JOBS FOR AMERICA'S GRADUATES

A Monthly Report to the CSA and the Board of Directors

November-December 2015

LARGEST GATHERING IN THE HISTORY OF JOBS FOR AMERICA’S GRADUATES: THE 2015 NATIONAL LEADERSHIP AWARDS

We were delighted to celebrate the 35th Anniversary of Jobs for America’s Graduates on December 3 as the largest gathering in JAG history. Nearly 1,000 people filled the ballroom at the Marriott Marquis Hotel, including 670 young leaders from around the country, who were preparing to participate in the National Student Leadership Academy through the weekend.

Led by our Chair, Governor Phil Bryant, JAG recognized four leaders and leadership organizations for their commitment in enhancing the success rate of young people of great promise, and their specific help to JAG:

- Bill Hansen, CEO of USA Funds, and his colleagues as the National Student Investors of the Year.
- The AT&T Foundation and its “Aspire” Program, as Corporate Investors of the Year.
- The Delta Regional Authority, for their long-standing commitment to partner with JAG, and their focus on boosting the success rates of at-risk youth in the Delta Region.
- Pat Skorkowsky, Superintendent of the Clark County (Las Vegas) District, our first-ever National Superintendent of the Year.

The Leadership Awards Luncheon concluded with young people joining on the stage to dance and sing, and to show their appreciation to all of those who had invested their time, talent, and treasure in JAG and, therefore, in their lives.

NATIONAL STUDENT LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

This year we also held the largest National Student Leadership Academy in our history, with nearly 800 state and local staff, students, supporters, judges, and friends participating.

NSLA included an intensive series of leadership development activities, competitive events built around the JAG Employability Skills Competencies, team building, and opportunities to learn about America’s democracy and our nation’s history.

Our appreciation to the State Affiliates who worked so hard to make it possible for so many to attend and participate, and for helping to ensure the success of the National Student Leadership Academy. It was a “life-changing experience,” in the words of several students who shared their impressions of NSLA with us.

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Year-End Board Meeting — Setting the Agenda for 2016

The Board of Directors met on the morning of December 3 to act on the multiple initiatives for 2016 and the budget to support them.

Under the leadership of the Chair, Governor Phil Bryant, the Board acted on a variety of matters and set the agenda, goals, and the metrics to measure those goals in 2016 for the Plan of Work.

At the meeting, the Board:

- **Elected the slate of Directors** contained in the Board Notebook for a three-year term.
- **Re-elected the current set of Officers** for another one-year term.
- **Approved the Plan of Work for 2016** — the largest and most extensive Plan of Work in the Board’s history, incorporating two core goals:
  
  ⇒ “Quality is Job One!” About 80% of the metrics for the 2016 Plan of Work concentrates on enhancing the quality and value of the JAG experience for the young people who participate.
  
  ⇒ **Growth.** The Board also devoted a good part of the meeting to strategies for growth through enhanced state legislative support, the use of federal funds available to Governors, and private sector investments to extend the reach of the JAG Model and engagement of more young people.

- **Approved Committee Reports.**

- **Renewed the engagement with the auditors employed for the past six years,** based on the recommendation of the Audit Committee. The Audit Committee noted that, once again, JAG had a completely “clean” audit, with no management recommendations.

- **Approved the Resource Development Committee Plan for 2016.** This plan highlights the need for substantially expanded involvement by the Board and the identification of a much broader range of potential prospects to help fuel the growth and the reach of Jobs for America’s Graduates.

- **Approved the Budget for 2016.** Essentially a “flat budget” that assumes a substantial increase in private sector investments in JAG to meet the budget.

- **Approved renewed management contracts with Strategic Partnerships, LLC, and Corporate Education Resources, Inc.,** based on the recommendation of the Management Assessment Committee.

- **Approved Two Major Initiatives.**
  
  ⇒ **Proceeding with the negotiations with the State of Nevada, Jobs for Nevada’s Graduates, the Clark County School District (Las Vegas), and funding sources to develop a final plan for “Going Deep,”** as approved in concept by the Board last November. As noted in earlier communications, that plan calls for targeting the lowest-performing 20% of the most at-risk population in North Las Vegas for three years to determine potential economic, social, and academic impact of JAG “taken to scale.”
  
  ⇒ **A financial commitment drawn from the reserves of JAG to support the “refresh” of our National Employability Skills Curriculum over the next 12 months.**
Follow-Up Actions from the Board Meeting

Based on the Board’s decisions related to the Plan of Work, budget, and metrics for 2016, multiple initiatives are currently underway:

Jim Koeninger and the team in Dallas are moving forward with the refresh of the JAG National Employability Skills Curriculum. Work on the new curriculum includes adding new content from both external and internal sources and seeking guidance on what is missing and what can be improved. JAG is assessing the changing high school graduation standards in a number of states and is seeking reviews and agreements from the business community on the competencies critical for entry-level employment. The refresh will also include the introduction of Project-Based Learning methodology.

Considerable work has been undertaken to support the State Affiliates in their advocacy work among the 23 State Legislatures that will be considering funding for the 2016-17 school year. We are working to secure the support of Governors and other state-level officials to sustain or expand the funding from federal sources controlled by Governors. Taken together, these two resources total more than half of the resources available to our Affiliates.

The National Governors Association will hold its Winter Meeting in Washington the third weekend in February. Planning is underway for aggressive outreach and engagement efforts with the nation’s Governors in support of the growth and sustaining strategies of the State Affiliates.

Work is also underway for the 2016 JAG National Training Seminar (NTS) in Orlando, scheduled for July 13-15. NTS is the largest gathering of staff and management, with intensive training and development activities. We will recognize the performance of our Affiliates in providing services to the JAG Class of 2016 and the 12 months of follow-up services provided to the Class of 2015 through May 31, 2016.

Update on New State Prospects

As we entered the new year, we had both good news and bad news regarding prospective new states:

The bad news was that, due to some tough budget issues in Maryland, Governor Hogan was unable to secure an appropriation for the first-time implementation of JAG-Maryland, as we had hoped. The Governor and his team seem fully committed to finding other ways to bring JAG to Maryland, so we are opening discussions about other options, specifically around federal funding available to Governors that can be used to fund the JAG Model.

In Texas, we continued to hear positive words from the staff responsible for exploring the implementation of JAG-Texas after a very enthusiastic discussion between Governor Bryant and Governor Abbott last winter. However, no concrete steps have been taken, so Governor Bryant will follow up with Governor Abbott. In addition, we have proposed launching a pilot project in Port Arthur, Texas with the support of Entergy, which has a high priority on boosting the education and workforce capabilities in the East Texas area.

Good news: After 18 months of uncertain discussions, Governor Pat McCrory of North Carolina is completing plans to seek funding for Jobs for North Carolina Graduates (for the first time ever) in his February budget. A meeting is set with his senior management for a final review of the implementation plan and requirements for success on February 1. We hope that the Governor will submit the request with the rest of his budget by the end of February.

Rhode Island is the most likely new state for 2016-17. We anticipated launching 3-4 out-of-school programs and 1-2 in-school programs to demonstrate multiple applications of the JAG Model.

Other states in early stages of interest include Oregon and Massachusetts.
PREPARATIONS FOR FUNDING OF JAG AFFILIATES FOR THE 2016-17 SCHOOL YEAR

The next few months are critical for ensuring sustained funding and making every effort to grow the available resources to expand the impact of JAG across the 32-state national network.

At the Council of State Affiliates planning session, the national office met with each of the participating State Affiliate leaders. We reviewed their plans for outreach and engagement with their Governors, State Legislatures, state and local funding sources, school districts, and private sector funders to sustain and grow the organization in each of their states. The national staff and the Board of Directors stand ready to assist in making the strongest possible case for sustaining and growth funding, as may be most helpful to the JAG State Affiliates.

Plans are in place for JAG national’s participation at the February 19-21 National Governors Association Winter Meeting – the most well attended of the two NGA meetings. Governor Phil Bryant, JAG Board Chairman, and JAG’s three Vice Chairs stand ready to help with the outreach and engagement during the multiple opportunities they will have to interact with their colleagues at the NGA sessions.

Governor Bryant is initiating a series of outreach calls and communications to a number of Governors, including newly elected Governor John Bel Edwards of Louisiana and Governor Matt Bevin of Kentucky, to urge support for sustaining and growing the JAG organization in their states.

Of course, 2016 is a national election year. We have every reason to believe that jobs and educational outcomes will be high on the lists of those running for office. Therefore, we hope that the success of JAG will be even more compelling to sitting and prospective office holders.

Council of State Affiliates 2016 Planning Session

Immediately following the December 3 Leadership Awards Event, 28 of the State Affiliate leaders gathered with the national staff to work together on the implementation of the 2016 Plan of Work for the national organization and discuss issues that need attention. Many of the State Affiliates brought their SWOT Plans (focused on the opportunities and challenges that the Affiliates will be facing), which provided important guidance.

A wide range of topics were discussed, falling into the following categories.

Funding. There was a great deal of discussion about Affiliates’ use of state, federal, and local governmental funding for JAG programs. In addition, there were extensive discussions regarding the range of private sector sources at the national and state levels. The national office described their goal of trying to secure additional national sources of growth funding, similar to the AT&T and Delta Regional Authority Grants, to provide incentives for expansion of the JAG organization in some or all State Affiliates.

Quality Control and Enhancement. A major portion of the meeting was focused on the day-to-day operations of the delivery of the JAG Model and how to continuously improve our students’ experience with JAG. The group spent a considerable amount of time on the ever-increasing and more demanding standards for graduation on a state-by-state basis and the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), with the multiple implications to those who are utilizing it as a source of funding. Other discussions included the continuously changing nature of the mechanisms by which employers hire young people (especially the electronic screening systems that tend to eliminate young people with no work experience), the changing nature of the labor market that is beginning to build demand for JAG’s young people, and potential national hiring partnerships, like the American Staffing Association. Another priority area of focus was on the plans for the refreshment of the JAG National Employability Skills Curriculum, and CSA members committed to work on that refreshment. The plans for Affiliate engagement were reviewed as well.

Plans for 2016. Affiliates provided guidance regarding planned national events this year and how to make them as valuable as possible.

- The content and timing of the December Leadership Awards and National Student Leadership Academy events.
- Plans for the National Training Seminar in Orlando July 13-15, and how to ensure participants continue to receive great benefit from it as well as the Pre-NTS Professional Development Workshops, July 11-13.
- Plans for the 2016 National Thought Leader Event.

The national office sent a follow-up communication to all of the Affiliates outlining decisions reached and actions required. Follow-up continues on multiple topics.
We are delighted to announce the commitment by the American Staffing Association (ASA) representative companies to partner with us in expanding the employment opportunities and the local “real-time market knowledge” of what employers are looking for with our JAG Affiliates. ASA employs three million people in any given week—approximately 2.5% of the American workforce.

Please take the time to go to the links below featuring more information on our partnership:
https://americanstaffing.net/posts/2016/01/19/at-risk-youth-for-future-workforce/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EZLv6LZkP8

We are particularly pleased that ASA is engaging their member companies to provide guidance to our staff and students about market conditions, employment opportunities, mock interviews, and mentoring. They are also offering a series of four podcasts for additional training and information for our staff and students.

ASA is reaching out to their member companies to encourage expanded engagements, while JAG convened a teleconference with our State Affiliates to join with ASA in providing a full briefing on the range of opportunities for engagement.

Over the past several months, we are also pleased that Integrity Staffing Solutions, Elwood Staffing, and Milliner & Associates have all committed their personnel and financial resources to engage current programs and also, in one case, to launch a new JAG program in Louisville, Kentucky.

These staffing companies have demonstrated an ability to offer our young people a much broader range of potential jobs—and the chance to “test drive” a job.

Our special appreciation to the ASA leadership, Richard Wahlquist and his team, for making this commitment to support the work of Jobs for America's Graduates.

**JAG Performance Outcomes for the Class of 2014:**

- Graduation Rate: 93%
- Employment Rate: 59%
- Positive Outcomes Rate: 80%
- Full-time Jobs Rate: 72%
- Full-time Placement Rate: 89%
- Postsecondary Education Enrollment Rate: 43%

**About JAG**

Jobs for America’s Graduates (JAG) is a state-based national non-profit organization dedicated to preventing dropouts among young people who are most at-risk. In more than three decades of operation, JAG has delivered consistent, compelling results—helping nearly three-quarters of a million young people stay in school through graduation, pursue postsecondary education and secure quality entry-level jobs leading to career advancement opportunities.