

Eric Gurna

LA's BEST Afterschool Enrichment Program

Los Angeles, CA



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When Eric Gurna, CEO of LA's BEST needed a new website to be more mobile responsive and to make it easier to donate on mobile devices, he knew he had a big opportunity to do more than build the website. Two years into his tenure as CEO, and two years from its 30th anniversary, he knew it was now the right time to initiate a process to review how LA's BEST told their story and remake how they presented themselves. LA's BEST is a provider of safe and supervised afterschool education, enrichment and recreation programs for the 200 highest need, least resourced schools in Los Angeles.

Eric knew he didn't have the internal capacity, and he didn't want to hire someone as he knew that after the project, they wouldn't need someone full time. When he heard about Encore Fellowships, it seemed like a perfect fit.

“I ran a consulting business for fifteen years, so I know when it's useful to bring consultants on. We needed subject matter expertise for this substantial project. I knew that it was crucial to bring in the talent for what we needed to do. The project had a bigger, more open-ended goal than a website. It was essentially a rebrand. Before starting the web, we needed to think about our visual look, our messaging, and telling our story. The field of education had changed and the language of education had changed. We needed to clarify our values and our message.”

When Eric met his potential Encore Fellow, Joan Goldfeder, it felt like a good fit. Joan created a process to help stakeholders talk through and negotiate the issues. She conducted interviews and focus groups, posed messages and language the team could react to, and facilitated hammering out the messaging. The messages now demonstrate the impact and importance of the work LA's BEST does.

“Without Joan, I would have cut corners and had only incremental results. Joan made sure we took the work to the next level.”

Ultimately, LA's BEST received a family of documents to work from for all their communication needs, including value statements, goals, and key messages. The team now has boilerplate they can feel confident using and know they will be on message.

"It changed how I talk about certain things we do...I feel more confident in how we tell our story and explain who we are; why it's important. We are helping children make meaningful choices because we want them to grow up to have lives full of choices – that is a message that is from the heart. It has given us a toolbox and wind in our sails to recruit staff, students and families, and explain to school leaders what LA's BEST does."

To make an Encore Fellowship successful, Eric advises, "Make sure you spend the time to find the right fit. Don't underestimate the energy needed to create the conditions for the Fellow to be successful. The most important thing is that the Fellow has a strong point of contact and is not expected to just figure out how the organization works. Make sure you acclimate the Fellow. Our organization is a public/private partnership, with 200 program sites and three boards. We had to make sure she knew how the organization functioned."

Eric continues, "Encore Fellowships are the equivalent of a grant for gaining professional expertise for a drastically reduced price. I am grateful to have this opportunity and proud we made the most of it. The level of expertise and substance was an incredible long-term value. Additionally, Encore Fellows assure that organizations are getting people with commitment to the work...we are getting people who really want to help make positive change in the world. That compassionate commitment drove Joan to provide the highest quality, stick with difficult decisions and push through a lot of tedious work. She pushed to make the final product excellent, not just good enough. This Fellowship was a case study of incredible success."