

# Pioneering the Future: A New Generation of Local Government Professionals

by John Nalbandian

**T**he Local Government Management Fellows (LGMF) Program was begun in response to demographic trends predicting significant retirements of experienced local government executives. This will occur at the same time as 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, established this one-year fellowship program—a full-time work experience—with participating local governments in order to give the best and most recent M.P.A., public policy, or public affairs master's-degree graduates an attractive opportunity to learn about and enter the local government management profession.

The pioneering sponsoring local governments are:

- Catawba County, North Carolina
- Charlotte, North Carolina
- Minneapolis, Minnesota
- 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**

(serving in 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 Toledo in Ohio.

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.

Having moved from Ohio to northern California, Kelly seems to be off to a great start toward this goal through 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 into contact with high-level administrators on a critical administrative and political issue. Among her varied projects, she has worked on a neighborhood revitalization initiative, 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, Kelly has found that a major challenge is defin-

ing her role in the organization. With flexibility and moving among different departments and assignments comes ambiguity, and learning to adapt to this is a challenge.

Her most satisfying experiences center on the high-level access she enjoys to administrators and elected officials in this city of more than 6,000 employees. Kelly recommends the LGMF Program for 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**

(serving in 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 was spending the spring of 1999 in India interviewing Tibetan refugees as part of a study abroad program.

Mary's past work experience has included supervising an extended daycare center and serving as an analyst for the Charleston County (South Carolina) School District. She was attracted to the LGMF Program because it was an opportunity to cultivate direct experiences that would contribute to her development as a future leader with a personal goal of building public/private nonprofit partnerships in service to the community.

Mary's varied experiences in Sarasota County are contributing toward 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 mainte-



nance efforts and capital improvements into integrated neighborhood plans.

During several hurricanes this past season, Mary worked in the emergency operations center and considers herself fortunate to have been invited to participate in an extensive staff development program that 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 the other fellows, is learning to manage her fellowship. She has been given free rein to become involved in the projects that she values, but this is a little daunting at the same time as it is gratifying.

She says she would recommend LGMF as an opportunity to learn in a practical way how 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 bird's-eye view from which to do this."

**Jamie Privuznak** (serving in Charlotte, North Carolina) graduated with an M.P.A. degree in 2004 from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Before graduate school, Jamie worked internships in the Florida state attorney's office; in the sheriff's office of Martin County, Florida; and at the Charlotte Douglas International Airport in Charlotte. Her goal is to be a 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 has included serving



as project coordinator for the transfer of Mecklenburg County's 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 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 chance the program affords, 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.

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

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 the 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, been involved as the county's liaison with the NAACP in helping to coordinate county services, and completed an economic impact analysis.

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. This is being accomplished as she fulfills her work assignments because she has been given enough latitude to actually "own" the projects she is working on.

The challenge for her is learning to think "big picture," having discovered that, even with good information and the right people at the table, the dynamics of policy development are complex. She says that being an 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** (serving in Minneapolis, Minneapolis) graduated in August 2004 with a master of science degree 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 have included service

as project manager for the city's community engagement effort, assisting city departments in results-oriented business planning, helping to coordinate the development of budget pages and the 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, which may be limited in scope. He comments that the LGMF Program "can give fellows the opportunity to see the practical applications of their studies unfold before their eyes."

**Patricia Dossett** (serving in Winchester, Virginia) served on the board of supervisors in Spottsylvania County, Virginia, before earning her M.P.A. from Virginia Commonwealth University. With a strong commitment to public service, Patricia was a community organizer, political activist, and mother 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



**Tameika Leslie** (serving in 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 earning her undergraduate degree, Tameika worked in the private sector for two years, then returned to school to satisfy her interests and fulfill her 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



## 2005 Local Government Management Fellowship Program (LGMF)

Created through a partnership involving ICMA, the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, the National Forum for Black Public Administrators, and the International Hispanic Network, the LGMF Program was created to generate interest in local government careers among recent master's program graduates.

This highly competitive, career development opportunity places fellows in a full-time, full-access local government management track position shaped by direct mentorship under senior government leaders and rotational assignments.

To date, the LGMF coalition has received commitments from these local governments to host fellows during the 2005–2006 program year:

- Arlington County (Arlington), Virginia
- Catawba County (Newton), North Carolina
- Charlotte, North Carolina (continuing participation with 2004 fellow)
- Dakota County (Hastings), Minnesota
- Hampton Roads, Virginia (accepting two fellows)
- Henderson, Nevada
- Mesa, Arizona
- Miami Beach, Florida
- Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Montgomery County, Maryland
- San Jose, California
- Sarasota County (Sarasota), Florida
- Tucson, Arizona
- University Place and Puyallup, Washington
- Washoe County, Nevada
- Wichita, Kansas
- Winchester, Virginia

More than 90 graduate-level students submitted applications to the 2005 program. Six members of the LGMF Program Advisory Board have completed evaluating those applications, and finalists' applications are being sent to the host local governments for review and to set up interviews.

Members of the advisory board are John Nalbandian, professor of public administration, University of Kansas (board chairman); Frances Gonzalez, assistant city manager, San Antonio, Texas; Sylvester Murray, director, Public Management Program, College of Urban Affairs, Cleveland State University; Tim O'Donnell, city manager, Brea, California; Michael Rogers, executive vice president, Corporate Services, MedStar Health, Inc.; and Bonnie Therrien, town manager, Wethersfield, Connecticut.

Student applications for the 2006 Fellowship will be available on ICMA's Web site in late August, 2005. Local governments interested in hosting a fellow should contact Rob Carty at 202/962-3560; e-mail, [lgmfprogram@icma.org](mailto:lgmfprogram@icma.org).

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 helped hire 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. All placements seem to be providing the fellows with valuable experiences and exposing them to the nitty-gritty of administrative work, as well as of 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 programs. In this sense, their work is different from graduate school, where projects and assignments often are laid out clearly. This takes some get-

ting 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 preparing a new generation of local government executives.

San José, California, decided to participate in the program because its design is similar to that of its own management fellow program, which has operated for a number of years. Peter Jensen, assistant to the city manager, says that this design involves fellows in completing four rotations of about three months each in different parts of the organization, which allows them to get a rare overview of how the locality works. It also allows them to infuse energy and new thinking into different parts 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 San José fellows who are assistant directors and deputy directors in the city's departments, and there are others who fill various leadership roles in the organization.

He adds that the city shows that a fellowship is a win-win situation: it can attract the best and the brightest to the organization, while it offers 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 program more formally recognizes this practice and

## 2005 Local Government Management Internship Program

Between May 23 and July 22, 2005, the town of Meredith, New Hampshire (Carol Granfield, town manager), will host 10 undergraduate students as part of Wittenberg University's 2005 Local Government Management Internship (LGMI) program.

Participating students will work in the Meredith town offices on a variety of projects for nine weeks while they gain insight into daily local government operations. The group will be accompanied by two professors from Wittenberg University, who will advise the students on their projects and course work.

This LGMI program is a component of ICMA's Next Generation Strategy, and the Association has partnered with Springfield, Ohio's Wittenberg University to market the program to potential host communities. The nine-week program combines an unpaid undergraduate internship with a class/seminar component.

Students from Wittenberg are placed as interns in a host local government and given one or more projects to complete by the end of the program. Onsite Wittenberg faculty advise students on their projects and required coursework. Students also attend class two nights per week and participate in local government meetings.

Students who participate in the Wittenberg LGMI program are not paid; instead, they receive six to eight hours of college credit for successful completion of the program. The total cost to the student is \$2,700 to \$3,000 and includes tuition, transportation to and from the host city, and two extended weekend excursions during the course of the program.

Host communities are responsible for providing the housing costs. Local governments interested in hosting a group of interns during the 2006 program year can learn more by visiting the Web site at [www.localintern.org](http://www.localintern.org). Or contact Rob Carty at ICMA, 202/962-3560; e-mail, [rcarty@icma.org](mailto:rcarty@icma.org).

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 of 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**

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## Next Generation Web Site

The graphics for the site have been completed, and ICMA staff will be live-testing the functionality of the Web site within the next few weeks. Look for the release of this new resource in late spring!