

**Pioneering the Future and a New Generation of
Local Government Professionals**

John Nalbandian

The Local Government Management Fellows (LGMF) program was created in response to demographic trends predicting significant retirements of experienced local government executives. This will occur at the same time that political, economic, and social trends worldwide are thrusting into prominence the role of local and regional governance.

ICMA, in partnership with the International Hispanic Network, the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, and the National Forum for Black Public Administrators created this one-year fellowship program—a full-time work experience—with participating local governments designed to provide the best and most recent M.P.A., public policy, or public affairs master’s degree graduates with an attractive opportunity to learn about and enter the local government management profession.

The pioneering sponsoring jurisdictions are:

- Catawba County, North Carolina
- Charlotte, North Carolina
- Minneapolis, Minneapolis
- San José, California
- Sarasota County, Florida

- Winchester, Virginia.

In 2005, ICMA expects to add to this list, offering a dozen fellowships.

Meet the Fellows

As chair of the LGMF program advisory board, it is my pleasure to profile this pioneering group of Local Government Management Fellows.

Kelly Spivey (San José, California) spent two semesters studying abroad—a summer in Mexico and a semester in Spain—and earned her M.P.A. degree from the University of Toledo in 2004. Prior to her selection as a fellow, Kelly gained work experiences in several nonprofit organizations and as a research and teaching assistant at the university.

Of her experiences, Kelly writes, “I have spent all of my professional and volunteer time working alongside the public sector for nonprofit agencies that address myriad needs of the community. These experiences . . . culminate in my aspiration to work in the public sector,” specifically, in local government, she adds.

Moving from Ohio to Northern California, Kelly seems to be off to a great start towards this goal with the projects she is involved in. Gathering information relevant to the closing of the downtown hospital and trauma center and crafting a request for qualifications for potential site reuse has brought her in contact with high-level administrators on a critical administrative and political issue. Among

her varied projects, she has worked on a neighborhood revitalization project hosting community meetings and doing surveys in Spanish.

Kelly was attracted to the LGMF program as the path to a major geographic move that permits her to use her Spanish professionally. She loves the diverse opportunities she has been given. Like other fellows, a major challenge is defining her role in the organization. With flexibility and moving among different departments and assignments comes ambiguity, and learning to adapt to it is a challenge.

Her most satisfying experiences center on the high-level access she has to administrators and elected officials in this city of more than 6,000 employees. Kelly recommends the LGMF program with the variety of opportunities it offers—both in organizational setting and geography. She likes the freedom to explore her future that the fellowship has provided. “It signals a new level of professional freedom and exploration,” she writes.

Mary Sassi (Sarasota County, Florida) graduated from Arizona State University in 2004 with a master’s degree in public administration. Included among Mary’s numerous social service volunteer activities, she spent the spring of 1999 in India interviewing Tibetan refugees as part of a study abroad program.

Mary’s work experience includes supervising an extended daycare center and serving as an analyst for the Charleston County (S.C.) School District. She was attracted to the LGMF program as an opportunity to cultivate direct

experiences that would contribute to her development as a future leader with a goal of building public/private nonprofit partnerships in service to community.

Mary's varied experiences in Sarasota County are contributing towards her goal. She has worked on an affordable housing/community housing initiative, has helped conduct economic and fiscal impact studies for the construction of a conference center, and has become involved in a program that coordinates various maintenance and capital improvements into integrated neighborhood plans.

Mary worked in the emergency operations center during several hurricanes this past season and considers herself fortunate to be invited to participate in an extensive staff development program the county sponsors.

Mary was attracted to the LGMF program by the breadth of experience it offered. She saw the program as a way of gaining knowledge of the many facets of local government so she could begin to develop big picture thinking on community issues. Her challenge, like that of other fellows, is learning to manage her fellowship. She has been given free reign to become involved in the projects that she values but which is a little daunting at the same time.

She says she would recommend the LGMF as an opportunity to learn in a practical way to manage and lead in a political environment. This knowledge cannot be taught, she says. "It can only be experienced and observed, and the fellowship provides a birds-eye view from which to do this."

Jamie Privuznak (Charlotte, North Carolina) graduated with an M.P.A. degree in 2004 from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Prior to graduate school, Jamie had internships in the Florida state attorney's office; in the Martin County, Florida, sheriff's office; and at the Charlotte Douglas International Airport in Charlotte. Her goal is to be a future leader in city management, and her internships have helped to solidify her long-term commitment to a life of public service.

Jamie's work in Charlotte includes serving as project coordinator for the transfer of Mecklenburg County zoning services to the city of Charlotte, providing staff support to the transportation committee and transportation cabinet, and supporting the work of the ethics review committee. In these tasks, Jamie has worked with several departments, and she has prepared proposals for the city council and county commission.

Jamie has seen her academic work come to life in the fellowship program. She has taken advantage of the access the program provides to watch which policy issues develop and which seem to be ignored. She enjoys the opportunity to seek out projects that will add value to the city.

Similar to the other fellows, Jamie prizes the chance to work with higher-level officials who have the knowledge and willingness to guide her, and she recommends the fellowship as providing excellent access to just about all the "moving parts" and processes of local government.

Tameika Leslie (Catawba County, North Carolina) graduated with an M.P.A. degree from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro in 2004. Tameika's goal is to become a city manager. After her undergraduate degree, Tameika worked in the private sector for two years before returning to school to fulfill her interests and commitment to public service.

She says, "My own desire to give back to the community stems from the fact that I have had several positive female role models in my life encouraging me to realize all of my own dreams and goals and helping me recognize my own worth. I know that I will continue to seek opportunities that will allow me to give back."

Tameika is a management analyst in the county manager's office in Catawba County, where she has worked on a variety of projects. In preparation of budget recommendations, she conducted outcome audits of several departments, analyzed and made recommendations regarding additional staffing in the district attorney's office, worked on the capital improvements budget process, has been involved as the county's liaison with the NAACP helping to coordinate county services, and she has done an economic impact analysis in preparation for budget issues.

Tameika saw the LGMF program as an opportunity to launch a career from a base where she would have a variety of experiences and access to top-level administrators. That is being accomplished as she fulfills her work assignments, being given enough latitude to actually "own" the projects she is working on.

The challenge for her is learning to think “big picture,” discovering that even with good information and the right people at the table, the dynamics surrounding policy development are complex. She says that being a LGM fellow has confirmed her “desire to establish a career in public service.” She continues, “Participating in the program has been one of the most challenging and rewarding opportunities I have ever been involved with.”

Jamie Lantinen (Minneapolis) graduated in August 2004 with a master of science in public policy and management from Carnegie Mellon University. Jamie spent a year abroad as an undergraduate at Oxford in the United Kingdom.

Jamie works out of the office of the city coordinator (CAO) in Minneapolis. His assignments include service as project manager for the city’s community engagement effort, assisting city departments in results-oriented business planning, helping to coordinate development of budget pages and collection of performance measures for the city’s annual report, and serving on a task force to analyze and present the results of a citywide employee survey.

Jamie says that as soon as he heard about the LGMF program, he knew it was a perfect match. “I had the skills from graduate school and work experience, but I needed the high-level exposure and hands-on experience of being in a government to tie it all together. LGMF offered that.” Most challenging to him is finding the time to fit in all of the opportunities that have been made available.

Most satisfying is being able to “talk with and learn from so many talented, dedicated, and caring public servants, in diverse areas of the organization.”

Jamie contrasts his fellowship with a typical entry-level job that may be limited in scope. He comments that the LGMF program “can give fellows the opportunity to see the practical application of their studies unfold before their eyes.”

Patricia Dossett (Winchester, Virginia) served on the board of supervisors in Spotsylvania County, Virginia, prior to earning her M.P.A. from Virginia Commonwealth University. With a strong commitment to public service, Patricia was a community organizer, political activist, and mom of four before donning her knapsack and returning to campus. A self-labeled “late-bloomer,” she says she is committed to the empowerment of all voices in the governance process.

Since her selection, she has implemented an executive leadership program, researched employer-assisted housing, developed a community engagement program with CDBG-entitlement neighborhoods, completed a SWOT analysis of the relationship between a nonprofit organization and the Winchester government, and assisted in the hiring of a new police chief.

Patricia applied to the LGMF program to gain experience and exposure to the administrative workings of local government, and she considers herself an “island survivor” after having completed the several hurdles in the selection process.

The most challenging aspect of her experience has been the recognition that she is in charge of her future. She is learning to adapt to a fast-paced environment where she is expected to define her goals and objectives while completing challenging assignments. Most satisfying for her is the opportunity to

gain knowledge of the nitty-gritty of local government—looking inside out in contrast to her experience as an elected official where she already possessed a broader community perspective.

She values the variety of assignments she has been given, and she recommends the LGMF program to other M.P.A. graduates who want to get an inside look at how local government operates and the opportunities that are available.

A Solid Beginning

If we can judge by the experiences of the first class of fellows in the Local Government Management Fellows Program, it looks like the program is off to a solid start. Each placement seems to be providing the fellows with valuable experiences, exposing them to the nitty gritty of administrative work, as well as policy making in local governments nationwide.

Several of the fellows appear surprised that they have as much freedom as they do to craft their own program. In that sense, their work is different from graduate school where projects and assignments often are laid out clearly. This takes some getting used to, and the fellows seem to be meeting this challenge well.

The initial placements have spread the program nationwide, and next year with about a dozen placements and fellows, the LGMF program is expected to become a more visible response to the goal of creating a new generation of local government executives.

San José, California, decided to participate in the program because its design is similar to its own management fellow program that has operated for a number of years. Peter Jensen, **title**, says that the design of the program is for fellows to complete four rotations of about three months, each in different parts of the organization that allows them to get a unique overview of how the locality works. It also allows them to get an infusion of energy and new thinking into different areas of the organization.

“If everything works well, San José winds up with a candidate for permanent employment who has true insight into how the city works and has already built credibility and staff relationships,” Jensen says. And the program has been successful in the past. There are former fellows who are assistant directors and deputy directors in departments, and there are others who are in various leadership roles in the organization. He adds that the city shows that it's a win-win situation: it can attract the best and the brightest to the organization, and it can offer fellows an experience they couldn't get by being hired into an entry-level analyst position.

Joellen Daley, assistant county manager, Catawba County, North Carolina, speaks of the county's commitment: “As active members in ICMA, County Manager Tom Lundy and I knew that participation in the LGMF program was important and necessary to promote ICMA's strategy to encourage and train the next generation of city and county managers. Catawba County has regularly offered internship opportunities in many of its departments. Participation in the LGMF program more formally recognizes this practice and dedicates an

opportunity within our organization to someone interested in local government management. We are pleased with the program thus far and look forward to continuing to participate in the future.”

Ed Daley, city manager, Winchester, Virginia, another sponsoring city, notes that the LGMF program offers a national pool of prescreened elite candidates from the nation’s accredited graduate schools of public affairs and administration. He says, “The LGMF program is one way we can give back to our profession and continue ICMA’s tradition of promoting excellence in local government management as we help prepare our successors.” **PM**

John Nalbandian is a faculty member in the Department of Public Administration, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas. He was a Lawrence councilmember for nearly 10 years, including two terms as mayor. He is chairman of the LGMF advisory board.

Callouts:

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Members of the LGMF program advisory board are:

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Photo captions:

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