

# Bridge-to-Practice Program Survey Findings

A “bridge-to-practice” program is defined as a program to provide recent law school graduates with an opportunity to develop and enhance their practical legal skills as they transition into the practice of law, generally by providing funding of some sort for a period of post-graduate work in one of several kinds of legal workplaces.

Typically, third-year students or recent graduates may apply for funding for a defined term project with an approved employer. Fellowships are typically subject to pre-approval, may or may not require proof of hours or projects completed, and may be paid on an hourly, lump sum, or other basis.

Bridge-to-practice programs are generally funded in whole or in part by a law school, university, or related organization for work performed for a third party (e.g., public interest organization, government agency, member of the judiciary, or private employer). Bridge-to-practice programs are thus distinct from law school-funded jobs on campus, such as, for example, as research assistants.

In order to measure the prevalence of such programs and to document their structures and policies, NALP conducted a survey in fall 2012. The survey was developed with the assistance of, and vetted by, a small working group of NALP law school members. A total of 84 schools responded to the survey, representing all U.S. NALP regions, a range of sizes, and both public and private schools. Of these, 46, or 55%, reported having a bridge-to-practice program, as defined for this survey. It is likely that this percentage is not typical of the entire school population, to the extent that schools without such a program may not have been inclined to participate in the survey, even though the survey was designed to be applicable to all schools. It is also the case that the reported bridge-to-practice programs are more common among schools with 750 or more JD students and at private schools. For example, over half the schools with a bridge-to-practice program that responded to the survey have 750 or more students, and two-thirds are private schools. Almost 60% of schools with a bridge-to-practice program also characterized their school as being in a metropolitan area with a population of one million or more, and an additional 20% characterized their school as being in a metropolitan area with a population of 100,000-999,999.

## Key Findings

- Of the schools with a bridge-to-practice program, 22% have had the program since 2007 or earlier, 11% started in 2008, 22% started in 2009, 33% date from 2010, 6% started in 2011, and 6% started in 2012. The findings presented below are based on those 43 schools whose program started in 2011 or earlier.
- These programs are typically run by the career services office (84%). In a few cases where the responsibility lies elsewhere than in the CSO, the public interest center was most often noted.
- Fellowship opportunities are most often identified by both students/graduates and staff (65%). One-quarter of schools reported that only students/graduates identify opportunities, and just a handful reported that only staff identify the opportunities.
- Fellowships are most often for 6 months or less, as shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1. Duration of Fellowships**

3 months or less	47%
4-6 months	53%
7-9 months	9%
10-11 months	7%
1 year	19%
More than 1 year	2%
Not preset	7%

Note: Percentages add to more than 100 because more than one option could be chosen.

- Typically, a graduate who receives a full-time job offer before the end of the fellowship can terminate the fellowship without penalty. Generally, a minimum time requirement is not iron-clad, and the employer is well

aware of the circumstances under which the graduate is employed. However, providing reasonable notice if the fellow finds a job is a typical practice, generally directly between the fellow and the employer, rather than between the fellow and the school. Not surprisingly, the fellow can expect to forgo any hourly pay or stipend remaining on their fellowship, or to return a prorated portion of the stipend if the stipend was paid in a lump sum, so that funds can be reallocated. Alternatively, the employer can be asked to return unused funds.

- Comments on fellowship length revealed a variety of practices. Some schools noted a minimum hours requirement (assuming, as noted previously, that the fellowship runs its full course), and the time span over which those hours are met can vary depending on the timeline arranged between the employer and the fellow. There may nonetheless be a final deadline by which the hours must be completed. Some schools noted that fellowship extensions may be granted — e.g., month-to-month, for 10 weeks, or 3 months — for fellows who have not obtained full-time legal employment and who have demonstrated continued active job search activities.
- As to when fellowships are obtained, just over half of schools reported that they are obtained after graduation. Most of the rest reported that they are obtained in a mix of before and after graduation.
- Commentary on when fellowships start indicates that rolling start dates are most typical, with that time period usually starting no earlier than August (or after bar results) and sometimes later, such as November or December following graduation. Some schools noted a single start month, anywhere from September to January following graduation. A few schools indicated that fellowships can start any time after graduation, and a few described having two distinct start cycles, such as before and after bar results, or September and January.
- Just a few schools, 7%, reported that they required bar passage to participate in the program.
- About one-third of schools indicated that graduates may be considered for a second fellowship but often under specific circumstances, some of which have been noted above. For example, a second fellowship may be possible if the first placement does not result in a permanent job or is less than satisfactory and a second opportunity has more potential. A few schools noted that a second opportunity is available if, for some reason, the employer becomes unable to accommodate a fellow. Some schools said that a fellow may switch employers without necessarily receiving additional funding. In one case, graduates may apply for both a post-graduation and a post-bar fellowship.

- Just over half of schools reported that their fellows work part-time; 37% said they work full-time, and the few remaining reported that the split is about even. Comments indicated that the fellowships are designed to provide part-time work specifically so that graduates have time to continue their job hunt activities. Consistent with other commentary, mutual understanding between the employer and graduate is key; for example the required hours may be met on a mutually agreed to schedule and timetable.
- Fellows are most often paid on a stipend basis; two-thirds reported paying fellows a stipend, and one-third reported paying them on an hourly basis.
- For those schools paying on an hourly basis, nearly all paid each of their fellows the same hourly rate. Reported hourly rates ranged from \$10 per hour to \$38 per hour, though nearly half the reported hourly rates were in the \$15-20 per hour range.

## Stipends

For those schools paying their fellows a stipend, most, but not all, reported that each fellow receives the same stipend amount. Schools most commonly pay stipends on a monthly basis (43%). About one-quarter pay a lump sum, and one-third pay on some other basis. For stipends paid on some other basis, descriptions provided suggest that two payments are most typical: one near the beginning or halfway through the fellowship, and one upon completion or verification of hours worked. Payments on a bi-weekly or twice-a-month basis were also noted, as was a quarterly payment, and an option for either a lump sum or quarterly payment. As **Table 2** shows, monthly sti-

**Table 2. Monthly Stipends**

Range of stipend amounts	\$417 - 3,666
Median amount	\$1,225
Average amount	\$1,558
Distribution (% of stipend amounts in each range)*	
\$750 or less	8.3%
\$1,000	37.5%
\$1,200 – 1,800	25.0%
\$2,000 – 3,666	29.2%
# of stipend amounts reported	24

\* The ranges in the distribution portion of the table are not adjacent because the ranges are based on reported stipend amounts.

pend amounts (which schools were asked to report regardless of payment frequency) varied a great deal.

- Fellows' paychecks were most often issued by the law school (58%), followed by the parent university (37%). A few schools reported that the employer or the law school foundation (or similar entity) issued the paychecks (12% and 9%, respectively). Percentages add to more than 100 because more than one choice could be checked.
- It is more common, for tax purposes, for fellows to receive a Form 1099 (58% of schools) than to receive a W-2 (42% of schools).
- Just 11% of schools reported that fellows could enroll in their school's health care plan at any cost.

### Funding Levels

Of the schools reporting a bridge-to-practice program, 32 were able to report the total amount of funding for their Class of 2011 fellows. As in **Table 3**, funding levels varied widely, and although higher funding amounts generally correlate with larger numbers of fellows funded, this is not always the case. Collectively these schools provided almost \$8.5 million in bridge-to-practice fellowship funding. Among schools whose program had been in place at least two years in 2011, just over half reported that funding for the program had increased since its inception. Among the rest, the number who indicated that the funding had stayed about the same only slightly outnumbered those who indicated that the funding had decreased (25% compared with 20%). However, the commentary revealed a variety of circumstances underlying these figures. For example, some schools noted increased participation, even as funding remained relatively constant. Some have experienced both increased funding and increased participation. In some cases

**Table 3. Total Funding for Class of 2011 (per school)**

Range of funding	\$8,400 - 1,463,700
25th percentile	\$82,500
Median	\$175,000
75th percentile	\$346,500
Average	\$265,359

funding for the Class of 2011 decreased, and for 2012 there was even less or none. Also noted was a drop in funding for 2011, followed by an increase in 2012.

- In response to a question about sources of funding for their program, the most common source reported was the law school's operating budget (67%), followed by an outside grant (such as a dedicated alumni gift or foundation grant) at 40%, and an endowment or other restricted funds at 33%. A few schools indicated an "other" funding source, such as other university non-restricted funds, the dean's discretionary fund, and SBA supplemental funding. (Percentages add to more than 100 because more than one funding source could be reported.)
- Most schools (70%) require some type of report back from fellows during and/or at the conclusion of the fellowship. Commentary on the kind of reporting required revealed a wide variety of practices. For example, many schools require fellows to meet with their career counselor on a regular basis and to submit reports regularly, either in writing or via telephone. A report on job search activities may be required as part of the report. Some schools require timesheets signed by the supervising attorney. Some schools noted that they survey fellows at the end of their fellowship. Some ask for a memo reflecting on their experience, or just ask that the graduates report at the end of the fellowship if they have a job or will need further CSO assistance.
- Of the 43 schools with a bridge-to-practice program, 37 were able to provide a count of fellowships awarded to graduates in their Class of 2011. Collectively, these 37 programs funded a total of 1,444 fellowships. The number of fellowships per school ranged from 1 to 111, with a median of 30 and an average of 38. Most figures were reported only once, that is, there was no "typical" or common program size. Four schools reported funding 15 fellows.
- Of the 37 schools reporting a total number of fellowships, 34 were also able to report their counts by type of employer. Not surprisingly, and consistent with other findings on the Class of 2011, nearly half (47.9%) of the 1,229 placements accounted for were with public interest organizations. Second were placements with government (30.2%), followed by judicial clerkships at 12.4%. Law firms accounted for 7.2%, and the remainder were in corporate or other settings.