EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Congress set aside $13.1 million in the Department of Labor's Pilot and Demonstration budget in the 1998 Program Year for programs to address the needs of youth who were, had been, or were at risk of coming under justice supervision. The Department of Labor's (DOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA) collaborated with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in the Department of Justice (DOJ) in announcing solicitation SGA/DAA 98-015. The Solicitation for Grant Applications focused on projects designed to get youth at risk of criminal involvement, youth offenders, and gang members between the ages of 14 and 24 into long-term employment at wage levels that would prevent future dependency and would break the cycle of crime and juvenile delinquency.

Scholars studying juvenile offenders have called for a balance between strategies to control youth offender behaviors and efforts to build up the youths' assets, recognizing that there is a tension between assuring community and victim protection and meeting the social development needs of the youthful offenders themselves (Bazemore and Umbreit 1994). For the Youth Offender Demonstration Project (YODP), the role of surveillance of youthful offenders was maintained by the court and probation officers while services and case management support were provided through the employment training agencies and nonprofit organizations in the community. The YODP, combining oversight of the youth while delivering services to support their passage to the world of work, provided a theoretically driven demonstration of recommended social development strategies for youth offenders.

Scholars reviewed 30 years of research, noting the relationship between causes of delinquency and the chronological age of the children (family factors at younger ages, school experiences, followed by peer groups); they called their theory a social development theory because it followed the social development of the youth. They recognized the research findings that delinquency occurs with greater frequency with co-occurring risk factors (Hawkins and Catalano 1993, quoted in Howell, Krisberg, and Jones1995). Common risk factors, such as availability of drugs, lack of commitment to school, family management problems, and early academic failure were useful in predicting behavior problems. Research revealed that the more risk factors present, the greater the risk of juvenile problem behavior. Protective factors that buffer children from the adverse effects of risk factors included "healthy beliefs and clear standards for productive, law-abiding behavior, and bonding with adults who adhere to these beliefs and standards." (Steiner 1994).

DOL awarded grants to 14 round one YODP sites in June 1999[1]. Demonstration projects were designated according to one of three categories:

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[1]Subsequent to the award of this initial round of grants, ETA funded additional rounds of Youth Offender Demonstration Project grants to state and local areas.

- **Category I - Model Community Projects** were set in high-poverty neighborhoods where comprehensive, community-wide approaches to dealing with youth already had been established:

    (1) Denver, Colorado;

    (2) Houston, Texas;

    (3) Philadelphia, Pennsylvania;

    (4) Richmond, California; and

    (5) Seattle, Washington.

- **Category II - Education and Training for Youth Offenders Initiatives** provided comprehensive school-to-work education and training within juvenile correctional facilities as well as follow-up services and job placement when youth left correctional facilities and returned to their home communities:

    (6) Columbus, Ohio;

    (7) Indianapolis, Indiana; and

    (8) Tallahassee, Florida.

- **Category III - Community-wide Coordination Projects** worked with local youth service providers to develop linkages that strengthened the coordination of prevention and aftercare services for youth in small to medium-size cities with high poverty and high crime:

    (9) Clifton, New Jersey;

    (10) Bakersfield, California;

    (11) Knoxville, Tennessee;

    (12) Minneapolis, Minnesota;

    (13) Pensacola, Florida; and

    (14) Rockford, Illinois.

The projects operated for 24 months from the time of grant negotiation, generally from summer 1999 to summer 2001. The first six months were for planning; the remaining 18 months for implementation.

In May 1999, Research and Evaluation Associates received a task order from DOL to provide technical assistance support to the 14 projects. In June 1999, Research and Evaluation Associates received a task order to provide a process evaluation of 12 of the 14 sites. Two Category II sites, Tallahassee and Indianapolis, were evaluated under a DOJ contract as possible candidates for an outcomes evaluation based on a randomized design methodology.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE DELIVERY

The goal of the technical assistance (TA) effort was to identify barriers to project implementation, to recommend options for working through these barriers, and to arrange for expert assistance, tailored to the situation, to address them. The purpose of the TA was to provide problem-solving and alternative strategies to assure that projects could adequately demonstrate the value of the integrated services model, that is, delivering a coordinated spectrum of services intended to address the multiple needs of the target population.

The technical assistance consisted of seven tasks:

Task One. Conducting introductory conferences for the grantees.

Task Two. Assigning lead contact persons to each grantee.

Task Three. Providing technical assistance in specialized areas as needed by the Category I Model Community and Category II Education and Training grantees.

Task Four. Collecting administrative crime data at baseline and at 18-month follow-up from the police precincts in Category I Model Community sites.

Task Five. Assisting the Category II Education and Training grantees in setting up management information systems (MIS) to track the characteristics, services received, and outcomes of youth served.

Task Six. Preparing three separate technical assistance guides based on the experiences of the Category I Model Community, Category II Education and Training, and Category III Community-wide Coordination projects. (This task was eliminated when the process evaluation of the projects was funded.)

Task Seven. Preparing a final report on the accomplishments of the grantees and suggestions to DOL for improving such projects in the future.

Technical assistance is the process of providing help to resolve a problem or create innovative approaches. In the YODP, projects' staff were encouraged to make requests for technical assistance based on their assessment of barriers and opportunities. Research and Evaluation Associates, responding to their requests, provided technical assistance to the demonstration projects in many ways:

- on-site visits;

- telephone and e-mail contacts with project staff;

- conferences and workshops;

- information dissemination; and

- regular conference calls with demonstration projects, DOL and OJJDP.

Three conferences or workshops were organized for the projects' staff. The conferences combined presentations by topic area specialists and program staff persons with related experience. Two meetings involved all the participant projects and the third focused on the three Category II projects.

Each project had a Research and Evaluation Associates technical assistance specialist who assisted it with arranging technical assistance. These technical assistance specialists conferred with the project staff to clarify their requests and arranged for the delivery of the appropriate response. All such technical assistance events and activities were evaluated by the projects and by the specialist(s) arranging the technical assistance. The Research and Evaluation Associates specialists also designed a Youth Offender Demonstration Project Website and developed a data collection template for the projects. They arranged conference calls by project category for mutual learning, and they engaged the resources of the National Youth Employment Coalition for peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

Based on their interactions with the projects the technical assistance and evaluation teams, working with project officers at DOL, identified a public management model of demonstration administration, that is, nine attributes of projects that were successfully implementing the coordinated spectrum of services to the target population:

1. **Created a well-conceived plan:** Projects that had a clear vision and plan with achievable outcomes were more likely to implement projects in a timely way, even when the plan needed changing at various milestones.

2. **Had previous experience with the juvenile and criminal justice system:** Projects that had prior experience with the justice system were more likely to receive court or probation referrals and to work effectively with the target population.

3. **Collected and maintained data:** Projects that collected key information about their operations were more likely to manage the projects better.

4. **Developed a community support network:** Projects that developed a broad network of supporters and stakeholders were better able to find resources within the community.

5. **Maintained strong grantee involvement:** Projects that were led by a grantee that remained involved were more likely to keep the partnership working well and avoid goal displacement.

6. **Connected the workforce and justice systems effectively:** Projects that established close working relationships with key leaders in the two systems and used their resources were better able to recruit and train target youth.

7. **Leveraged resources through collaborations and partnerships:** Projects that leveraged resources through partnerships and collaborations were able to bring more services and more diverse services to the target population. They were also more likely to remain in partnership after the demonstration.

8. **Developed a continuous improvement system:** Projects that remained open to staff and organizational development, including technical assistance, were more likely to implement their projects effectively and in a timely fashion.

9. **Shared leadership and information:** Projects that shared leadership and information were more likely to have stakeholder ownership and loyalty.

LESSONS LEARNED

Although some lessons gleaned from this demonstration were related to the public management model, DOL and Research and Evaluation Associates also learned some important lessons about effective practices for providing technical assistance. In comparing projects, four general themes surfaced in relation to delivery of technical assistance:

•   **Philosophy of Technical Assistance:** A philosophy of technical assistance should be based on openness to, and willingness of, the projects to continue to learn.

    Lesson 1: Technical assistance needs to be introduced as a resource for continuous improvement. Every opportunity needs to be exploited to demonstrate that using it is a good management technique and not a sign of weakness.

    Lesson 2: Technical assistance from outside the partnership is essential to facilitate the clarification of roles and responsibilities, especially when there are some emotions attached to current operating procedures. An outside facilitator can maneuver the group through the tensions as well as support their efforts to deal with technical issues of organizational responsiveness and accountability.

•   **Sequencing of Issues in Technical Assistance:** It is important that technical assistance is sequenced appropriately, that is, to recognize that partnership development and planning are early issues needing attention, while other issues emerge as the project engages the youth. Some issues cannot be addressed until the fundamental programming is in place.

Lesson 3: Developing partnerships should anticipate needing technical assistance early-- before months of struggle have left some members of the partnership frustrated and angry with other members of the partnership.

Lesson 4: Technical assistance is a valuable resource in developing a realistic Implementation Plan early in the project period.

Lesson 5: Programming issues may not emerge until the demonstration is under way, and technical assistance can be very valuable in keeping the project staff from becoming overwhelmed by the individual differences among the youths' needs.

Lesson 6: Responses to technical assistance requests need to be attentive to the timing of the issue. Projects may not be able to attend to one set of issues until others have reached a more stable footing.

Lesson 7: Fundamental orientation issues need to be revisited. In the continuous-improvement mind set, this is an easy and comfortable process; for others, it might be an embarrassment to request technical assistance on issues carefully presented in the early stages of the project.

- **The Structure of Projects:** The project structure is important, and it is important to allow it to change, perhaps repeatedly, until the goals of serving the youth are met adequately.

  Lesson 8: The members of the partnership need to be aware of and committed to meeting the diverse and multiple needs of the target population. Relationships and arrangements need to be forged to meet these unusual demands.

  Lesson 9: Technical assistance is valuable in freeing project leadership to re-invent itself, perhaps several times. Leaders need to be encouraged to experiment with the demonstration model until it effectively meets the needs of the youth it is designed to serve. The value of the courage and persistence of project teams in struggling to provide the nation with workable models cannot be overstated.

- **Relationships:** Relationships undergird the technical assistance efforts; they are built on trust and candor.

  Lesson 10: Technical assistance requires both clarity of analysis and gentle candor with all parties. It is not enough to have made an accurate assessment of a situation; the follow through must be conducted in a way that improves the projects and keeps the relationships intact.

  Lesson 11: There is a difference between providing technical assistance and monitoring. Trying to combine the two functions reduces the openness of projects to seeking or receiving technical assistance.

Lesson 12: Sustaining a climate that encourages collegial peer-to-peer relationships among project teams is an important dimension to technical assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future Technical Assistance Efforts

Future technical assistance specialists need to consciously forge partnerships with the projects' staff and the DOL project officers in their common search for workable models to assist court supervised youth and youth at risk of gang or criminal involvement to make a successful transition to employment at wages that prevents future dependency or criminal activity:

- Create an environment that frees project leaders to try new approaches and that assesses the outcomes carefully is based on strong and trusted communication and

- Create technical assistance plans to facilitate the continuous improvement process.

Future technical assistance needs to be more conscious of the likely issues of concern at various points in the development and implementation of the integrated services model.

Future Demonstration Projects

Future demonstration projects need to be designed to account for the multiple and varied nature of issues the youth face to help them transition to employment.

- Partnerships in the future need to include state and local health care, housing and educational systems.

- The public management model needs to be tested and re-evaluated in subsequent demonstrations.

When future demonstrations show promise, it will be important to find ways to track the youth for a longer period of time to allow for an assessment of long-term outcomes. The ability to hold a job, establish independent living, open a bank account, or remain free of the court system are long-term outcomes that could not be determined because of the nature of this demonstration.

Research and Evaluation Associates, Inc.