

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE WORKFORCE AGENCIES

Reemployment Strategies Promising Practices Summary: LA Fellows

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**REEMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES “PROMISING PRACTICES” STUDY
PRACTICE SUMMARY: LA FELLOWS**

<i>Project/Practice Name</i>	<i>LA Fellows Program</i>
<i>Location</i>	Los Angeles, California
<i>Sponsoring Agency</i>	Los Angeles Valley College (LAVC)
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<i>Project Practice Overview</i>	LA Fellows provides participants – predominantly UI claimants and dislocated workers – with 140 hours of job search skills and leadership classroom training, 100 hours of volunteer experience with nonprofit organizations, and numerous networking and other skill building opportunities.

A. BACKGROUND

Los Angeles has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, 11 percent as of January 2012, with thousands of highly skilled mid-level managers and other professionals looking for their next job opportunity. The severe economic downturn has created a desperate environment, with too many job seekers lacking the skills, training and confidence necessary to secure employment in a competitive market. At the same time, recent studies indicate that approximately 30% of nonprofit organizations in Los Angeles are in danger of closing their doors because of the bleak economic landscape.

Los Angeles Valley College’s (LAVC) Job Training Department (LAVC/JT), the program administrator of the LA Fellows Program, recognized a need and an opportunity. Working closely with an advisory board and community stakeholders, the model for the LA Fellows Program was developed, with the driving force being the innovative idea to combine workforce development and volunteerism as a meaningful pathway to employment. Funded initially by a grant from the City of Los Angeles and subsequently primarily by Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding, the LA Fellows Program provides participants – which are predominantly UI claimants and dislocated workers – with 140 hours of skills and leadership classroom training, 100 hours of simulated On-the-Job-Training (OJT) project-based internship experiences with nonprofit organizations, and numerous networking and other skill building opportunities.

Los Angeles Valley College is one of nine community colleges that make up the Los Angeles Community College District, which is part of the state’s community college system.

LAVC offers for-credit, non-credit, and not-for-credit coursework.¹ The college offers two-year Associates degree programs (with an emphasis on articulation to four-year college degree programs), as well as certificate for-credit, noncredit, and not-for-credit programs, in a range of fields, including: computer science and information technology, design and visual arts, child development and education, biomedical equipment technology, nursing, and respiratory therapy. The LA Fellows Program, a not-for-credit program, operates out of LAVC's Job Training Department. LAVC partners closely with the City of Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board and the WorkSource California system, and a host of other public and non-profit organizations on this project. LAVC is on the WIA eligible list of providers.

B. PRACTICE OBJECTIVES AND START-UP

LAVC launched the *LA Fellows Program* during the fall of 2010. Prior to LAVC's official launch of LA Fellows, a pre-pilot, seven-week trial period was implemented (May 4, 2010 – June 19, 2010) with funds from a \$20,000 City of Los Angeles grant to test the idea, design, and feasibility of implementing the vision for the project. The trial run resulted in significant job placements and outstanding reviews from program participants, community stakeholders, and employers—and led to a grant award from the City of Los Angeles Community Development Department and the first official program year. The first cohort of 30 students was recruited during the summer of 2010, and began the 140-hour, 7-week classroom component of the program in September 2010.

The chief objective of the *LA Fellows Program* is to help participants secure employment quickly despite the challenges of a tough economy. The focused training curriculum, combined with the program's volunteer OJT-like internship experience at nonprofits, is intended to help participants (often unemployed/dislocated middle managers with considerable prior job experience) with their job search skills, computer skills, and project-based volunteer experience to ease the path back to full-time employment. An important element of the program is boosting the self-confidence of participants through the 140 hours of classroom training offered within the community college setting and the 100 hours of productive work at a nonprofit organization. Not only are LA Fellows taught how to find their next job faster, they are also given the training and networking skills necessary to find subsequent jobs.

C. TARGET POPULATION AND RECRUITMENT/INTAKE PROCESS

The target group for this program consists of unemployed individuals including UI claimants and/or dislocated workers who already have some (often considerable) job-related experience and skills and are looking to secure employment. There are no income eligibility requirements for entry into the LA Fellows Program – but participants must be unemployed

¹ The primary distinction between noncredit and not-for-credit programs is that not-for-credit programs are funded with special grants rather than college general funds.

and motivated to return to work.² Many participants are UI claimants and all are enrolled as training participants under the WIA Adult or Dislocated Worker programs. LA Fellows are selected through an application and interview process that has been designed to mirror the job search process. The application and interview process involves several steps that are designed to screen out unemployed individuals that are only interested in the training portion or only interested in the volunteer portion. The selection committee screens potential candidates to make sure they will be committed to the full program. In addition, the application process seeks to screen out individuals who are not interested in securing a job while attending and immediately following graduation from the program. Key measures used to judge the program's performance are job placement and hourly earnings.

Outreach/recruitment methods have included enlisting the aid of the project's local WorkSource Center (One-Stop Career Center) partners (who have referred a number of program participants), as well as the networking contacts and resources of the program's Advisory Board members. Participation in local job fairs, positive word-of-mouth from LA Fellows participants, e-mail announcements, and local networking groups like "Challenger" and "Women at Work" have been instrumental during the outreach and recruitment phase. Social media sites, specifically LinkedIn and Twitter, further enhance the program's ability to connect with potential program candidates. Although with one exception, there is no direct connection to or referral from the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program, a majority of LA Fellows are either current UI claimants or have exhausted UI benefits. The exception is that the LA Fellows program is considered "approved training" by the state's UI program, so Fellows are exempt from UI job search requirements while they are enrolled.

To participate in the program, participants must complete the LA Fellows application form, which is intended to help determine if an individual is appropriate for the program.³ Potential LA Fellows must attend an informational orientation meeting to insure they understand the commitment and particulars of the program from start to finish. To be considered complete, applications must be filled out entirely and include: a short answer section, a resume, a letter of recommendation from a former employer, the names and telephone numbers of three references, and a two-page personal statement. According to program administrators, the original idea behind this somewhat involved application process was to immediately screen for dedicated participants who would be willing to put in the work that is necessary to become successful job seekers and community-minded LA Fellows. Completed applications are then evaluated by a committee made up of staff members from both the LA Fellows Program and the Los Angeles Valley College Job Training Department.

After the applications are read and evaluated, potential candidates are scheduled for an in-person interview at Los Angeles Valley College. The interview process is typically about 30 minutes and is aimed at determining appropriateness for the program and motivation to complete the program. Through the first four cohorts of the program (over a one-year period), 126 of the 154 individuals interviewed for the program were selected to participate in the LA

² While the LA Fellows Program does not have income eligibility requirements, those LA Fellows whose training costs are offset by Individual Training Accounts paid for by the WIA Adult Program would need to meet requirements of the WIA Adult Program.

³ A copy of the application for the LA Fellows program is available at: <http://www.lafellows.org/apply.html>

Fellows program (though many of those inquiring about the program elected not to apply before the interview process). Based on the strength of the individual's completed application and in-person interview, a cohort of between 30 to 35 LA Fellows is selected to participate in the program (for each session, which is referred to as a "cohort"). The final step in the application process is a mandatory orientation for the LA Fellows, which provides further details about the program and responsibilities of participants. All applicants that make it through the application process and are selected to enroll in the LA Fellows are also then enrolled in the WIA program at one of the WorkSource Centers that partner with the program.

Given the high unemployment rate in Los Angeles and its strong linkages with referral sources, LAVC has not experienced challenges with recruitment or filling the five cohorts that have so far participated in the program. LAVC does not provide financial incentives for participants to attend the program, though there is no cost to attend the class and support services are available to participants through the local WorkSource Center (i.e., all participants are enrolled in WIA and thus eligible to receive support services offered through the WIA program). LAVC does not conduct formal testing or individual assessment of LA Fellows, though participants receive the usual assessments and case management services available through the WorkSource Center for WIA participants.

D. DESCRIPTION OF PRACTICE/PROGRAM

The LA Fellows Program provides participants with 140 hours of skills and leadership classroom training, 100 hours of internship experience with a nonprofit organization, and numerous networking and other skill building opportunities. The 140-hour classroom training program component is offered over a seven-week period and covers four major topic areas:

- *Employability Skills (58 hours)* - Focuses on uncovering the hidden job market, creating job search plans, generating leads, and understanding the psychology of interviewing.
- *Career Advancement (67 hours)* - Explores emotional intelligence, public speaking, diversity, leadership, negotiation skills, critical thinking, understanding generations, and conflict management.
- *Nonprofit Development and Grant Writing (15 hours)* - Covers development for nonprofits, grant writing, and succeeding in the social service world.
- *Computer Applications (voluntary attendance) (15 hours)* – Hands-on training in computer skills emphasizing MS Word, MS Excel, and MS PowerPoint.

Training sessions are held Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for a total of 20 hours per week, plus the optional computer classes. Tuesdays and Thursdays are left open for participant job search, networking, and exploration of nonprofits for potential internship placements. All classroom training activities are provided on the LAVC campus (in Valley Glen, California).

Upon completion of the classroom training program, program participants interview for and are placed in a project-based, 100-hour volunteer internship with a local nonprofit organization. This component of the program is similar to an OJT opportunity and is intended, in part, to re-engage participants in the workplace, help build the participant's resume (and fill

possible gaps in employment), help rebuild the participant's confidence, and make a meaningful contribution to the voluntary organization sponsoring the internship and the community. Each Fellow completes their project-based internship at the host site under the guidance of designated agency staff. Additionally, it is a training experience designed to provide candidates with the opportunity to apply the workplace skills developed during the classroom training under the guidance of professionals in a real-world environment, while augmenting their professional portfolio.

LA Fellows Program staff develops relationships with community nonprofit organizations and ask each individual organization if there is a need for a high-level volunteer to donate 100 hours in a project-based role. Interested nonprofits submit applications (available for download at: <http://www.lafellows.org/nonprofits.html>) for a variety of positions, from grant writing and development to marketing and IT roles. From there, LA Fellows staff creates a book of all of the volunteer opportunities available and presents this to the Fellows. LAVC has a roster of 250 nonprofit organizations from which participants may select (of which 65 organizations have been used over the first 5 cohorts of classes).

LA Fellows secure their own volunteer internship by selecting nonprofits to pursue based on the job descriptions on the list, researching the nonprofit organizations and, sending targeted resumes and cover letters to at least 3 organizations, and interviewing for the volunteer positions. Fellows are welcome to volunteer their 100 hours at a nonprofit organization that does not submit an application to the book as long as the organization agrees to sign the LA Fellows Program memorandum of understanding (MOU). Not only does the volunteer internship component of the LA Fellows Program provide support to those nonprofit organizations who host an LA Fellow, but it also focuses the talents of participants while they await paid employment by developing the individual and simultaneously surrounding them with a support network. Additionally, gaps between employment situations are filled with meaningful time spent serving others as Fellows become engaged in filling the needs of their local communities. All volunteer internship activities take place at the various nonprofit host agencies in the Greater Los Angeles area. Some examples of nonprofit organizations sponsoring internships for LA Fellows include: Braille Institute, Chrysalis, the Los Angeles Public Library, Pasadena Ronald McDonald House, The Soldiers Project, Tree People, Operation Gratitude, and the Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment.⁴

During the volunteer internship phase, participants keep in contact with staff members to report and track their volunteer hours. LA Fellows staff members also send email notifications about upcoming job fairs, promising job leads, recruitment drives, and the monthly LAVC Job Club event. Additionally, participants from all cohorts are encouraged to come together to network, share job leads, and help one another prepare for upcoming job interviews through the use of a group page on the social media site, LinkedIn. Several Fellows have secured employment based on tips or leads they have received from other LA Fellows. LA Fellows

⁴ One LA Fellow from an early cohort who served her internship at a nonprofit organization has gone on to work for that organization and has thus far sponsored several LA Fellows at her organization. Additionally, a number of other LA Fellows have been subsequently hired by the nonprofit organizations where they served as interns under the program.

Program staff record nonprofit volunteer hours and keep track of employment verification data for each participant of the program.

E. USE OF TECHNOLOGY

While the LA Fellows program employs social media and computers for the optional computer courses, it is not reliant on a technology component or platform. Outreach/recruitment methods and publicity for the program are enhanced by the use of social media sites, most notably, LinkedIn and Twitter.

F. KEY PARTNERS AND LINKAGES

The LA Fellows Program was created in partnership with the Valley Industry and Commerce Association, City of Los Angeles Community Development Department, Valley Economic Alliance, State of California Employment Development Department, Los Angeles Valley College Foundation, Los Angeles Community College District, Community Career Development, Inc., City of Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.⁵ The LA Fellows program enjoys strong political support from the City of Los Angeles Mayor's Office and several members of the Los Angeles City Council, as well as the strong support of the employer community in the Greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. As noted earlier, the approximately 250 nonprofit organizations that have agreed to sponsor internships (and the 65 nonprofits who have so far sponsored Fellows) are key partners in the effort.

The Unemployment Insurance program does not have a direct link or involvement in this program, other than considering LA Fellows as an approved training program for claimants, though a substantial number of participants are dislocated workers and UI claimants/exhaustees. The LA Fellows program has a close relationship with the WorkSource Centers, in particular, four WorkSource Centers serving the portion of Los Angeles where the program is located: the Wilshire Metro, Goodwill Metro North, Canoga Park, and Van Nuys WorkSource Centers. These four WorkSource Centers in addition to others provide referrals and regularly host orientations about the LA Fellows program. Additionally, all participants are enrolled in the WIA Adult or Dislocated Worker programs and receive additional case management assistance and job search assistance at the WorkSource Centers.

G. PARTICIPANT ENROLLMENT AND CHARACTERISTICS

Since its inception in September 2010 (through March 2012), the LA Fellows Program has enrolled a total of 156 participants in five cohorts. Each cohort has had 30 to 34 participants. Across the five cohorts, 100 percent of LA Fellows have completed the 140-hour classroom

⁵ For more information about the community partners, please visit: <http://www.lafellows.org/partners.html>. For a complete list of nonprofit partners, please visit : http://www.lafellows.org/list_nonprofit

training component or been placed in jobs while attending the classroom component. LA Fellows staff estimate that between 80 and 90 percent of LA Fellows (through the first four cohorts) have completed the full 240 hours of classroom and internship activity (with the remainder securing employment that made it difficult or impossible to complete the full 240 hours of training).

All the participants are seeking employment at the time they are enrolled in the program, and as indicated earlier, most are either UI claimants or exhaustees. All LA Fellows have previous labor market experience or are displaced homemakers. Virtually all participants (96 percent of the first four cohorts) have been 30 years of age or older, with many of the participants being older workers in their 40s, 50s, and into their 60s. The first four cohorts included a mixture of participants by race/ethnicity, with slightly more than half being white (57 percent) with the balance of participants being black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islanders.

H. EARLY OUTCOMES/ PERCEPTIONS OF IMPACTS

The LA Fellows program measures program success through a variety of indicators, including participant feedback, the benefit to the nonprofit community, and most importantly, job placements and wage rates. Participants fill out evaluations at the conclusion of training to provide staff with feedback about what is working with regard to training topics, curriculum and facilitators, and what could be improved. LA Fellows program staff and WorkSource Centers staff keep in contact with each cohort over the course of the program year to secure progress updates on job search status and employment verification forms when each participant lands a job.

Employment and Earnings Outcomes. Within one year, 70 percent of the first two cohorts (45 of the 60 participants in these two cohorts) secured employment, at an average wage of \$27.31. Participants have mostly secured full-time positions and at wages in excess of \$20 per hour. Through the first four cohorts, 60 percent obtained wages in excess of \$20 per hour, with some making in the \$40 to \$60 per hour range and even higher. Some examples of job placements at wages in excess of \$30 per hour included the following: Senior Compliance Analyst (\$32.21 per hour); Project Finance Consultant (\$75.00); IT Systems Administrator-Desktop (\$30.78); Process Reengineering Consultant (\$65.00); Legal Analyst (\$32.30); Senior Business Analyst (\$46.88; \$53.00); Digital Modeler (\$44.00); Associate Director for Foundations and Corporations (\$31.25); and Senior Vice President - Financial Planning and Analysis (\$98.96).

Customer Satisfaction. Participants from Cohorts 1 through 4 completed a four-point Likert Scale Customer Satisfaction Survey (from Excellent-to-Poor) at the end of training. To date, 99% of participants who have completed the LA Fellows Program rated the program as Excellent or Good. Specific topics in the satisfaction survey and the ratings are noted in the chart below:

SATISFACTION TOPICS	Excellent or Good
Overall Evaluation of Class	99%
Instructors' Presentations	100%
Usefulness of Course Content	97%
Instructors' Knowledge of Subject	99%
Usefulness of Training Materials	95%
Relevance to LA Fellow's Career	94%

Program administrators and staff also note that participants benefit in a number of tangible ways with respect to current and future job search (and career upgrading) efforts because of:

- An improved resume and strong cover letter,
- Strengthened interviewing and computer skills,
- A current understanding of the job market,
- Increased opportunities to network with professionals,
- A boost in confidence and re-connection to the workforce through the internship at a nonprofit, and
- An ability to build their resumes through the internship opportunity (and to fill in a gap in employment), as well as to gain valuable life experience by spending time helping those in need.

Voluntary Sector Benefits. In addition to the benefits accrued to program participants, nonprofit partner agencies and the greater Los Angeles community benefit from the volunteer hours provided to their organizations by the program. Through the first four cohorts, LA Fellows administrators have estimated that the nonprofit organizations where participants have been placed have benefited from 12,600 volunteer service hours, estimated at an equivalent of \$340,000 of volunteer labor to these organizations.

I. PROJECT STAFFING

The main staffing costs for the LA Fellows Program is for the LA Project Coordinator and the 6 to 10 part-time instructors for the 140 hours of classroom instruction provided for each cohort. The table below summarizes the types of staffing and provides an estimate of the time devoted to the LA Fellows by each type of staff.

Position/Service Provided	% of Time Devoted to LA Fellows Program
LA Fellows LAVC Project Coordinator, Project Associate	100%
Team of 6 – 10 Instructors providing Academy style instruction	4% - 40%
LA Fellows LAVC Job Training Director	15%
LA Fellows LAVC Job Training Staff WorkSource Liaison	15%
LAVC UI Job Training Staff	5%
Website / IT LAVC staff	10%
WorkSource Center Staff	5%

J. PROJECT COSTS/EXPENDITURES AND FUNDING SOURCES

Development costs for the LA Fellows program are estimated at \$20,000, which was covered by a grant from the City of Los Angeles to cover a pre-pilot trial run of the LA Fellows Program. Ongoing (steady-state) costs for one-year of operation of the LA Fellows Program – covering four cohorts and a total of 125 participants – are estimated at \$227,000 or \$2,216 per participant. The major costs of the program are almost all related to labor costs – mostly to covering the cost of the Program Coordinator and program instructors for the classroom component of the program.

Ongoing costs of the program for the first year of the program (to cover four cohorts and 126 participants) were covered by an ARRA WIA grant from the local Workforce Investment Board. Funding for the fifth cohort (serving 30 participants) has mostly been covered by individual training accounts (ITAs) paid by the WIA programs (including the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and national emergency grant (NEG) programs). The ITAs have been \$1,620 per participant (to cover 135 hours of training) and therefore reimburse LAVC about three-fourths of the estimated \$2,216 cost per participant. LAVC expects ITA funding to continue for the program, but is looking for additional sources of funding for the program.

K. SUSTAINABILITY, REPLICATION, AND LESSONS LEARNED

LAVC’s not-for-credit program offerings require annual grant or contract funding to continue (i.e., such programs are not covered by state funding provided to LAVC and other community colleges by formula based on enrollment). LAVC plans to continue to offer the LA Fellows program as a not-for-credit program within its Training Department. Most of the costs are offset for the current cohort by WIA-ITA funding. The WIA-ITA funding is provided on a participant-by-participant basis by the WorkSource Centers, though there is uncertainty about the level of funding that will be received by the WIA program and the extent to which it will be able to fund future LA Fellows. LAVC is committed to continuing the LA Fellows program, but is looking to secure a permanent source of funding for the program.

LAVC administrators indicated that this program is well-suited for replication by other community colleges and potentially by One-Stop Career Centers across the country. It is, however, necessary to assemble a staff of instructors for the classroom component of the program – and community colleges, with their emphasis on providing for-credit and not-for-credit instruction, are well-suited for this component. Additionally, it is essential to have strong ties to the nonprofit sector to be able to generate the internship slots required under the initiative. LAVC’s Job Training Department had strong linkages with the nonprofit sector prior to this initiative and was able to expand ties to local employers through its partnerships under this project with the workforce investment board, various economic development agencies, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Mayor’s Office and City Council.

LAVC administrators/staff indicated that one of the great strengths of the LA Fellows program is its ability to offer a flexible curriculum model that incorporates both classroom instruction and an OJT-like component that enables unemployed participants to begin to transition back to the workforce through an internship at a voluntary organization. This internship opportunity not only helps to fill in the resume for individuals who may have been unemployed for a year or longer and provides valuable work experience, but also helps the organizations in which the individual is volunteering. Staff indicates that the program is particularly suited for long-term unemployed middle managers who are motivated to return to work but whose confidence is ebbing because of long and unsuccessful efforts to find a job. Many of the individuals served by the program had worked for long periods and built up strong skills prior to their spell of unemployment. The Fellows also often are uncertain of how to effectively look for a job and to translate the skills they have to current job openings. A particular problem is that participants often do not know how to effectively network. This initiative is directly aimed at individuals with prior labor market experience (and in some instances displaced homemakers) and is not intended for unemployed individuals with little or no previous work experience or individuals that are seeking a degree or other skill-based training certificate.

According to the staff/administrators, the LA Fellows Program model could potentially be adapted to help specific population groups like veterans or industry sectors such as information technology, advanced manufacturing, or “green” industry sector. Veterans returning from active duty who have never had to secure employment in the private sector could benefit greatly from a similarly structured approach. Likewise, transitioning professionals from industries that have seen significant downsizing could be enrolled in training and volunteer programs that would prepare them for a new career in Green technology or other high growth sectors. In fact, the LA Fellows’ fifth cohort has had the opportunity to take a 3-credit (over 7 weeks with 8 hours of classroom instruction per week) environmental studies course offered by LAVC to enhance their knowledge of environmental challenges and to prepare for potential entry into a green job.