

Sterling Leadership Fellows

Development Program

2025-2026 Information Brochure

Mission: To develop aspiring leaders by stimulating transformation from a management to a leadership perspective & behavior, to elevate professional, personal, & organizational performance excellence.

Applications due: April 18, 2025

Link to Download the Application

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Contents

Program Overview How to Use When to Use **Page Purpose and Benefits** 3 **Program Components** 3 Read, understand, and adhere to the Code Immediately; **Code of Ethical Conduct** 6 of Ethical Conduct. review as needed Refer to this calendar for key program Immediately; **Program Calendar** dates and topics, and mark your calendars 7 review as needed to prepare for the sessions ahead. Review descriptions of the types of **Logistics and Pertinent** program events and guidance for As needed 9 Information scheduling your time. **Capstone Project Purpose** 11 Description 11 **Preparing for the Project** 11 **Developing Your Proposal** 11 12 **Reviewing the Proposal** and Project **Deliverables** Use this as a guide in preparing materials Before each session **1**3 and information. **Roles and Responsibilities** Give this to your sponsor and review it Before the first 15 before you meet with her or him. Refer to meeting with your it during the meeting to ensure that you sponsor cover all essential areas. Give this to your sponsor and review it Before the first **Meeting with Your** 16 before you meet. Use it to help craft an meeting with your **Sponsor** approach to the capstone project. sponsor **Sterling Organizational** For viewing and referral while developing Before the May 17 and updating the Organizational Profile. 2025 Session **Profile Series YouTube** Links

Program Overview

Purpose and Benefits

To offer a leadership development program centered on Sterling Core Values and Concepts, forming relationships with and learning from Florida Governors Sterling Award and Georgia Oglethorpe Award recipient role models, their senior executives, and other expert topic presenters. Participants will benefit from:

- Accelerated leadership development.
- In-depth learning from world-class organizations and their senior executives.
- Relationships with other executives that will benefit Fellows now and into the future.
- Knowledge of the Sterling Framework and Criteria for Performance Excellence and the impact of systems thinking on organizations.
- Personal interactions with role-model organizations and their senior executives.
- A deeper understanding of leadership, strategic planning, sustainability, core competencies, customer engagement, employee engagement, integration of processes, plans, resources, and goals, and measuring the right things.
- Focus on Sterling Core Values and Concepts.
- Ongoing virtual meetings/conference calls to enhance opportunities to learn and share.
- Relationships with the cadre of Fellows, who possess expertise often sought by others.
- Coaching and Mentorship by Sterling Framework experts.

Program Components

Interaction with Successful Senior Executives

The Sterling Leadership Fellows cohort meets with visionary leaders who have achieved exceptional business results in multiple venues. On-site, small-group workshops with senior executives from Florida Governors Sterling Award and Georgia Oglethorpe Award recipient organizations allow the participants to learn how the senior executives have led their organizations effectively. In addition, the Annual Sterling Conferences in 2025 and 2026, the South Florida Sterling Summit in 2026, and virtual sessions provide formal and informal opportunities to network with senior executives from a variety of successful organizations.

Workshops with Role-Model Organizations

Core Value themed on-site sessions at Florida Governors Sterling Award and Georgia Oglethorpe Award recipient organizations, focusing on different components of a successful leadership and management system. At each workshop, Fellows learn how senior leaders have set a vision for and achieved success aligned with Sterling Core Values and Concepts across their organizations, see the impact of a systems perspective on organizational success, and tour the organizations' facilities. A key component of the workshops is the opportunity to raise and discuss questions and issues with senior leaders, other experts, and Fellows.

Individualized Learning Objectives and Plan

In collaboration with program staff, each Sterling Leadership Fellow creates a set of individualized learning objectives and a plan to achieve them based on the Fellow's needs and those of the sponsoring organization. The capstone project embodies this personalized learning and development. Additionally, personalized feedback and guidance are accessible throughout the thirteen-month Fellowship program.

Organizational Profile

Fellows will develop their sponsoring Organizational Profile or update a currently existing Profile, understanding the organization's context and identifying the pressures and influences affecting the organization and its environment.

Personalized Capstone Project

Each Fellow develops a capstone project addressing a strategic issue or need that is significant to the sponsoring organization and identified in the Organizational Profile. The project integrates and applies learning from the program sessions, other members of the Fellows cohort, and award-recipient senior executives. Each Fellow will present information on progress at each session (beginning in June 2025) and provide a presentation on the results of his or her capstone project at the final session. Each Fellow will document their Capstone Project in a visual storyboard for entry into the Sterling Storyboard Showcase at the Sterling Annual 2026 Conference.

Orientation to the Sterling Excellence Framework, Criteria, and Core Values and Concepts

Fellows participate in a pre-conference workshop in May 2025 as an orientation to the Sterling Excellence Framework, focusing on specific Criteria categories. In addition, each monthly session, virtual or in-person, is themed to the core values and reinforced by presentations and workshops. From senior executives of role-model organizations, Fellows learn how executives have applied the framework and concepts to improve their own leadership effectiveness and their organizations' business results. The focus is on concepts of strategic significance.

Sterling Annual Conferences and South Florida Summit

Sterling Leadership Fellows will participate in the Sterling Annual Conferences in 2025 and 2026. Fellows will participate in the Managing for Excellence Certification Track in 2025 and in the Leadership Track in 2026. They will also be invited to the 2026 Executive Round Table event, networking with and learning from other senior executives experienced in using the Sterling Framework and Criteria for performance excellence. Additionally, Fellows will attend the Sterling South Florida Summit in 2026, where they will meet and interact with senior executives and others from award-recipient organizations. They will hear presentations to learn how to apply Sterling principles to achieve excellence.

Peer Learning

Sterling Leadership Fellows have multiple opportunities to build a network of relationships with others in their cohort for mutual learning and support. Fellows participate as a group in six inperson sessions (including the Conferences and Summit) and seven virtual sessions themed to the Sterling Core Values and Concepts focusing on key areas of success for leaders. In addition,

Fellows exchange ideas and opinions as they wish through both synchronous and asynchronous discussions.

Expectations for Completion of the Program

The Sterling Leadership Fellows alumni are an elite group committed to performance excellence, improving their own organizations, and sharing with the Fellows' network to help others succeed. Therefore, the program has certain expectations of its participants to graduate:

- Attend sessions.
- Participate in meetings and small-group settings by asking questions, offering feedback, volunteering to share, etc.
- Hold confidential proprietary and personal information that you hear from other Fellows, but do share best practices learned at meetings with your own organization.
- Complete a capstone project, presentation, and storyboard before Graduation.

Code of Ethical Conduct

Members of the Sterling Leadership Fellows development program pledge to uphold all applicable legal requirements and ethical principles during all activities associated with their participation in the Fellows Program.

Fellows will be guided by four principles intended to enhance the sharing and learning of all parties: integrity, professional conduct, confidentiality, and respect for intellectual property. In promoting high standards of ethical conduct, they will:

- Conduct themselves professionally, guided by truth, accuracy, fairness, respect, and responsibility in all their interactions.
- Avoid discussions or actions that might lead to, or imply an interest in, restraint of trade: market or customer allocation schemes, price fixing, dealing arrangements, bid rigging, bribery, or misappropriation.
- Avoid sharing information that their organization considers proprietary and protect the confidential information of others.
- In any sharing exchange, be willing to provide the same level of information that they request.
- On graduating as a Sterling Leadership Fellow, I can use the following designation: Sterling Leadership Fellow. Fellows may use the Sterling Leadership Fellows logo (e-mailed to them upon program completion) on business cards, résumés, and other personal promotions; however, they may not use The Sterling Council logo in any personal or professional communication or materials.

For specific questions or guidance, please contact your employer's legal counsel.

Program Calendar for Cohort 2 (Themes may be interchanged)

Boldface indicates an in-person session.

Activity*	Content		
ckoff	Overview of the Fellows program;		
	Introduction to Sterling Core values		
	and Concepts; Introduction to		
	Organizational Profile		
25 Pre-conference and	Pre-conference workshop Criteria		
nual Conference and Banquet	101; Registration in Managing for		
·	Excellence Certification Track; Board		
	Reception		
eme: Systems Perspective	Networking; Systems Perspective		
	presentation; Organization profile		
	presentations from Fellows with		
	feedback; Capstone Project Selection		
eme: Visionary leadership	Networking Dinner; Visionary		
•	Leadership presentation; Role-Model		
	Presentations and Facility Tour;		
	Capstone Project framework		
	presentation and Sample;		
	Performance improvement Training		
eme: Customer-Focused	Networking; Customer-Focused		
cellence	Excellence presentation; Capstone		
	project Proposal, updates and		
	feedback		
eme: Organizational Learning	Networking; Organizational Learning		
	presentation; Capstone project		
	updates and feedback		
eme: Agility and Resilience	Networking Dinner; Agility and		
	Resilience presentation; Role-Model		
	Presentations and Facility Tour;		
	Capstone project updates and		
	feedback		
eme: Societal Contributions	Networking; Societal Contributions		
	presentation; Capstone project		
	updates and feedback		
eme: Valuing People	Networking; Valuing People		
- ·	presentation; Capstone project		
	updates and feedback		
eme: Managing by Fact	Networking Dinner; Sterling South		
	Florida Summit; Managing by Fact		
	presentation; Role-Model		
	Presentations and Facility Tour;		
	Sterling Board of Directors		
	interaction; Capstone project updates		
	interaction, capstone project updates		
	25 Pre-conference and Inual Conference and Banquet eme: Systems Perspective eme: Visionary leadership eme: Customer-Focused cellence eme: Organizational Learning eme: Agility and Resilience eme: Societal Contributions eme: Valuing People eme: Managing by Fact		

Date and Location	Activity*	Content
February 24, 2026,	Theme: Focus on Success &	Networking; Focus on Success &
Virtual	Innovation	Innovation presentation; Capstone project updates and feedback
March 24, 2026, Virtual	Theme: Delivering Value &	Networking; Delivering Value &
	Results	Results presentation; Capstone
		project updates and feedback
April 28-29, 2026,	Theme: Ethics and Transparency	Networking Dinner; Ethics and
Central Florida Region		Transparency presentation; Role-
		Model Presentations & Facility Tour;
		Final Capstone project presentation and feedback
May 27-30. 2026,	Graduation; 2026 Annual	Registration in Leadership
Conference in Orlando	Conference and Banquet	Certification Track; Board Reception;
		Cohort 2 and 3 Round Table and
		Reception Networking Event;
		Graduation Ceremony; Executive
		Round Table

Logistics and Pertinent Information

Please mark your calendars for the events listed in the program calendar above. Logistics details will be provided in advance of each session.

Sterling Leadership Fellows Investment: \$12,000

(Inquire for Available Payment Options)

Fee Includes:

- 13 Monthly Sessions plus Orientation.
 - Six In-Person (two days)
 - Eight Virtual (four hours)
- Program Materials.
- Full 2025 Annual Conference Registration including Annual Sterling Awards Banquet.
- 2025 Pre-Conference Registration.
- Full 2026 Annual Conference Registration including Annual Sterling Awards Banquet.
- 2026 Invitation-Only Sterling Executive Round Table.
- 2026 South Florida Summit Registration.
- Networking Dinners & Receptions.
- Unlimited Telephone/Virtual Support from Sterling Staff and Sterling expert resource network.
- Fellows Mentoring and Coaching from Sterling Master Examiners.
- Support from Sterling Staff and Sterling expert resource network to develop or update Organizational Profile of Home Organization.
- Support from Sterling Staff and Sterling expert resource network for developing and completing Capstone Project addressing strategic needs of home organization.
- Exposure to regional Role Model Organizations.
- Opportunity for knowledge-sharing with co-workers and teammates at home organization.

- Opportunity for personal interaction and knowledge sharing with role model organizational leaders and staff.
- Process improvement and tools training.
- Access to performance improvement tools.
- Graduation and Sterling Fellows Certification.
- Sterling Fellows Alumni Network Access.

On-Site Sessions

- Transportation, lodging, and meals are the responsibility of individual Fellows. Meal
 exceptions include continental breakfasts, networking lunches and receptions included with
 each Sterling Annual Conference and South Florida Summit, and networking dinners in each
 in-person session.
- Arrival and departure times: Ensure that you arrive at each on-site session in time to check in, join the group at the arranged times and attend the session events. Please plan to stay until the actual end time for each in-person session.
- **Networking Dinners:** For in-person sessions, the Fellows program will arrange a time and place to meet for an informal networking dinner.

Capstone Project

Purpose

The leadership capstone project will address a strategically important organizational issue. It is intended to support the Fellow candidate in driving strategic results improvement with significant, systemic impact in the home organization. This is to be accomplished by integrating Sterling concepts and the best practices of Award recipients that are learned throughout the Sterling Leadership Fellows Program experience.

Description

In collaboration with your sponsor, you will identify and define a problem or issue originated in what you learned when completing the Organizational Profile, develop an approach that taps the learning and leadership skills you gain from the Fellows Program, and produce actionable results. Sterling Master Examiner mentors and coaches will serve as advisers during the project.

You will design your capstone project to fit your interests and leadership focus along with your organization's distinctive needs. Most likely, your project will require substantial personal effort and incorporate the work of others under your direction. The project, or a well-defined portion of it, must be achievable within the time frame of the Fellows Program. You will

- in consensus with your supervisor and organizational leadership, identify a problem or issue originating in the Organizational Profile project.
- define clear goals and specific objectives.
- create a team of individuals at your home organization to work with you on the project.
- develop a detailed proposal/charter with a timeline for completion.
- conduct primary and secondary research, as needed.
- perform quantitative and/or qualitative analyses.
- develop and test solutions.
- formulate options and recommendations.
- produce a written product for your organization.
- deliver a 15- to 20-minute presentation at the Fellows April 28-29, 2026, in-person session created with a focus on your intended audience (e.g., board of directors, employees).
- develop a storyboard and deliver a more detailed presentation within your organization, as appropriate.
- display the storyboard at the 2026 Sterling Conference venue.

Preparing for the Project (June 2025)

You should begin planning your capstone project by reviewing your organization's current Profile to identify a strategic challenge or issue that has significant impact on organizational results. In collaboration with your sponsor, you should select the focus of your capstone project before the July 22-23, 2025 in-person session.

Developing Your Proposal/Charter (June-August 2025)

Be sure to develop your ideas and write the proposal in conjunction with your sponsor, who will be asked to approve the project and commit to supporting it. Obtain input from the Sterling staff and mentors/coaches, as appropriate. Once you have gained agreement, write a project proposal/charter for submission to the Fellows Program. Be brief, but specific, with measurable goals. In your proposal,

- Describe what the project will entail; how it relates to one or more of your organization's strategic challenges, strategic advantages, core competencies, or strategic issue; and how you will carry it out. Describe the problem, and briefly describe the phases in the project and their time frames.
- Describe the desired outcome.
- Identify your home organization team which will work with you on this project.
- You will submit to Sterling staff the written plan and then present an overview to the other Fellows at the August 2025 virtual session.

Reviewing the Proposal and Project (August 2025 and ongoing to April 2026)

A critical source of learning during the capstone project is the substantial individualized feedback you will receive. You will benefit from regular feedback on all aspects of the project and its implementation, as well as from the opportunity for self-assessment.

The feedback process begins in the design phase of the project. As you design your project and develop your proposal, you will receive significant input from your sponsor, Sterling staff and mentors and coaches. You will provide a brief update presentation to the cohort at each following session to gain outside perspectives throughout the project. It is suggested your presentation answer the questions shown below, as appropriate to the stage of development of your project.

Capstone Project: Format for Update Presentations			
What's the problem that you are trying to solve?	8. What progress have you made?		
2. What Organizational Value(s) is this project focused on?	9. What tools have you used or plan to use?		
3. How has your problem statement changed, if at all?	10. How are you planning to document any process or changes to ensure they will continue to be deployed and sustained as people come and go?		
4. In brief, what's the context for this problem?	11. What obstacles have you encountered? How are you addressing these obstacles?		

5. Who are the stakeholders who will be affected and who will be needed for support?	12. Where would you like help/feedback?
6. How are their perspectives included in addressing the problem?	13. What are your lessons learned?
7. What metrics will measure progress? Have you established baselines?	

At the April 28-29, 2026, in-person session, you will present your final project results to the other Fellows. Your Sponsor, Supervisor, and project team will be invited to this session to participate in person or virtually. You will create a Storyboard for entry into the Sterling Storyboard Showcase at the 2026 Annual Sterling Conference.

Deliverables

For Session	Task	Deliverable Assignment	Due
May 5, 2025	Introduction and Kickoff	• N/A	• N/A
May 27- 30, 2025	 View Sterling Organizational Profile series on YouTube (links on the last page of this Information Packet). 	Complete viewing Organizational Profile series videos	• May 27, 2025
June 24, 20	Complete your Organization's Profile	Completed Organizational Profile	• June 24, 2025
July 22-23, 2025	 Select focus of Capstone Project (i.e., strategic challenge or potential new system/process design with strategic impact on organization). 	Capstone Project Topic Selection	• July 22, 2025
August 26, 2025	 Draft initial Capstone Project plan/proposal/charter. 	 Project plan/proposal/charter Present Plan to cohort using "Capstone Project: Format for Updates" questions above. 	• August 26, 2025
September 23, 2025	 Continue Implementation of Project Plan 	Update Capstone Project Presentation	• September 23, 2025
October 21-22, 2025	 Continue Implementation of Project Plan 	Update Capstone Project Presentation	• October 21, 2025
November 18, 2025	 Continue Implementation of Project Plan 	Update Capstone Project Presentation	• November 18, 2025
December 9, 2025	 Continue Implementation of Project Plan 	Update Capstone Project Presentation	• December 9, 2025
January 21-22, 2026	 Continue Implementation of Project Plan 	Update Capstone Project Presentation	• January 21, 2026

February 24, 2026	 Continue Implementation of Project Plan 	Update Capstone Project Presentation	•	February 24, 2026
March 24, 2026	 Continue Implementation of Project Plan 	Update Capstone Project Presentation	•	March 24, 2026
April 28- 29, 2026	Complete Implementation of Project Plan	 Completed Project and Presentation. Present your capstone project (25 minutes, followed by brief discussion). Please include these elements: Organizational Profile context Problem statement Strategic significance to Organization. Relevant areas of the Sterling Framework and Core Values you considered. Discoveries, obstacles, solutions. Project result. 	•	April 28, 2026
May 26- 29. 2026	 Complete Project Storyboard for entry to Sterling Storyboard Showcase 	Completed Storyboard	•	May 26. 2026

Roles and Responsibilities for the Capstone Project

As an organization sponsor ...

You support the Sterling Leadership Fellow by ...

- participating in the selection of the project and project team.
- ensuring that the Fellow has sufficient resources to complete the project.
- serving as a sounding board for ideas.
- offering insights and advice.

Your organization gains ...

- attention to and potential solutions for a strategic issue facing your organization.
- the leadership skills, knowledge, and insight gained by the Fellow, with potential knowledge transfer to the project team and others in your organization.

To be a successful sponsor, you need to ...

- participate in discussions with the Fellow to identify the project, its expected outcomes, and the expected learning for the Fellow and project team members.
- provide periodic feedback.
- commit to helping the Fellow achieve project goals.

As a Sterling Leadership Fellow ...

You support your own development by ...

- applying your learning from the Fellows program to a project with the potential for significant impact on your organization.
- listening to the thoughts and experiences of your sponsor and project teammates and sharing your own.

You gain ...

- insights and counsel on an area of critical interest to you and your organization from experienced senior executives, your fellow participants, Expert presenters, and Sterling staff.
- an opportunity to apply Sterling concepts to an issue within your organization.
- accelerated professional development with relevance to your organization.

To benefit from the project, you need ...

- the desire and initiative to tackle a significant issue within your organization.
- the personal responsibility to execute the project plan.

Meeting with Your Sponsor on the Capstone Project

Sponsor

Before you meet with the Fellow, consider

- your organization's needs, current issues, and areas for improvement.
- your expectations for the project.
- your expectations for the Fellow.
- your ability to support the Fellow.
- the Fellow's goals for participating in the program.

During the initial meeting, you might explore

- what the Fellow's background, experience, and strengths are that could be best applied to a capstone project.
- what business impact and learning objectives the Fellow wants to achieve.
- what the Fellow thinks may inhibit achievement of the goal(s) of the Fellows Program.
- what the Fellow needs to remove those inhibitors.
- where the Fellow thinks he or she needs the most help.
- which one or two things would ensure a positive capstone project experience for the Fellow.

Sterling Leadership Fellow

Before you meet with your sponsor, consider

- your goals, expectations, and learning objectives.
- Whether an Organizational profile already exists and whether it needs to be updated.
- potential projects and their impact, possibly based on answers to questions in the Organizational Profile or on an internal organizational tool, such as a balanced scorecard.
- support you may need from your sponsor including creating a project team.

During the initial meeting, you might explore

- the sponsor's ideas for a project with potential for a significant impact on the organization.
- the sponsor's general expectations of the people he or she sponsors, if applicable.
- help that the sponsor can provide in mitigating obstacles or the like.

Sterling Organizational Profile Series YouTube Links

Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qKoDnY-REM&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9aNDAx&index=1&t=4s

Part 2:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6h6N0Vc61Lc&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9aNDAx&index=2

Part 3:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SlgTNG3xppc&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9aN DAx&index=3

Part 4:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIXMzNxz58Y&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9aNDAx&index=4

Part 5:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2TO_iEUevE&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9aN DAx&index=5

Part 6:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWyU1eeh3ZA&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9a NDAx&index=6

Part 7:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsUtfCGurnc&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9aND Ax&index=7

Part 8:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtEjxqgsWec&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9aNDAx&index=8

Part 9:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKmRJysfDWA&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9a NDAx&index=9

Part 10: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LifApc4sV-c&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9aNDAx&index=10

Part 11:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlpyXoxhPCQ&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9aN DAx&index=11

Part 12:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZYf1sa4nDI&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9aNDAx&index=12

Part 13:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oU_pZrzs0MY&list=PL6hk46p1g7bQtxvGIWjKsy4k7AO9aN DAx&index=13