
APPENDIX B

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TALENT SEARCH PROJECTS SHUT DOWN?

As part of a modification to our original contract, the U.S. Department of Education's Planning and Evaluation Service asked us to explore what happened at sites that lost their funding to operate a Talent Search project in 1998. Key issues concerned whether grantees either established new programs or expanded other programs to continue serving Talent Search participants, and the extent to which former participants may have been able to find similar services from other providers. With regard to other providers, two distinct situations seemed theoretically possible. The existence or closure of a Talent Search project in an area might have encouraged the development of other precollege programs, because the Talent Search program was seen as valuable and worth emulating. Alternatively, the existence of a Talent Search project might have deterred the development of similar programs, because it was seen as sufficiently meeting target students' needs. It was also possible, of course, that Talent Search had neither of these effects.

The scope of our exploratory work on this task was limited. During the first few months of 2000 we attempted to reach key officials—the former program director or a representative of the former host institution—for brief telephone interviews. We made contact with officials from all but two of the projects that lost funding in 1998. Our findings, which are based on officials' perceptions of how students and services changed in the aftermath of losing federal Talent Search funding, are summarized below. We did not follow up with students to determine their receipt of services to replace Talent Search.

TALENT SEARCH PROJECTS RARELY LOSE FUNDING

Talent Search grantees rarely lose their federal funding. Since existing projects can receive up to 15 extra points on their applications ratings for prior experience, they have an advantage over new applicants. Of all the grantees that were operating a Talent Search program during the last grant cycle (1994–98) and applied for continued funding, only 14 were turned down. Basic information on these former grantees is provided in table B.1.

Table B.1: Talent Search grantees that did not receive funding for the current grant period.

Grantee	Location	Type of Host Institution	Approved number of participants in 1996–97
California State University, Fullerton	Fullerton, CA	Public 4-year college	800
Community and Economic Development Association, Inc.	Maywood, IL	Community organization	600
Davenport College of Business	Grand Rapids, MI	Private 4-year college	975
Emporia State University	Emporia, KS	Public 4-year college	1,100
Hopkinsville Community College	Hopkinsville, KY	Public 2-year college	600
Joliet Junior College	Joliet, IL	Public 2-year college	700
Lumbee Regional Development Association	Pembroke, NC	Community organization	850
Michigan State University	East Lansing, MI	Public 4-year college	800
Northwest-Shoals Community College	Muscle Shoals, AL	Public 2-year college	800
Northwestern Michigan College	Traverse City, MI	Public 2-year college	600
Provisional Educational Services, Inc.	San Bernardino, CA	Community organization	1,000
Southeast Missouri State University	Cape Girardeau, MO	Public 4-year college	1,100
University of South Carolina, Spartanburg	Spartanburg, SC	Public 4-year college	1,000
Wayne County Regional Education Service Agency	Wayne, MI	Community organization	700

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal TRIO Programs.

Actually, one of the 14 institutions, Northwest-Shoals Community College, continued operating a Talent Search project; in fact, two projects. It had two grants during the 1994–98 grant period. For the 1998–2002 period the college applied for continued funding for both projects and also submitted an application for a new Talent Search project. One of the two previously funded projects' applications was turned down, but the application for the new project was accepted. The new project, however, was approved to serve 200 fewer participants than the one that was forced to shut down, and it serves different target schools.

HOST INSTITUTION RESPONSES

Grantees that wished for at least some of their former Talent Search participants to continue receiving some kind of precollege services could have pursued several different strategies. They could have started new programs, expanded other existing programs, or referred them to programs or services available from other institutions. Each of these approaches was tried to varying extents by some of the former Talent Search grantees. But apparently none of them proved to be very feasible or successful—at least not if success is judged by the percentage of former Talent Search participants able to get similar, alternative services.

Several of the projects tried to start other federally-funded precollege programs. At least three of the former Talent Search grantees applied for a new Upward Bound grant in the competition that closed in October 1998 (for the grant cycle that began in fall of 1999). Two of them won. One of these winning institutions sent letters to about 100 former Talent Search participants, inviting them to apply for the new Upward Bound project. Our contact estimated, however, that less than 10 of them eventually joined Upward Bound. In addition, at least five of the former grantees had applied or were planning to apply for a GEAR UP grant, although none had been successful at the time of our interviews; two of the five were planning to apply for the second time.

Only one former project director mentioned applying for other sources of program funding, besides Upward Bound and GEAR UP, that could potentially serve some students who had been in Talent Search. But two of the three grants she had in mind were for family literacy programs, not very similar to what Talent Search had offered.

It is important to note, however, that many of these actions were not motivated solely or even primarily by the loss of the Talent Search grant. Some of the organizations were following a longstanding practice of continually seeking out new funding opportunities that would benefit their target constituencies. For example, one former project director whose organization applied for an Upward Bound grant said they had planned to do that anyway, although losing the Talent Search grant certainly “sealed the decision.” And another official said that when it comes to providing services, “I’m always looking for more money.” Thus, some efforts described above were not seen at the time as ways to replace lost Talent Search funds.

Six of the former grantees apparently did not try to initiate any new programs to replace Talent Search. Three of these host institutions, according to our contacts, also had no other precollege programs to accommodate former Talent Search participants, although the former director at one of these places said she does what she can occasionally to provide minimal services to the former target population. For example, she had recently made a presentation on financial aid at one of the former target high schools and she always provides one-on-one assistance to people who call or stop by the office with education-related questions. The remaining three projects had one or more other precollege programs, but reportedly did not expand them to serve former Talent Search participants.

An important reason why these organizations did not initiate efforts to compensate for the loss of Talent Search, even though former program staff had been interested in doing so, was insufficient funds. They did not have the money, our sources told us, to create new programs and pay the staff who would be needed to operate them. A few staff also questioned their organizations’ commitments to the Talent Search program. Finally, a representative of one of the community organizations explained that even if his institution possessed or

had been able to obtain funds to support a program smaller than Talent Search had been, it would have been somewhat politically difficult to sponsor services that would benefit just some of the districts or schools in its target area; they felt pressured to serve all or none.

Competing for a new Talent Search grant in the future is also an option that some former grantees may pursue. In seven of the twelve cases we studied, officials thought their former host institutions would apply again for a Talent Search grant at the next opportunity; some said they definitely would. In the few cases where officials we interviewed could not make an educated guess as to what their former host institutions would do, they consistently favored the idea of submitting a new application and hoped that would happen. An official at one former grantee noted, however, that if they won a GEAR UP grant, there might be less interest in competing for Talent Search again, since the two programs have overlapping purposes and target groups.

THE POST-TALENT SEARCH SERVICE ENVIRONMENT

If former grantees did not come up with new ways to serve former Talent Search participants, where could these students, dropouts, and other adults turn, if interested, for similar precollege services? To what extent could former Talent Search staff help them find alternative programs? Our exploratory research indicated that there were few good options; service opportunities were often rather limited and in any case the alternatives were not very comparable to Talent Search.

One of the more prevalent alternative service options might have been Upward Bound. As we stated in the preceding section, two former grantees started operating an Upward Bound program one year after their Talent Search projects shut down. Also, several of the other host institutions were operating an Upward Bound project when they lost their Talent Search funding. During the 1998–99 program year, according to the TRIO directory, seven of the 14 former Talent Search grantees were operating a “regular” Upward Bound project,¹ including one institution (Northwest-Shoals Community College) that had two Upward Bound grants. In addition, the target areas served by some of the former Talent Search projects were also served by Upward Bound projects hosted by other nearby institutions.

In cases where the former Talent Search target high schools were also served by an Upward Bound project, or where students from a former Talent Search target middle school were transferring to an Upward Bound target high school, some former Talent Search participants might have been able to join Upward Bound and thereby continue receiving precollege services. But officials consistently pointed out that this would only have happened to a very limited extent. Because

¹That is, not a Veterans Upward Bound project, which would not be an alternative service option for the typical Talent Search participant.

Upward Bound projects are so much smaller than Talent Search, the number of Upward Bound openings in any given year would be tiny relative to the number of former Talent Search participants. Moreover, the two programs are of a different nature. Students who had participated in Talent Search might not be able to make the greater time commitment typically required in Upward Bound, might not be interested or in need of its intensive academic services, and might not meet the eligibility criteria.²

- One former Talent Search grantee that already had an Upward Bound project referred some participants to it, but the prospects for their getting in were not good, because it had a waiting list.
- One of the former grantees that won funding for a new Upward Bound project, sent letters to about 100 former Talent Search participants, inviting them to apply for the new Upward Bound program. Our contact estimated, however, that less than 10 of them eventually joined Upward Bound.

Other than Upward Bound, several officials said, there were few alternative precollege programs even roughly comparable to Talent Search in the areas they served. Some said there were virtually none. One of the community colleges that lost its Talent Search grant had a year-round, precollege math and science program, but it only served only 50-75 students. A former director from a community organization said that colleges in the local area may have had a few “little programs,” but these lacked the capacity to absorb many former Talent Search participants. A former target district for a different project had recently received a GEAR UP grant. In one target city there was a Boys and Girls Club. And elsewhere a former target middle schools reportedly had been awarded a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant, but according to the former Talent Search project director it was not as comprehensive as Talent Search had been, and lacked a precollege orientation.

One former project director said that in his city there were a few “enrichment programs” run by community organizations, but that these programs were much smaller than Talent Search; were not constantly recruiting and did not operate on school campuses, so students might not know about them and might find it more difficult to participate in them, relative to Talent Search; and, in some cases, were aimed specifically at just one racial/ethnic group, such as blacks or Hispanics, and therefore were not likely to help students with other backgrounds. Another

²Three kinds of eligibility criteria apply here. First, in Upward Bound, two-thirds of all participants must be from low-income families and be potential first-generation college students, and the remaining one-third must be either low-income or first-generation. In Talent Search, two-thirds of participants must be both low-income and first-generation, but the remaining one-third do not have to meet either of these criteria. Thus, any Talent Search participants in this last category would be prohibited from joining Upward Bound. Second, Upward Bound is only for high school students; it does not serve students below 9th grade, nor out of school adults. Third, individual Upward Bound projects might have their own additional eligibility standards, such as a minimum GPA requirement, that some former Talent Search participants would be unable to meet.

former director said that other programs did not offer as extensive a range of services as Talent Search did, and may not be free.

A few officials commented that opportunities varied considerably by location, including community size and urbanization. For example, one person described how in a small community students had very few alternative programs, but in a mid-sized city formerly served by the same Talent Search project, they had a greater chance of finding some other program to join.

We usually asked specifically whether former target schools had stepped up to fill the gap left by the closure of these Talent Search projects. Perhaps having seen what the Talent Search program did for their students, schools would initiate or increase efforts to provide similar services. Most officials, however, said there was no response by former target schools. Some schools may have been interested in providing students with supplemental services similar to those Talent Search had provided, said a former project director, but they would very quickly have run up against funding limits. A couple of former grantee officials said that schools did not have the resources, neither the money nor the staff, to carry on the type of services Talent Search had provided. In the middle- and low-income areas that Talent Search targeted, one of them explained, schools were strapped for cash and typically had just two guidance counselors trying to serve 500 to 1,000 students.

Neither the existence nor the demise of Talent Search had spawned many alternative precollege programs in the target areas, according to our contacts. As with the former grantees themselves, other potential service providers were hampered by a lack of funds. One official assessed the situation this way: Without government “leading the charge” and providing the funds, then nothing will ever happen and service needs will go unmet. In addition, another former director worried that alternative programs starting up after Talent Search ended might find some students and parents skeptical about joining, based on a concern that these new programs too might go out of business.

Furthermore, our sources felt that their Talent Search projects, when they were operating, had not deterred the development of alternative precollege programs. The general lack of similar services was attributed first and foremost to a lack of funds; it was not because potential program operators and funders felt that Talent Search was doing all that needed to be done for the target population. As one former project director put it, if anyone had looked closely, they would have clearly seen that Talent Search was not coming anywhere near meeting the level of need in the community; they would have seen there was plenty of room for similar programs.

A final interesting finding from our interviews was that when a Talent Search project shuts down, other programs may also see decreased participation. We

heard this from representatives of two of the 12 projects we studied. Both cases involved programs that could help students pay for college.

- One former host institution, a two-year college, has a program that is modeled somewhat after the well known I Have A Dream program. Area schools annually choose 50-60 disadvantaged middle school students for the program. The students attend a short summer program at the college and then receive a guarantee that if they remain drug-free and maintain a 2.0 GPA, the program will cover all tuition costs at the college above and beyond the value of any Pell grants they receive. An official told us that without Talent Search to provide services to this program's participants in the years between 6th and 12th grade, fewer of them are using these "scholarships."
- At one of the community organizations, a high proportion of Talent Search participants were from one particular racial/ethnic group. There are at least two generous college scholarship programs aimed specifically at this group, but without Talent Search, the former project director said, many students are not hearing about these scholarships at all or not soon enough to benefit.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The general picture that emerged from our limited research on the aftermath of Talent Search project closures is one in which few former program participants can readily obtain similar services from alternative sources. A lack of funds was cited as key to this situation far more than a lack of will. But while the cessation of services was no doubt unfortunate for those affected, concerned readers may be comforted by a few thoughts. First, it is rare for Talent Search grantees to lose funds. Second, former participants at the 14 de-funded projects did at least receive *some* precollege services, some of them for several years, and this may have a positive effect on their lives. It is possible, for example, that students who were approaching the end of high school when the projects ended knew a good deal more about financial aid and getting into college than they would have if they had never joined Talent Search in the first place. Third, at the same time that these 14 projects were shutting down, many new Talent Search projects were starting up in other communities all around the country, serving lots of other students and dropouts who undoubtedly need precollege assistance just as much as those in the areas where the 14 de-funded projects had operated. In fact, ED funded about 40 new Talent Search projects beginning in the 1998–99 program year. Thus, in the big picture, although 14 projects shut down, the nation saw a distinct net increase in the number of people and communities served by Talent Search.

