

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

When Congress authorized Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs in 1982, it mandated that coordination between agencies operating JTPA programs and other agencies play a central role in the organization and provision of services. The purpose of this report is to assess the role of program coordination in enhancing JTPA program effectiveness and efficiency. Specifically, it is intended to: (1) identify major strategies and characteristics of coordination, (2) assess the relative advantages and disadvantages of coordination, (3) identify factors that are effective in promoting and enhancing coordination, (4) assess legal, administrative, and other barriers to coordination, and (5) propose specific actions that might be taken at the federal, state, and local levels to facilitate better integration of programs.

BACKGROUND

Under JTPA Title II-A, employment and training services are provided by over 600 local service delivery areas (SDAs). These services include classroom and on-the-job training, job search assistance, and remedial education. The Act mandates that SDAs coordinate the provision of services with other human service agencies serving dislocated, unskilled, and economically disadvantaged individuals.

In this report, coordination refers to situations where two or more organizations work together, through a formal or informal arrangement, to meet one or more of the following goals: (1) improve the effectiveness of programs, (2) improve the cost effectiveness of programs, (3) avoid unnecessary duplication of services, and/or (4) improve measured performance on outcomes of interest to the program administrators.

Coordination efforts can vary in complexity. The simplest form of coordination is the sharing of information by two or more programs. Other forms of coordination include joint planning, coordinated referrals, and coordinated provision of services. The most complete form of coordination is program integration, where two or more programs merge their funding and jointly conduct outreach, assessment, service provision, and placement.

Some agencies are required to coordinate certain activities with JTPA, while others do so on a voluntary basis. At the state and local level, there are a variety of other programs/agencies with which

JTPA programs may coordinate, including: (1) the employment service, (2) welfare programs, (3) academic education, (4) vocational education, (5) economic development, and (6) vocational rehabilitation.

This study collected information on the experiences of agencies involved in coordination projects. The study began with a review of the literature on JTPA coordination. This review synthesized findings from over 100 articles and reports. To obtain more recent and more detailed information, telephone interviews were conducted with staff from 60 coordination projects, and on-site case studies were conducted for nine of the projects.

A total of 252 coordination projects were identified by the Employment and Training Administration's regional offices. Sixty projects, representing a wide range of agencies, were then selected based on the type and extent of coordination, urban/rural setting, region, and target group affected. The same criteria were then used to select nine of the coordination projects for case studies.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

Our research indicates that there is a great deal of diversity in coordination 'models' and strategies. Most of the program officials interviewed stated that the advantages of coordination substantially outweigh the disadvantages. Interviewees cited many advantages both for the client and the agencies involved in coordination. The majority of coordination efforts reported either no disadvantages to coordination or only minor ones. The most significant disadvantage is the amount of time and effort required to plan and sustain successful coordination.

Our conclusion about the generally positive returns to coordination, which is consistent with findings from other studies, provides a strong rationale for agencies at federal, state, and local levels to take steps to promote coordination. While many agencies across the country are actively involved in coordination projects, there is still much that can be done at all levels of government to strengthen and expand coordination.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

1. Wide Diversity of Coordination Models and Strategies Exists

Our study of the practical experience of state and local agencies with coordination efforts reveals diversity among coordination 'models' and several dimensions which characterize coordination efforts:

"top-down" versus "bottom-up" coordination: the initiative to coordinate may either be

locally-developed ("bottom-up" coordination) or may be encouraged or imposed by federal or state officials ("top-down" coordination);

- broad-scope and narrow-scope coordination: coordination efforts may involve as few as two agencies or many other independent agencies; and
- degree of integration: coordination efforts vary considerably in terms of the types of activities coordinated and the extent of coordination (e.g., in some efforts agency budgets and lines of authority remain largely untouched, while in others funding and staff responsibility are shared or pooled).

2. Advantages of Coordination Substantially Outweigh Disadvantages

Throughout our case studies and telephone interviews, a consistent theme emerged: the advantages of coordination substantially outweigh the disadvantages. Interviewees cited many advantages both for the client -- particularly better access to a wider range of services and a reduction in the barriers to accessing services -- and for agencies involved in coordination. Agencies benefit in a variety of ways, including the following:

- access to additional resources;
- ability to secure additional public and/or private funding;
- greater flexibility in using funds;
- ability to offer a wider range of services targeted on client needs;
- increased knowledge and communication among agency staff;
- ability to share credit for client outcomes;
- ability to place clients (through other agencies) at little or no additional cost;
- increased operational efficiency and reduction of duplicative agency efforts;
- better tracking of services received by clients and client outcomes;
- enhanced ability to serve mandated target groups;
- improved image with clients, employers, and the community;
- specialization in areas of expertise;
- enhanced performance outcomes; and
- cost savings through elimination of duplicative efforts.

3. Disadvantages of Coordination Are Relatively Minor -- Time and Effort in Planning and Sustaining Coordination Cited as Most Significant Disadvantage

The majority of coordination efforts studied reported no disadvantages to coordination or only minor ones. The most significant disadvantage is the amount of time and effort required to plan and

sustain successful coordination. Most staff of coordinating agencies view such meetings and other regular interagency communication to be an unavoidable cost of coordinating services. Time spent attending to additional paperwork is also frequently mentioned as a cost. Disadvantages to the agencies are more significant than disadvantages to the clients. The latter consist primarily of the potential for completing additional forms or problems of access to services. Other disadvantages to agencies include:

- loss of autonomy in decision making;
- need to resolve interagency conflicts;
- need to maintain new operational procedures, client flows, and information systems; and
- potential inefficiencies of out-stationed staff.

Some of these disadvantages may be ameliorated as agencies become more accustomed to dealing with one another and as the time needed to sustain coordination is reduced.

4. No Single Factor Is Essential to Coordination, but a Variety of Factors Promote Successful Coordination

Interviewees identified many factors that promoted coordination. Some factors -- such as high-level political support -- are more important than others. None of the factors is essential, but most are important to successful coordination efforts. Among the major factors that promote coordination are the following:

- high-level political support at the federal and state levels, as well as support from agency and community leaders at the local level;
- cooperative attitudes among managers and staff at state and local agencies;
- decreases in funding and funding shortages, or the availability of new program funds or funds earmarked for coordination;
- mutual needs and common goals of agencies, particularly related to serving clients effectively;
- a previous history of coordination;
- mechanisms to build consensus and to resolve conflicts that may arise during planning and implementation of coordination efforts; and
- co-location of facilities.

5. Agencies Encounter Administrative, Legal, and Other Barriers to Coordination

All of the successful coordination efforts that we reviewed encountered some barriers to coordination. The most common barriers are "turf" issues and ignorance or dislike of the philosophy or



operations of other agencies. We suspect that these barriers play a significant role in thwarting many potential coordination efforts before they are seriously considered. These barriers are generally overcome in the successful projects by getting to know and understand the other agencies involved. In many successful examples of coordination, the key agency staff knew each other well before coordination efforts were undertaken; in other cases, pressure from the governor or an agency head forced agencies to work together while the agencies worked to understand each other's programs.

Legal issues were not commonly cited as barriers. Among the legal barriers cited are the following:

- . eligibility restrictions;
- . restrictions on uses of funds; and
- . client confidentiality requirements.

In some cases, special legislation or waivers are required to help the agencies coordinate.

Administrative barriers were encountered at some agencies, including the following:

- . restrictions on obtaining credit for services and results;
- . difficulty in working with staff from other agencies;
- . different geographical boundaries for coordinating agencies;
- . incompatible forms and management information systems;
- . incompatible procedures;
- . long-term leases and space limitations; and
- . lines of authority.

Perhaps the most common administrative barrier is that agencies often have different perspectives on performance and services to clients. In the past year, the Department of Labor has sought to encourage services to the hard-to-serve while retaining the performance standards system. To some extent this may help welfare programs coordinate with the JTPA system.

Among the other barriers to the establishment or maintenance of coordination cited are the following:

- . fear of loss of agency autonomy or function;
- . distrust of other agencies;
- . lack of ownership;

- lack of political or administrative support; and
- the time and effort required to plan and implement coordination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While many agencies are actively involved in coordination projects across the country, there is still much that could be done at the federal, state, and local levels to strengthen and expand coordination. All levels of government can and should take steps to increase collaboration among agencies, but none need be held back by inaction at other levels. Some of the recommendations that emerge from this study can be implemented quite easily, particularly the ones which require no new legislation. The recommendations requiring new legislation are likely to enhance significantly the role of coordination in delivery of employment services and other social services at state and local levels.

1. At the Federal Level

In general, steps should be taken that increase the likelihood that state and local level officials will decide that it is in their own interest to coordinate. Presumably, self-interest can help to overcome omnipresent "turf" concerns as well as the frequently present personality problems and distrust.

Under current law, the federal government can continue to play an important role in promoting coordination by providing high-level support for coordination and by expanding its efforts to provide technical assistance to states and localities. Specifically, the following are recommended:

- expand efforts to document and communicate information about the benefits of coordination;
- continue providing support and encouragement for state and local officials in their efforts to coordinate JTPA programs and other programs;
- provide flexibility for coordination to state and local level officials charged with implementing federally-funded programs;
- increase federal efforts to insure that innovators will not be worse off for taking chances;
- increase federal efforts to encourage the use of state and local bodies whose mission is to promote coordination;
- set an example by continuing coordination at the national and regional levels;
- provide information on successful examples of coordination; and
- provide technical assistance, guidance, and problem resolution for states and localities on designing and implementing coordination.

The Department of Labor and other federal agencies could make several changes to existing legislation or regulations either to promote coordination or to reduce barriers to coordination at the state and local levels. Particular emphasis should be placed on the following areas:

- increase flexibility in using funds to coordinate;
- mandate coordination for other human service programs; and
- develop common definitions of terms.

There are several steps that the Department of Labor and other federal agencies could take to further test innovative approaches to coordination:

- continue providing financial support for demonstration projects and other innovations; and
- conduct a national evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of coordination.

2. At the State Level

States also play a key role in promoting coordination and in helping localities to overcome the various barriers to coordination. The role of the state -- particularly the governor and state agencies responsible for employment and training, education, vocational rehabilitation, welfare, and other social services -- can often be critical in providing the political support and resources that are necessary for agencies to become involved in coordination efforts.

Under current law, there are a variety of steps that states might undertake to promote coordination and to assist localities in overcoming barriers to coordination.

- provide high-level support for coordination;
- strengthen statewide coordinating committees;
- provide localities with technical assistance and problem resolution;
- promote compatibility/integration of automated information systems;
- provide for cross-training of staff; and
- encourage strengthening of local level coordination efforts.

States could make several changes to existing legislation or regulations either to promote coordination or to reduce barriers to coordination at the state and local level. Particular emphasis should be placed on the following areas:

- use the JTPA performance standards system to encourage coordination;
- mandate joint planning and coordination among state agencies;

- make geographical boundaries of state and local programs coterminous;
- provide greater flexibility in sharing credit for outcomes across agencies;

There are several steps that states could take to further test innovative approaches to coordination:

- provide funding/grants for innovative coordination projects; and
- provide funds for documentation and evaluation of innovative coordination projects.

3. At the Local Level

This study, and others that preceded it, establishes the critical role that localities play in developing and implementing coordination projects. Local agencies are generally on the front-line in most coordination projects (even those that are "top-down" models of coordination). There are a number of things that can be done at the local level to foster coordination:

- develop an understanding of the objectives and operations of other programs;
- increase joint planning among local agencies;
- introduce cross-training of staff; and
- document and evaluate coordination efforts.