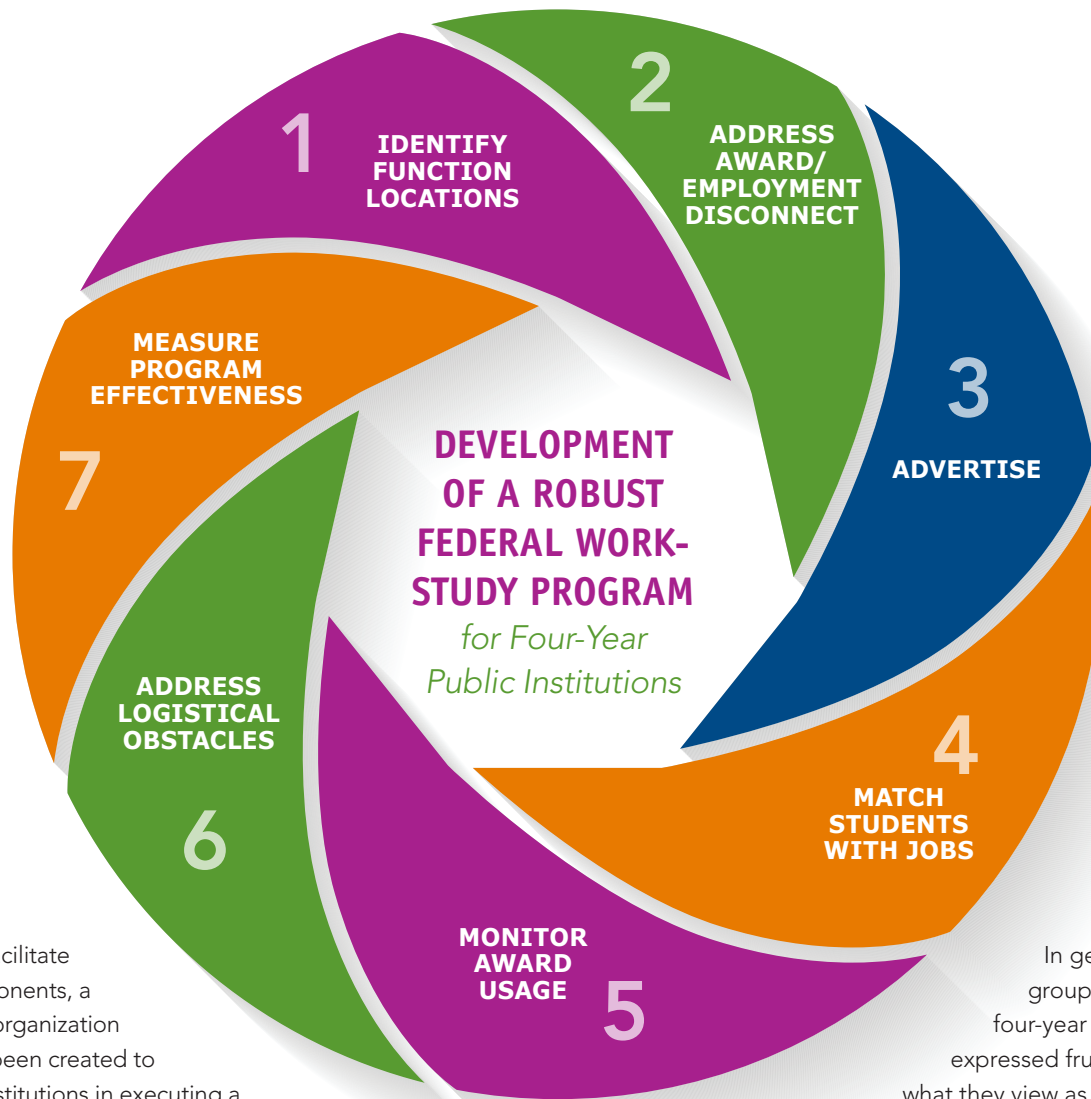




# DEVELOPMENT OF A ROBUST FEDERAL WORK-STUDY PROGRAM *for Four-Year Public Institutions*

Research by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) and Public Agenda indicates that optimally functional and innovative FWS programs incorporate all of the following components:



In order to facilitate these components, a “knowledge organization system” has been created to help guide institutions in executing a successful FWS program. The components identified in this system are a result of findings from a research project comprised of a literature review and policy scan, a national survey, and focus groups. In general, where survey and focus group results differed, our recommendations relied more strongly on the survey findings, since the survey respondents were a more representative sample than the much smaller focus groups. The “Promising Innovative Practices” sections on the following pages list current practices for each of the seven areas that survey respondents and focus group participants have implemented on their own campuses and found to be successful.

In general, focus group participants from four-year public institutions expressed frustration with what they view as insufficient FWS allocations that strain the program in many ways. Public four-year institutions also appeared to place more importance than some other sectors on ensuring off-campus employment positions were relevant to students’ programs of study. This material is based on research funded in part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.



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## 1 IDENTIFY WHERE FWS FUNCTIONS ARE LOCATED WITHIN THE INSTITUTION

FWS functions can be within the purview of the financial aid office (FAO), but can also be dispersed across the institution. Survey findings showed:

- *Management of FWS Expenditures/Fund Usage:* 91% reported this function was in the FAO, 2% in the bursar's office, and 1% in payroll.
- *Data Collection:* 67% reported this function was in the FAO, 4% in the institutional research office, 4% in student employment, and 4% in human resources.
- *Coordination of FWS Community Service and/or Job Location and Development Programs:* 61% reported this function was in the FAO. For community service, 15% in student employment, 3% in human resources. Some institutions have specific community service offices that fulfill this role. For job location and development programs, 7% reported it is located within student employment.
- *Advertising FWS Positions:* 60% reported this was carried out by the FAO, 11% by student employment, and 5% by human resources.
- *Hiring/Placement:* 55% reported this function was in the FAO, 13% in student employment, and 8% in human resources.
- *Managing FWS Payroll:* 40% reported this function was in the FAO, 36% in payroll, 10% in human resources, 8% in student employment, and 6%-8% in the bursar's office.

### **Promising Innovative Practices:**

- Using technology to connect office systems and databases that are currently maintaining separate records.
- Partnering with the institutional research office to leverage data compilation and analysis skills.

## 2 ADDRESS THE DISCONNECT FROM AWARD TO EMPLOYMENT

A key piece of a robust FWS program should include some type of intervention to better connect the receipt of an award to actual employment. Many more students are awarded FWS than actually end up employed in FWS positions. Thirty-nine percent of survey respondents from four-year public institutions reported that fewer than half of the students awarded FWS at their institution were employed in an FWS position, higher than the overall survey average of 33%. Thus four-year public respondents saw the lowest percentage of high placement rates. Focus group participants told us that the gap grew larger into the upperclass years, as more of the FWS-awarded students left for other jobs on and off campus with higher pay rates and levels of responsibility and autonomy. This was somewhat exasperated by the expressed lack of workplace skills that first-year students were seen to have, which made them less desirable than upperclassmen workers to some employers. According to our survey respondents, many FWS-awarded students simply did not apply for FWS positions, some found non-FWS employment, others applied but were not hired, and some students could not find FWS positions they wanted. Many of our survey respondents told us that they thought this was because students could make more money in a non-FWS position, while some thought it was because they already had non-FWS jobs that they kept. Finally, some survey respondents speculated that students took non-FWS positions to get more job experience.

### **Promising Innovative Practices:**

- Offering incoming first-year students the opportunity to start FWS positions in the summer before matriculation.
- Offering returning students a higher wage to make FWS positions more attractive.
- Expanding the types of FWS positions offered to provide a wider range of job experiences.

## 3 ADVERTISE FWS POSITIONS

Because the gap between students with FWS awards and those taking FWS positions is so large, any step to increase the percentage of eligible students in positions is beneficial to the program. Advertising is one way to expose FWS students to the possibilities of FWS employment, whether that be by promoting the variety of job types available, the flexibility in scheduling, or other beneficial aspects of FWS jobs. Only 37% of survey respondents from four-year public institutions thought that their school's advertising of FWS positions was "very effective." Fewer than half of those involved in FWS administration reported that their school had an online portal to advertise FWS positions.

### **Promising Innovative Practices:**

- Establishing online portals for students that provide information on the available FWS jobs.
- Holding job fairs for FWS students.



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### 4 MATCH STUDENTS WITH FWS JOBS

Another key component to a successful FWS program is the ability of an institution, to the extent possible, to help connect students with jobs related to their career interests. About half (47%) of our four-year public institution survey respondents reported that they would always take the student's educational program or career goals into account when placing students in FWS positions, assuming the student could articulate such goals. Unfortunately, only 18% of four-year public survey respondents thought that their school was "very effective" at helping students find positions that reflect their goals. Because placement of FWS students into positions is not isolated in the FAO, it is important to have institution-wide practices and policies to ensure the FWS student and employer experiences are uniform and positive. Focus group attendees told us that the general perception of FWS positions is that they are more clerical in nature. This misperception could discourage faculty and staff with other types of positions from thinking of them as potential FWS positions and turn students away from looking for an FWS position.

#### **Promising Innovative Practices:**

- Educating staff, faculty, and students on the actual types of positions that can be FWS jobs.
- Promoting more of a mentor/mentee relationship between FWS students and employers through trainings.
- Exploring being able to offer students employed in FWS positions academic credit, when applicable, in addition to their FWS wages.

### 5 MONITOR STUDENT AWARD USAGE

One of the key difficulties FWS administrators reported is monitoring student award usage at the individual level. A negative consequence of not monitoring fund usage can be the sudden termination of a student's employment if a student runs out of funding, which can, in turn, contribute to poor academic performance, dropping a course, or even dropping out of school. In the four-year public sector, when this happens it can end the student's employment, but in many cases the institution attempts to continue the employment with institutional or departmental funds. Some schools have systems in place to monitor fund usage, but few have systems that will alert the program administrator when a student is on track to prematurely use up the allotment.

#### **Promising Innovative Practices:**

- Using technology to create systems that alert all parties if projections indicate the student will run out of FWS funding.
- Encouraging the student and employer to work out a schedule in advance so the relationship between hours worked and the FWS award is fully understood, as well as an agreement as to whether the student will still be employed after their FWS award runs out and, if so, what the funding source will be.

### 6 ADDRESS BARRIERS TO FULFILLING COMMUNITY SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

Per federal regulations, at least 7% of a school's FWS allocation must be used to employ students in community service jobs and at least one student must be employed as a reading tutor or in a family literacy project, but one quarter of four-year public institutions reported difficulty meeting these requirements. FWS administrators reported they would like the definition of what constitutes a community service position to be broadened so they can more easily expand their community service offerings. In addition, about half of community service FWS positions are off-campus, which can create a barrier to filling the positions because for students, getting to the job can be costly, time-consuming, confusing to figure out, or all three. Off-campus FWS positions were seen as more prized at public four-year institutions, as they were more likely to have greater relevance and academic benefit than on-campus opportunities (which were seen as more clerical). At 47%, four-year public college survey respondents were much more likely than other sectors to report that their school has a job location and development program. Four-year public school respondents, at 20%, told us that they were operating such a program in collaboration with other schools.

#### **Promising Innovative Practices:**

- Employing a full-time person to manage the community service program.
- Offering mentor programs that pair FWS college students with younger students in the community to assist with the college decision-making and application process, especially in communities with low levels of educational achievement, in order to satisfy community service requirements.
- Providing transportation facilitated by the school or community service agency for off-campus community service positions.



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### 7 DETERMINE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FWS

Throughout the other areas there has been a lack of data that allow the institution to understand how to improve the process of implementing FWS. Few institutions indicated they collect data that link retention or the graduation rate of FWS students to the FWS program. Fewer still have conducted research on the long-term impact of FWS participation on readiness for employment or workplace engagement. Only 20% of four-year public respondents thought that their school was “very effective” in helping students meet their postsecondary educational costs. And only 19% thought that their school’s FWS program helped students find FWS positions that complemented their educational programs or career goals. We think collecting this and other data would be helpful and contribute to a successful program.

#### ***Promising Innovative Practices:***

- Distributing surveys to students, both before and after their FWS experience, that measure change over time on aspects related to retention and future success in careers, then re-distributing surveys several years after graduation.