

GAO
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-53](#), a report to congressional requester

Why GAO Did This Study

The Youth Opportunity Grant program (YO) represented an innovative approach to improving education and employment opportunities for at-risk youth by targeting resources in high poverty areas and incorporating strategies that experts have identified as effective for serving this population. The Department of Labor (the Department) awarded 36 grants in 2000, and the program continued for 5 years. The Department had used a similar approach on a smaller scale in previous programs, but little information is available on the impact of these other programs. In order to understand what can be learned from the Youth Opportunity Grant program, GAO examined the grantees' implementation of the program, challenges they faced, and what is known about the program's outcomes and impact. To view selected results from GAO's Web-based survey of the Program Directors, go to [GAO-06-56SP](#).

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Labor take the actions necessary to complete the impact analysis of the Youth Opportunity Grant program and release the data and all related research reports from the program's evaluation. In comments on GAO's draft report, the Department agreed with GAO's recommendation to complete the impact analysis and publish all related reports.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-53.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David Bellis at (415) 904-2272 or bellisd@gao.gov.

YOUTH OPPORTUNITY GRANTS

Lessons Can Be Learned from Program, but Labor Needs to Make Data Available

What GAO Found

Grantees used a variety of approaches to build the infrastructure of the YO program, provide services to at-risk youth, and conduct outreach efforts. While grantees set up centers and trained core staff to deliver services, they differed somewhat in their approaches, depending on circumstances within their communities. In addition, grantees employed a combination of strategies to provide youth services, including collaborating with other providers and inventing unique programming. To recruit this hard-to-serve target population, grantees used a range of techniques, from partnering with juvenile justice agencies, to combing malls for eligible youth.

Fast program start up, conditions in their communities, and the characteristics and needs of the youth challenged the grantees; however they used features of the program design to address some of these difficulties. Many grantees struggled to set up the program, especially within the Department's time frame. In addition, grantees felt encumbered by the drugs, violence, and a lack of jobs in their communities as well as the obstacles facing their clients, such as low academic achievement and lack of family support. Grantees used the discretion and other components built into the program design to address many of these challenges. For example, in response to safety concerns, an urban grantee elected to provide transportation for youth attending evening events. However, grantees and others said more planning time would have been beneficial.

Grantees and others reported that the youth and their communities made progress toward the YO program goals, but the program's impact is still under study. Grantees reported that they had enrolled about 91,000 youth nationwide, many of whom completed high school, entered college, or found employment after enrolling in the program. In addition, grantees and others said that the grants had benefited their communities. However, without an impact analysis, it is not known whether these events would have occurred in the absence of the program. The Department contracted for a \$24 million evaluation of the program that included plans for an impact analysis; however, agency officials are unsure if the analysis will be completed.

Manchester Point Arena Youth Opportunity Center, Calif.



Source: GAO.