some of my classmates and I noticed that Mayor Turner employs many of the leadership techniques that we learned in our sessions. He participated in an ALF class too (Class XX). He embodies a lot of what ALF stands for, including valuing diversity and inclusiveness.

What does being part of the ALF network mean to you?

I made lifelong friends in ALF who will have my back forever no matter what-- and I'll have theirs. That's so important and special to me. I cherish that. In my classmates, I have an incredible group of people to talk to and bounce ideas off of. They are an invaluable, cheerleading section -- people who lift me up. Even though we are so different from one another, they have experienced many of the challenges that I face and provide really good advice. I am so grateful to have had the ALF experience with them.

Without scholarships, what will others be missing?

The whole experience! I think that scholarships are an essential part of making this opportunity available. People like me, who do not work for a corporation that can assist them with tuition, would not get to participate and be a part of this amazing organization. It is so inspiring to be part of a group with so many people working for the common good. Without scholarships, only people who work for major corporations or are financially able to pay the full cost, could participate, consequently excluding a whole segment of the community.

I was really excited when I found out that someone had nominated me and I was accepted to participate in ALF, however, I was immediately deflated by the reality that there was no way I could afford the program. The scholarship to participate in the ALF program undoubtedly made this opportunity a reality for me.