



DEVELOPMENT OF A ROBUST FEDERAL WORK-STUDY PROGRAM

for Community Colleges

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 by NASFAA and Public Agenda, which is 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

community college survey respondents and focus group participants have implemented on their own campuses and found to be successful.

In general, community college participants in the focus groups expressed a greater frustration with barriers to successful FWS implementation and innovation than their four-year institutional peers due to the multi-mission nature of community colleges, the complexity of the student populations they serve, and the comparative lack of institutional resources. 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 WHERE ARE FWS FUNCTIONS LOCATED WITHIN COMMUNITY COLLEGES?

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

- *Management of FWS Expenditures/Fund Usage:* 95% reported this function was in the FAO.
- *Data Collection:* 71% reported this function was in the FAO, 4% in human resources, 3% in the institutional research office, and 3% in student employment.
- *Coordination of FWS Community Service and/or Job Location and Development Programs:* 70% reported this function was in the FAO. For community service, 9% in student employment and 2% in human resources. Some institutions have specific community service offices that fulfill this role. For job location and development programs: 4% reported it is located within student employment.
- *Advertising FWS Positions:* 65% reported this function was carried out by the FAO, 8% by student employment, and 7% done by human resources.
- *Hiring/Placement:* 60% reported this function was in the FAO, 13% in student employment, 8% in the bursar's office, and 7% in human resources.
- *Managing FWS Payroll:* 42% reported this function was in the FAO, 35% in payroll, 9% in human resources, and 7% in student employment.

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

Many more students are awarded FWS than actually end up employed in FWS positions. Although 33% of overall survey respondents from all sectors told us fewer than half of those awarded an FWS position were employed in one, the rate was higher among the community college respondents, at 40%. 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 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 experience.

3 ADVERTISE FWS POSITIONS

Because the gap between students with FWS awards and students taking FWS positions is so large, any step to increase the percentage of eligible students in FWS 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 offered, the flexibility in scheduling, or other beneficial aspects of FWS jobs. Only 21% of community college survey respondents 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. Community college staff were about the same as other types of institutions in terms of the use of online FWS portals, but much higher in the use of bulletin boards, at 26%. The fact the community college campuses are more likely to use bulletin boards, but not any less likely than other sectors to use other types of advertising as well, may indicate that community college students have less of an online presences, so staff are attempting to reach out to the population in a wider variety of ways.

Promising Innovative Practices:

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

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. More than half (55%) of our community college 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 community college respondents thought that their school was "very effective" at helping students find positions



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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, and this was particularly true for community colleges, as they tend not to have firmly established research functions that allow for placement into such activities.

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.
- Using high-school transcripts (particularly GPA and student activities) to help determine if first-year students will be able to balance the multiple responsibilities that come with an FWS position.

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. In the community college sector, when this happens it is more likely to end the student's employment, as they are less likely to be able to continue the employment with institutional or departmental funds after a student's FWS funding has run out. Suddenly ending FWS employment can contribute to poor academic performance, dropping a course, or even dropping out of school. 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. Community colleges were least likely of all sectors to have such measures in place.

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 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. Only 14% of community college respondents told us that their school has a job location and development program, and this could be expanded. Community college respondents were more likely than other sectors, at 33%, to tell us that they were operating such a program in collaboration with other schools, showing these collaborations might be one way to increase the usage of such programs.

Promising Innovative Practices:

- 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.

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. The perception among community college survey respondents shows that, without having any available data to show otherwise, only 27% thought 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 complement 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.