

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT STAFF AND ORGANIZATION

Talent Search staff members are central to the program's success. This chapter uses information from the project survey and case studies to examine several topics, including project staff levels, staffing models, staff characteristics and salaries, project budget allocations, and relations between projects and target schools.

Overview and Selected Highlights

- Projects averaged 13 years of operation in 2001. Just over half began in 1975 to 1984.
- Nationwide, Talent Search projects employ an estimated 2,548 full- and part-time staff—an average of 7.1 individuals and 5.3 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff per project. Project FTE staff averaged one director or coordinator, two counselors, one other professional staff member, and a support staff.
- Just over two-thirds of Talent Search projects sometimes used volunteers and just over half had work study students.
- Project directors averaged about 7 years experience, counselors about 4 years.
- Staff spent most of their time, often four days a week, in the field, visiting schools.
- The percentage of staff who are black is similar to that of participants, but differs for Hispanics and whites. Three-fourths of Talent Search staff were females.
- Almost three-fourths of Talent Search project directors have advanced degrees and about 45 percent of counselors have advanced degrees.
- Just over one-third of Talent Search directors served as director of another related project at the same time as directing the Talent Search project.
- In 2000 dollars, salaries of directors and coordinators averaged about \$40,000, those of counselors and advisors about \$27,100.
- On average, Talent Search projects allocated two-thirds of their budgets to staff salaries.
- Relations between projects and target schools were generally positive. One key to good relations with target schools was reciprocation.
- To some alumni, personal encouragement from staff was more memorable than particular services. Staff often served as role models for participants.
- Case study interviewees consistently offered favorable comments about Talent Search staff, describing them as caring, dedicated, friendly, helpful, and nonjudgmental.

PROJECT ORGANIZATION AND STAFF ROLES

PROJECT AGE

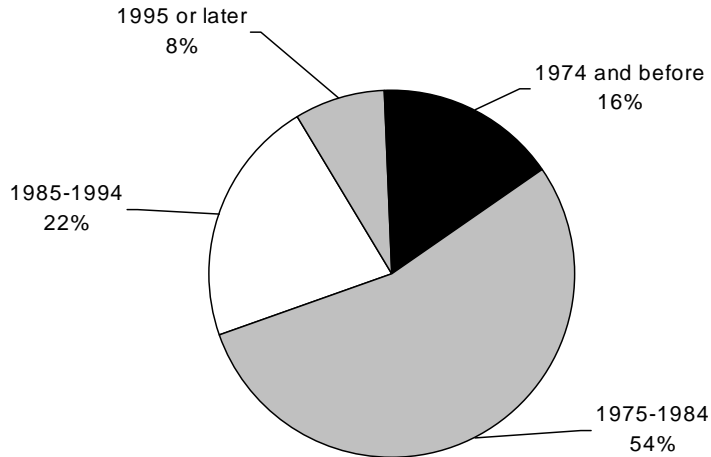
While TRIO programs have earned recognition as stable federal grant programs, the required grant award competition that occurs every four years means that all projects experience some element of uncertainty concerning their continuation beyond the current grant cycle. Nonetheless, by design, the program competition procedures foster stability in project awards by counting the achievement of self-identified project objectives as prior experience points that increase scores in the competition. Thus, despite many more applicants than awards, once a host has been awarded a grant and has launched a project, it will likely continue operations beyond the initial four- or five-year award. For example, in the last competition, which was held in 1997, only 14 of the operating projects that reapplied were not funded again.

Former program officials at two of these grantees told us that the budget section of their applications had been accidentally left out—an unfortunate oversight that led to a relatively large point deduction. Officials at 10 other defunded projects told us that their applications simply lost a few points in various sections—enough overall to put them below the cutoff score to receive a grant. Some officials attributed this to not having submitted as well-written an application as they could have; the writers may not have had enough experience or may have been too rushed at the end to smooth out the rough parts. Others, however, felt they had submitted high-quality applications and did not understand or agree with the point deductions. (See appendix B for more information on grantees that did not get renewed funding.)

Data on project age confirm the overall stability of Talent Search projects. Based on information provided by the project survey on the first year of operation, Talent Search projects averaged 13 years of operation by 2001. As shown in figure 4.1, 16 percent of Talent Search projects began in 1974 or before and were more than 25 years old. Just over half the projects (54 percent) began between 1975 and 1984. Projects hosted at public 4-year institutions were the oldest, and projects hosted at 2-year institutions were the youngest, averaging 15 and 11 years, respectively. The difference in average age reflects the increase in the number of projects hosted at 2-year colleges (see chapter 5).

Projects averaged 13 years of operation in 2001. Just over half (54 percent) began between 1975 and 1984; 30 percent began after 1984, and 16 percent began before 1975.

Figure 4.1—Percent distribution of the first year of operation of Talent Search projects operating in 1999–2000



SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

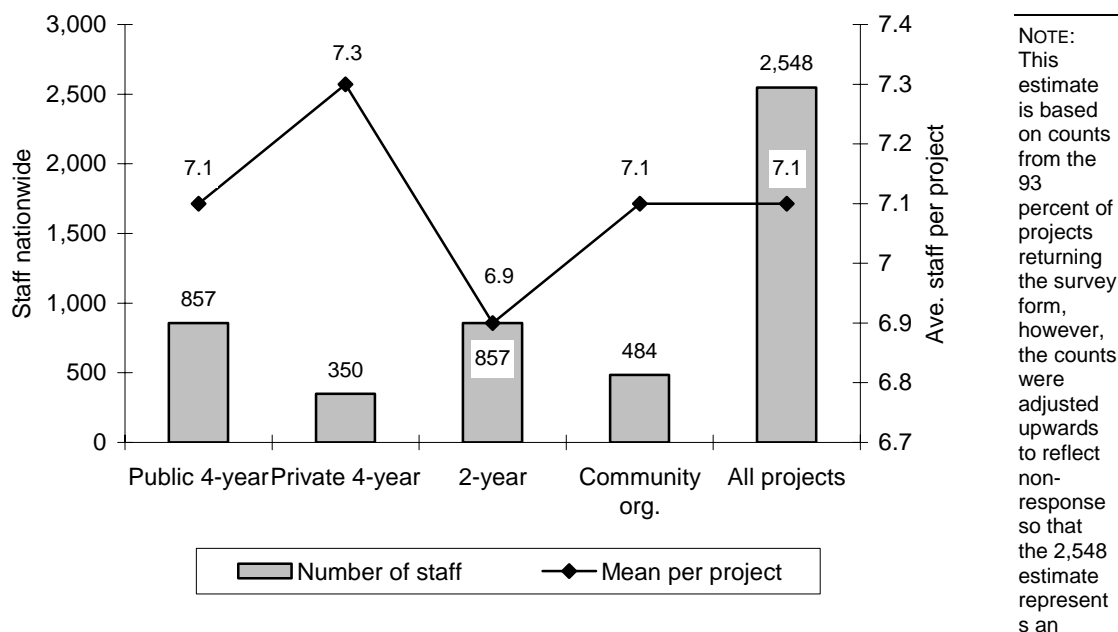
OVERVIEW OF STAFF

Nationwide, Talent Search projects employed an estimated 2,548 staff in the 361 projects operating at the time of the project survey (figure 4.2 and table 4.1).¹ This figure includes full- and part-time staff and support staff but excludes undergraduate student employees and volunteers. The count also includes graduate students who might be employed as tutors or in other capacities.

Projects averaged about 7.1 full- and part-time staff, one staff person for about every 125 participants. On average, projects hosted by community organizations were funded to serve larger numbers of participants and had higher average grant amounts, but they also had a higher participant-to-staff ratio (166:1) than other Talent Search projects. As we show later, however, projects hosted by community organizations that used volunteers tended to obtain more hours from them than did other projects.

¹This estimate is based on counts from the 93 percent of projects returning the survey form, however, the counts were adjusted upwards to reflect non-response so that the figure represents an estimate of the total staff from 361 projects.

Figure 4.2—Estimated number of staff and number per project, by type of host institution: 2000



estimate of the total staff from all 361 projects that were operating at the time.

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

Table 4.1—Project staff levels and participants per staff, by type of host institution: 1999–2000

	All projects	Host institution			Community org.
		Public 4-year	Private 4-year	2-year	
Total number of staff	2,548	857	350	857	484
Average number of staff	7.1	7.1	7.3	6.9	7.1
FTE staff	5.3	5.6	5.4	4.9	5.8
Average number of participants per staff member	125	127	110	109	166

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000; Analysis of data from Talent Search Performance Reports, 1998–99.

NOTE: In reporting these staff, projects were instructed not to include undergraduate work-study or other part-time student employees or volunteers. The figures include graduate students who might have been employed as tutors or in other roles.

Not all staff worked full time for Talent Search. On average, staff worked 30 hours per week. Using 40 hours per week as the full-time equivalent (FTE) standard, we found that projects had an average of 5.3 FTE (table 4.1) In addition to using part-time employees,

at some Talent Search projects staff members were full-time employees of the host institution but only a part of their time was allocated to and paid for by Talent Search. As noted in chapter 5, 90 percent of the host organizations operated other programs for disadvantaged students, most commonly Upward Bound. Indeed, it was not uncommon for a Talent Search and Upward Bound project located at the same institution to share some staff. This was especially true for a senior project director role and for roles such as technology coordinator or tutoring coordinator. Projects indicated that there were advantages to this model in that the experience of senior staff could be utilized by both projects, and this sharing created efficiencies for roles that were not full-time for either project. Staff sharing can also contribute to coordination and synergy across projects.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT AND VOLUNTEER STAFF

In addition to the staff described above, 70 percent of Talent Search projects sometimes relied on volunteers, college work-study students, or other undergraduate part-time student help. Overall, about 68 percent of projects reported that they used volunteers, 56 percent used work-study students, and 39 percent used other part-time undergraduate students (table 4.2).

Just over two-thirds of Talent Search projects sometimes used volunteers and just over half had work study students.

Projects hosted at community-based organizations were somewhat less likely to use volunteers than other types of hosts (54 percent of projects hosted by community-based organizations reported using volunteers compared with over 70 percent of projects hosted by private 4-year institutions and community colleges). However, the community-based organizations that reported using volunteers also reported the highest number of hours worked per week by volunteers (on average, 46 total hours in a typical week provided by an average of 9 volunteers). Projects hosted at private 4-year institutions that used volunteers averaged the highest number of volunteers (an average of 28) but tended to receive few hours per volunteer (an average of 36 total hours per week).

Table 4.2—Talent Search projects' use of volunteers, work-study students, and other part-time undergraduate student employees: 1998-99

	Percentage of projects using	Average number per project reporting use of this type of help	Average total hours worked per week, per project
Volunteers			
Public 4-year	67%	6	15
Private 4-year	72	28	36
2-year	73	8	17
Community org.	54	9	46
All	68	10	27
Work-study student staff			
Public 4-year	71	3	29
Private 4-year	68	3	28
2-year	60	2	18
Community org.	13	3	19
All	56	3	24
Other undergraduate student staff			
Public 4-year	53	7	42
Private 4-year	30	8	38
2-year	33	6	25
Community org.	35	4	29
All	39	6	34

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

STAFF POSITIONS

Table 4.3 provides the total number of staff and FTE staff by position. Overall, about 26 percent of FTE staff were project directors or coordinators and associate and assistant directors and coordinators. Counselors and advisors accounted for just over one-third (36 percent) of FTE staff. About 18 percent were other professionals, 15 percent support staff, 4 percent tutors, and 1 percent information specialists.

Projects typically employed one director or one coordinator, although some projects employed one of each; combined, these positions accounted for an average of 1.2 FTE per project. Projects averaged two counselors and one other professional staff member, who for example, might be responsible for organizing tutoring programs or summer workshops. Projects typically employed one support staff member. Some also had non-undergraduate tutoring staff, and a small number of projects employed an information specialist, though usually on a part-time basis. Project directors and coordinators averaged about 7.4 years of work with the project. Counselors averaged 4.2 years experience and other professionals 3.5 years.

Table 4.3—Number of staff and number of FTE staff per project, percent distribution of FTE staff, and years of experience, by position: 1999–2000

Position	Mean number of staff per project	Mean FTE staff per project	Percentage of total FTEs	Mean years of experience in current Talent Search project
Directors and coordinators	1.4	1.2	22%	7.4
Associate/assistant directors and coordinators	0.2	0.2	4	7.6
Counselors and advisors	2.2	1.9	36	4.2
Other professionals	1.3	0.9	18	3.5
Data and information specialists	0.1	*	1	4.8
Support staff	1.0	0.8	15	4.8
Tutors	0.9	0.2	4	3.8

*Less than .05.

NOTE: Some projects employed both a director and a coordinator and some had a portion of a director's time plus a full time coordinator; Hence the number of directors and coordinators is greater than 1.

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

STAFF MODELS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The case studies provide in-depth information on how staff were organized and functioned in different projects. Although faced with different circumstances in terms of the size of their target areas and the number of target schools and participants, most projects we visited for the case studies used variations of similar staffing models. The basic model centered on a core group of three to five staff members—typically with job titles such as advisor, counselor, or tutoring or workshop coordinator—who had similar basic duties: they worked directly with students in the field and provided the vast share of program services. They counseled and advised students at the target schools, led workshops, organized field trips, and assisted with college admissions and financial aid forms. The core staff reported directly to the project director or coordinator or, in some cases, to an assistant director or coordinator. In this model, top project officials, such as TRIO directors, project directors or coordinators, and assistant directors, usually did not provide much direct service in the field but rather oversaw the core staff and handled administrative matters.

The chief variation in service delivery models was the number and type of target schools and students for which staff were responsible.

With the core-group staffing model, the chief variations between projects centered around the number and type of both target schools and students for which core staff members were responsible. As for the number of schools, core staff typically carried roughly equivalent workloads. But workloads were a function of several factors, including the number of participants, the intensity of the services provided, and the distances to be traveled to the schools. At one project, for example, two core staff each served seven

target schools, and two other core staff each served 11 schools, but the former had to drive considerably greater distances than the latter. In addition, each school was the responsibility of a single staff member. Staff generally did not work at schools in pairs or groups.²

As for types of schools and students, projects differed in the extent to which core staff specialized in working with certain types of participants. We observed three model variations:

- In the first model, each staff member served only one type of school or general grade range of students. At one of the projects, for example, four staff served only high schools (ranging from two to four schools per staff member), and the remaining staff person served only middle schools (three).
- In the second model, all staff members served a mix of both middle school and high school students. At one project, for example, four core staff each served three to four middle schools and three to four high schools. This approach maximized both convenience (staff served clusters of schools generally located close together in a particular portion of a large target area) and continuity of service (staff served pairs of feeder middle schools and receiving high schools so that students might have the same Talent Search advisor from grade six to 12).
- The third model was a blend of the first two, with some staff specializing and others not. At one of the projects, for example, two staff members each served three high schools and one middle school, one staff member served three middle schools and one high school, and one served four middle schools. At another project, one staff member worked with two middle schools and one high school, a second staff member worked with one middle school and one high school, and the third staff member served two high schools.

In some cases, Talent Search staff members were based at a location other than the project's main office, especially when projects served large areas such that frequent travel between the main office and distant target schools would have been inefficient or impractical. At two of the case study projects with the largest target areas, at least half of the core staff members worked out of field offices or their homes so that they could be close to their assigned target schools. They seldom met with their project directors or other headquarters-based colleagues, relying on e-mail and the telephone to keep in touch.

²We found two exceptions to this practice. One project served three high schools with atypically broad grade ranges: one had grades 6-12, the second had grades 7-12, and the third had grades 8-12. At these schools, one staff member worked exclusively with the students in grades 11 and 12 while another worked with the younger students. The second project had assigned two core staff to work virtually full time at a four-year high school. Each followed cohorts from ninth through 12th grade, working with freshman and juniors one year, sophomores and seniors the next.

Staff spent most of their time either planning or providing services, with core staff typically in the field visiting target schools at least four days each week during the school year. But staff in some projects routinely devoted one day a week, usually Friday, to record-keeping and paperwork to document which services they had provided to which students.

Staff spent most of their time, often four days a week, in the field, visiting schools.

Most staff worked exclusively for Talent Search. However, as noted, some project directors divided their time between Talent Search and one or more other TRIO programs, though in such cases most day-to-day operational responsibilities fell to an assistant director or coordinator. Some project secretaries or other administrative assistants also worked for several TRIO programs or for other TRIO programs on a part-time basis. One project employed four full-time core staff members. In addition, this project had four staff members who split their time between Talent Search and Upward Bound. At two projects hosted by colleges, part-time office assistants were work-study students.

While over-two thirds of projects reported sometimes relying on some volunteers (table 4.2), most case study projects made limited regular use of volunteers. Several projects received occasional assistance from volunteers, such as parents serving as chaperones or local business leaders or college officials delivering informational presentations, but paid staff delivered major, recurring services. An exception was a project hosted by a community-based organization in a large city. The project relied on a large number of college student volunteers from a nearby university to tutor Talent Search students on weeknight evenings. It also drew on the services of a few participants in the AmeriCorps program, who, though strictly speaking are not volunteers (they receive a stipend for their service), were another source of free labor. A second exception was a university-based project that regularly used unpaid graduate student interns, such as those working on education or counseling degrees, to assist the full-time field staff.

Most case study projects did not make extensive or regular use of volunteers.

Projects also sometimes supplemented their core staff with a group of short-term hires to help with special program components. For example, one project offered a three-week enrichment program each summer for middle school students. The director hired four or five teachers from local middle schools and high schools to lead the various academic classes and other activities on a half-time basis.

Two case study projects did not use the typical staffing model discussed above. Instead, they had implemented a somewhat atypical service plan. Rather than relying on a core group of three to five full-time staff to visit assigned target schools one to four times a month for workshops and other meetings, both projects offered tutoring in certain target schools on a daily basis. Besides the project director, these grantees had only one other full-time employee involved in service provision. The largest share of the projects' labor expenses covered teachers from the target schools who served as Talent Search tutors and counselors after school, typically eight hours per week. In addition, at both projects, the director was heavily involved in providing services to students.

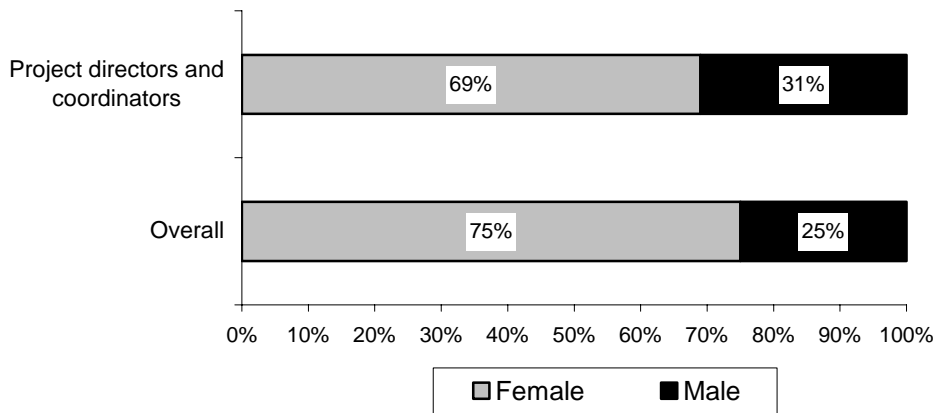
An atypical staff model used school staff as part-time tutors.

STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

STAFF GENDER AND RACE/ETHNICITY

Given that one of the roles of the Talent Search staff is to act as role models for participants, grant applicants have paid some attention to staff demographics, including gender and race and ethnicity. Overall, three-fourths of Talent Search staff in 2000 were female (figure 4.3). Among project directors and coordinators, a slightly smaller percentage, but still over two-thirds (69 percent) were female. Among participants, 60 percent were female (see chapter 7).

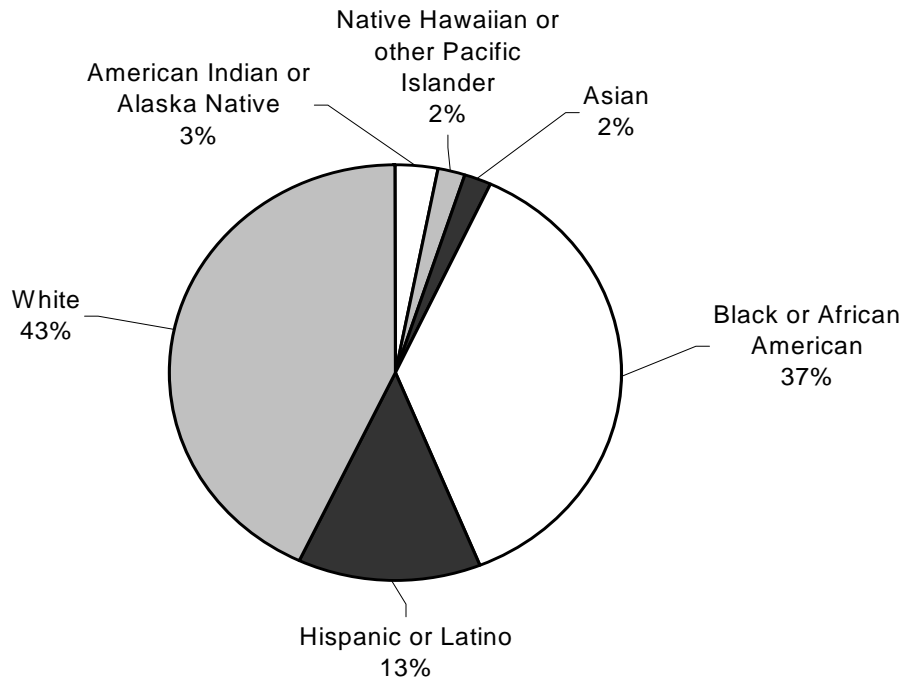
Figure 4.3—Percentage of Talent Search project staff by gender: 1999–2000



SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

Figure 4.4 provides the distribution of Talent Search staff by race and ethnicity. As will be seen in chapter 7, the distribution is similar to that of black participants but differs for Hispanic and white participants. Thirteen percent of Talent Search staff were Hispanic while 22 percent of participants were Hispanic. Forty-three percent of Talent Search staff were white (compared with 32 percent of participants), and 37 percent were black (compared with 36 percent of participants). Three percent of Talent Search staff were American Indian, and 2 percent each were Asian and Pacific Islander. Among participants, 4 percent each were American Indian and Asian and 1 percent were Pacific Islanders.

Figure 4.4—Percentage of Talent Search staff by race/ethnicity: 1999–2000

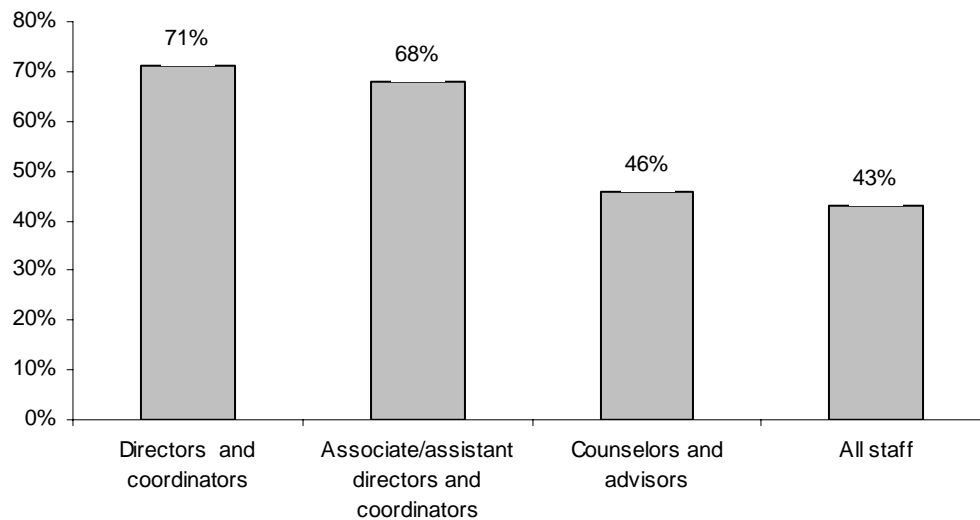


SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

STAFF EDUCATION

Almost three-fourths (71 percent) of Talent Search project directors and coordinators and over two-thirds (68 percent) of associate or assistant directors and coordinators have advanced degrees (figure 4.5 and table 4.4). Twelve percent of project directors and coordinators hold a Ph.D. or other professional degrees beyond the master's level. Among counselors and advisors, 46 percent hold master's or higher degrees. For all staff positions 42 percent of Talent Search staff have advanced degrees. Talent Search staff employed in private 4-year institutions were the most highly educated. Overall, 60 percent of Talent Search staff in private 4-year institutions hold advanced degrees.

Figure 4.5—Percentage of Talent Search staff with advanced degrees, by selected position: 1999–2000



SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

Table 4.4—Percentage of Talent Search staff by highest level of education, by type of host and by position: 1999–2000

	Less than bachelor's	Bachelor's	Master's	Ph.D. or other professional
Type of host				
Public 4-year	15%	42%	39%	4%
Private 4-year	9	32	54	6
2-year	19	38	41	2
Community org.	21	48	27	4
All projects	17	40	40	3
Position				
Directors and coordinators	*	29	59	12
Associate/assistant directors and coordinators	*	32	65	3
Counselors and advisors	4	50	44	2
Other professionals	8	53	38	1
Data and information specialists	58	37	0	5
Support staff	74	20	5	0
Tutors	24	45	30	1

*0 or less than .5 percent.

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

STAFF SALARIES

Table 4.5 displays data on staff salaries for 2000—specifically, the mean, median, and 75th percentile by position categories for staff working more than 37 hours per week. Directors and coordinators averaged about \$40,000 and associate and assistant coordinators about \$36,000. Counselors and advisors averaged about \$27,000. Projects hosted by private 4-year institutions recorded the lowest average salaries (data not shown).

In 2000 dollars, directors and coordinators averaged about \$40,000.

Table 4.5—Talent Search mean, median, and 75th percentile salaries, by position: 2000

Position	Salary for staff working 37 or more hours		
	Mean	Median	75th percentile
Directors and coordinators	\$39,919	\$37,926	\$46,488
Associate/assistant directors and coordinators	\$35,782	\$35,124	\$41,839
Counselors and advisors	\$27,106	\$26,860	\$30,888
Other professionals	\$28,747	\$27,376	\$32,025
Data and information specialists	\$20,049	\$18,285	\$22,727
Support staff	\$21,442	\$20,661	\$24,711
Tutors ^a	\$27,829	\$27,893	\$29,184

NOTE: Staff salaries are reported in 2000 dollars.

^aVery few staff in this category worked 37 or more hours.

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

USE OF LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH

Almost half (46 percent) of Talent Search projects reported that someone on their staff sometimes used languages other than English to communicate with participants (table 4.6). Projects hosted by community-based organizations were more likely to report the use of other languages (70 percent) than projects hosted at any other type of institution.

At almost half of all projects, someone on staff used a language other than English to communicate with participants.

Spanish was used most frequently; 42 percent of all Talent Search projects communicated with participants in Spanish. Spanish was also the language used most frequently by each of the host types considered individually: 65 percent of projects hosted by community-based organizations, 44 percent of projects hosted by private 4-year institutions, 39 percent of projects hosted by public 4-year institutions, and 30 percent of projects hosted by 2-year institutions.

Table 4.6—Percentage of Talent Search projects where staff sometimes use a language other than English to communicate with participants, and the languages used, by host type: 1999–2000

	All projects	Host institution			Community org.
		Public 4-year	Private 4-year	2-year	
Use language other than English	46%	42%	47%	36%	70%
Percent of all projects that use:					
Spanish	42	39	44	30	65
Other	9	9	8	9	8
Chinese	3	2	0	0	12
American Indian language	3	1	0	4	*

*0 or less than .5 percent.

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

PROJECT DIRECTORS' AND COORDINATORS' EXPERIENCE AND COMMITMENT TO PROJECT

This section presents information concerning Talent Search project directors and coordinators. Almost half (46 percent) of Talent Search project directors and coordinators had served in their position for six years or more (table 4.7). Almost three-fourths (74 percent) had served in their current position for at least two years. In addition, 35 percent had also served (or were currently serving) as the director or coordinator of an Upward Bound project, 24 percent had headed or were simultaneously heading a Student Support Services project.

Table 4.7—Talent Search project directors' and coordinators' experience directing or coordinating Talent Search and similar programs, as of 1999–2000

Director or coordinator of	Percent who had served				
	11 years or more	6–10 years	2–5 years	Fewer than 2 years	Never
This Talent Search project	18%	28%	28%	26%	*%
Other projects or agencies serving disadvantaged persons	10	10	17	10	52
An Upward Bound project	10	6	9	10	66
Student Support Services	6	6	6	6	76
Another Talent Search project	3	1	4	4	89
An EOC project	2	1	1	2	93

*0 or less than .5 percent.

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

half of all directors
coordinators had also
served in some other
position serving
disadvantaged persons.

Many Talent Search project coordinators and directors had also held other positions in Talent Search and similar programs (table 4.8). For example, nearly half (46 percent) had served in another capacity at their current Talent Search projects, and 29 percent had served in another capacity at an Upward Bound project.

Table 4.8—Talent Search project directors' and coordinators' experience serving in capacity other than director or coordinator for Talent Search and similar programs, as of 1999–2000

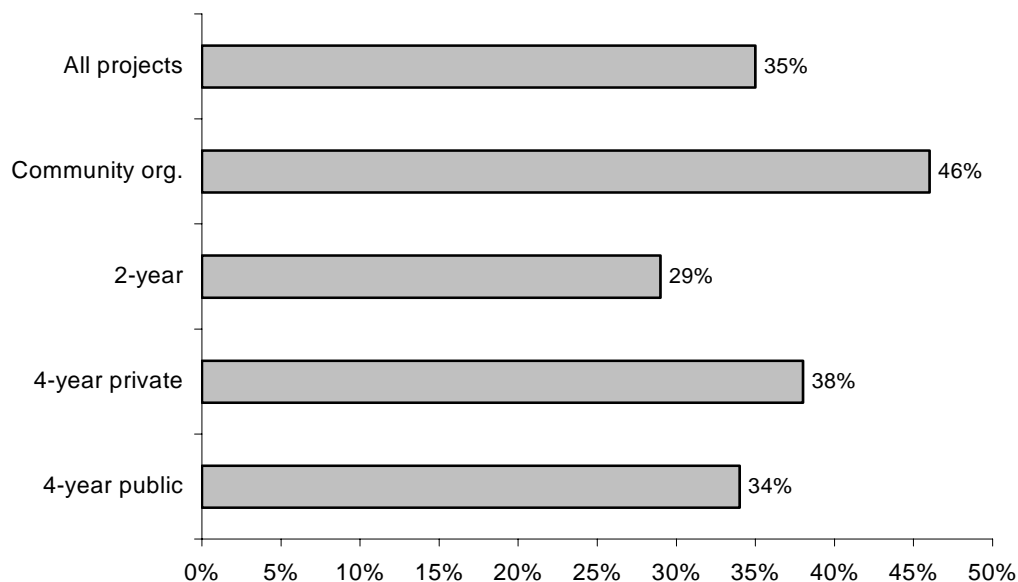
Project	11 years or more	6–10 years	2–5 years	Fewer than 2 years	Never
This Talent Search project	4%	10%	17%	15%	53%
Other projects or agencies serving disadvantaged persons	6	9	21	10	53
An Upward Bound project	3	5	12	9	71
Student Support Services	1	4	8	7	80
Another Talent Search project	1	1	3	4	90
An EOC project	<1	1	3	2	93

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

As discussed in chapter 2, with the expressed intent of fostering increased cooperation among projects serving economically disadvantaged students, Congress amended the TRIO legislation in the early 1990s to allow for less than full-time project directors. This practice also allows projects to economize and stretch resources. In 2000, just over one-third of all project directors and coordinators (35 percent) reported that they also currently served as directors or administrators of other student programs at their host institution (figure 4.6). In terms of host type, directors and coordinators of projects hosted by community-based organizations were the most likely also to serve as the director of another student program (46 percent). Directors and coordinators of projects hosted by 2-year institutions were the least likely to serve (29 percent) in the same capacity for another program at their host institution.

Just over one-third of directors simultaneously served as director of a related program at their host organization.

Figure 4.6—Percentage of Talent Search project directors and coordinators who also served as directors or administrators for other student programs at the host institution or organization, by host type: 1999–2000



SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

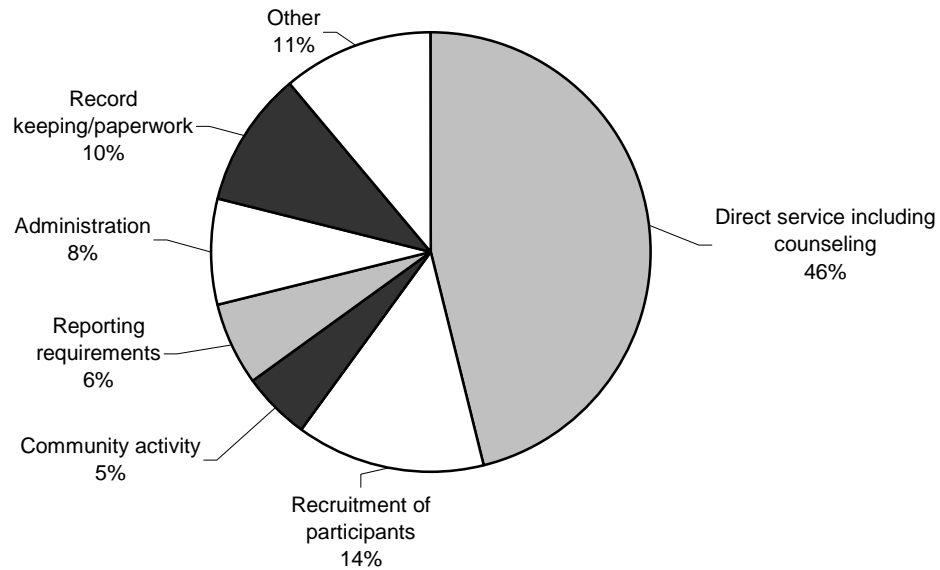
TIME ALLOCATION OF STAFF

We asked project survey respondents for estimates of the total time allocation for all staff as well as for project directors and coordinators. In the question on the project director's time allocation, we asked for a comparison of the time actually spent versus the time project directors would ideally like to spend. Figures 4.7 and 4.8 summarize the information.

In the allocation of total staff time (figure 4.7), respondents estimated that staff spent about 46 percent of their time in direct service, including counseling, and another 14 percent in participant recruitment. Respondents also reported that staff spent about 16 percent of their time on record-keeping and on paperwork and reporting requirements combined and another 8 percent on administration. Five percent of staff time went to community activity.

*Respondents estimated
on average, staff
spent about 46
percent of their time in
direct service.*

Figure 4.7—Estimated average time allocation of total project staff: 1999–2000

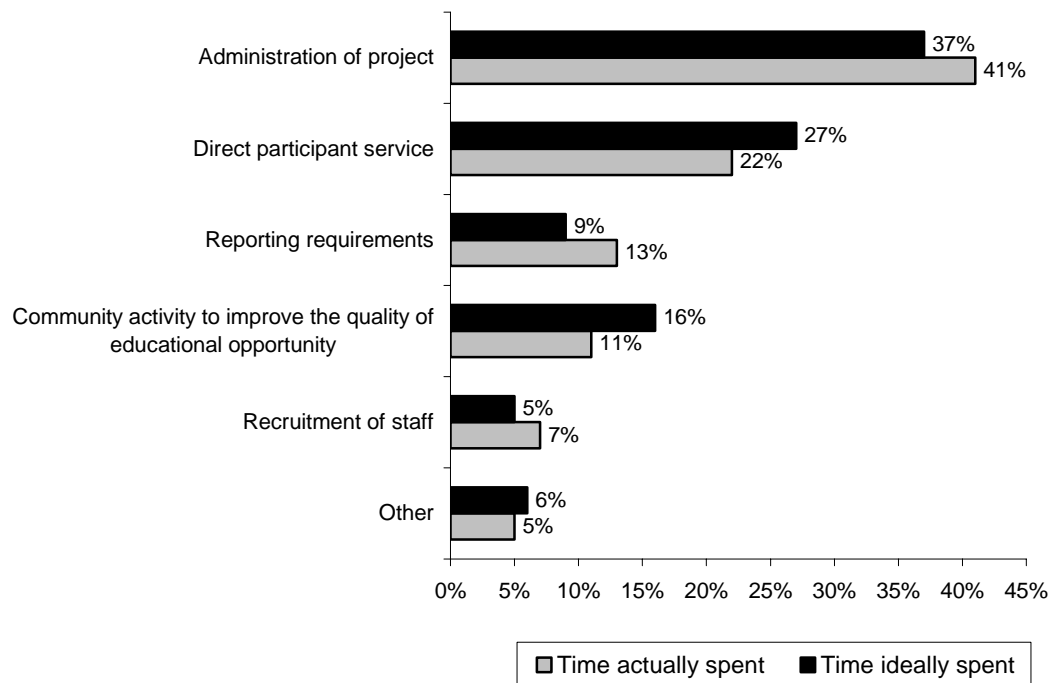


SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

Figure 4.8 shows that the way Talent Search project directors spend their time is fairly close to how they would ideally like to spend their time. Project directors reported spending just under one-fourth of their time (22 percent) on participant service and the rest on administration, record-keeping, community work, recruiting staff, and other activities. Ideally, they would like to spend a little less time on project administration and reporting requirements and a little more time both on direct participant services and on community activities that would improve the quality of educational opportunities. On average, project directors reported spending slightly more of their time on project administration and reporting requirements than they would ideally like to spend on those activities.

Project directors would ideally like to spend slightly more time in direct service.

Figure 4.8—Project directors' and coordinators' estimated actual and ideal time allocation among various activities: 1999–2000



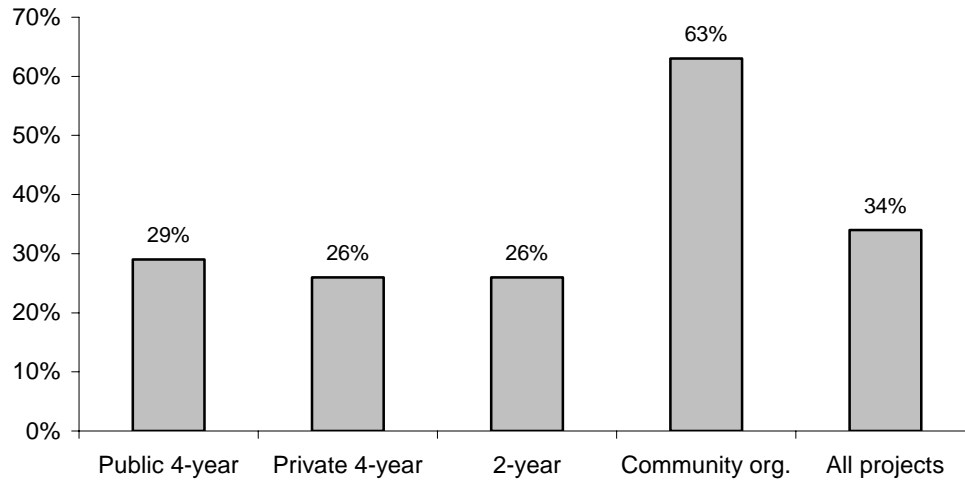
SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

USE OF EXTERNAL REVIEW BOARDS

About one-third of all Talent Search projects (34 percent) worked with an external group that provided support to their project (figure 4.9). A greater percent of projects hosted by community-based organizations (63 percent) worked with an external board than than was the case for projects hosted by educational institutions (26-29 percent). The external groups that support Talent Search projects were composed of a variety of participants. For projects overall, by far the largest group was current or former Talent Search participants. Other members included representatives of the host institution or agency, representatives of the target community, other educators, businesspersons and professionals, representatives of other groups, financial aid or admissions officers, and others (data not shown).

...one-third of all projects have external groups that provide support to the project.

Figure 4.9—Percentage of projects that reported having an external board providing advice and support to the project: 1999–2000



SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

TALENT SEARCH OPERATING BUDGET

To assess the degree to which funds from other sources supplement Talent Search federal funds, the project survey collected information on total project funding from all sources in a given year. We looked at both fiscal contributions and in-kind contributions. Based on the 1998–99 reported allocation, table 4.9 provides the estimated average allocations in 2000 dollars for fiscal contributions and the percent distribution of funds. On average, Talent Search funds accounted for 96 percent of the total fiscal contributions. Foundation and corporate support represented the next greatest amount of funds, about 2 percent of the total, providing an average of about \$17,000 per project.

About 96 percent of Talent Search project budgets came from the federal grant.

Table 4.10—Estimated total costs of Talent Search by source of support: 2000 dollars

Source of funds	Mean	Total	Percent of total
Talent Search funds	\$265,139	\$95,334,329	95.5%
Foundation or corporate support	\$17,272	\$2,676,243	2.7
Other	\$6,998	\$969,679	1.0
State funds	\$2,534	\$399,000	0.4
Local funds	\$1,446	\$218,604	0.2
Private donations	\$1,041	\$158,683	0.2
Other federal funds	\$413	\$60,390	0.1
Sum	\$294,843	\$99,816,928	100.0

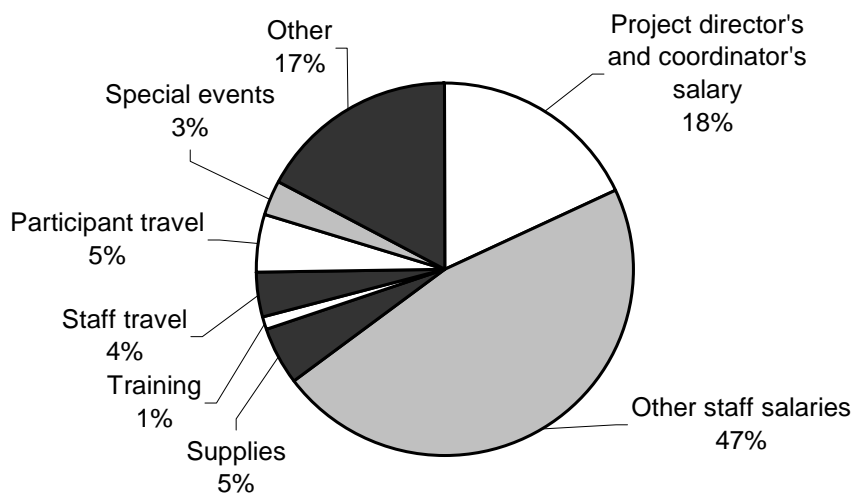
NOTE: Data were reported for 1998–99 and are expressed in the table as 2000 dollars based on consumer price index of ratio of .968.

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

We also asked projects to estimate in-kind contributions that they might have received in the form of facilities, personnel time, and other contributions. On average, projects estimated that they received about \$25,600 in-kind contributions for facilities, \$12,800 for personnel, and \$8,700 for other costs (data not shown).

On average, Talent Search projects allocated two-thirds of their budgets to staff salaries—47 percent to staff salaries and 18 percent to project director and coordinator salaries. Projects distributed the remaining one-third among participant and staff travel, supplies, special events, training, and other costs (figure 4.10).

Figure 4.11—Allocation of Talent Search grant money by budget category: 1998–99



SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

average, projects allocated two-thirds of budgets to staff salaries.

STAFF RELATIONS, TURNOVER, AND OTHER ISSUES

Using information from the case studies, the remainder of the chapter discusses staff relations, turnover, and other issues. Internal relations are the relationships among and between participants and project staff. External relations are the relationships between the projects and outside entities, such as target schools, host institutions, and other organizations. Both are important for smooth and effective project operation. During our site visits, we explored the nature of internal and external relations through interviews and observations.

STAFF AUTONOMY AND CREATIVITY

Across all the projects, staff involved in service delivery generally operated with a degree of independence and autonomy. In some cases, they were allowed to negotiate with target school officials each year to devise a unique service plan for each grade level, as the number and subjects of workshops to be offered. Other projects had developed fairly specific curricula for various grade levels, but staff were free to cover the subjects in whatever order they liked and to develop their own materials. Directors encouraged key staff to be creative in delivering services and meeting program objectives; they required staff to track service contacts continuously for end-of-year reporting purposes, but they seldom visited target schools to monitor staff performance.

ROLE MODELS

The case study projects often followed a policy of seeking staff whose backgrounds were similar to those of the students they would be serving and who had overcome challenges similar to those facing the students. In addition to seeking out staff who had been first-generation college students, projects sometimes considered whether their personal background characteristics would help them to serve as natural role models, to build comfortable relationships between participants and staff. Indeed, some staff were motivated to work in Talent Search as a way to help students like themselves. With similar backgrounds, staff could go beyond saying, "You can make it," to send the more personal message, "If I made it, so can you."

For example, projects that served substantial numbers of language minority students or students whose parents were not native English speakers typically employed one or more bilingual staff members to expedite communication with students and their parents. The project that served a community of Asian immigrants employed a staff member whose first language was Laotian and who spoke two or three other Southeast Asian languages. Similarly, three projects with substantial shares of Hispanic students employed one or more Spanish-speaking staff members.

STAFF TURNOVER

Among the mature projects we visited for the case studies (we did not include projects that were newly funded in the 1998 cycle), staff turnover was generally not viewed a serious problem. Four of the directors had worked at their projects for over 20 years.

Staff turnover was not cited as a serious problem by the projects we studied.

Several projects had one or two relatively new staff members, but the other staff commonly counted between four and eight years of experience on the job.

Only one of the case study projects appeared to have a relatively high staff turnover rate. At the time of our visit, the director had been with the program for three years, and none of the four core staff members had served for longer than two years. Before the current director's arrival, according to a former long-time staff member, the project went through three directors in about seven years. Of the current core staff, one was leaving at the end of the year to attend graduate school, another was openly looking for a junior college teaching job, one was about to begin maternity leave, and the fourth said that he was unlikely to stay longer than one more year.

Two implications of staff turnover, when it does occur, were clear. First, if students participated in a program for several years, they would likely have to deal with two or three Talent Search advisors. (Target school officials, too, would have to deal with new project staff.) Second, the remaining staff might have to spend more time than they would like in recruiting and training new staff—time that might otherwise be spent on program services. But these implications do not necessarily equate to serious problems or challenges. Services at the one high-turnover project cited above did not by any means appear to be less efficient or of lower quality than at other projects we studied. Although most project directors would probably prefer to have a highly stable core staff, they realized that, in view of the salaries that projects could afford to pay, some degree of turnover was inevitable. It was not uncommon for new hires to be relatively young and to have just completed their education. They often took a Talent Search job as the first in their professional career, with plans of moving on after a few years.

STUDENT-STAFF RELATIONS

Various interviewees—students, alumni, parents, target school staff, and host institution officials—consistently offered favorable comments about the Talent Search staff who worked directly with participants. Staff were described in terms such as caring, dedicated, friendly, helpful, understanding, and nonjudgmental. Participants viewed Talent Search staff as a resource they could rely on, whether for homework assistance, course selection, or many other concerns. A mother whose three children had gone through Talent Search described the program as “a big extended family...the counselors really care about what happens to the kids.”

When alumni reflected on their experiences in Talent Search, they often remembered more about the personal encouragement that Talent Search staff provided than about the details of particular services; they remembered the person more than the program. One alumna, for example, recalled fondly that although she knew nothing about college or financial aid, her Talent Search advisor helped her through all aspects of the college preparation, search, and application process. “If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be here now. He was my ticket. He opened the door to a college education.” In several projects, we heard about students and staff who kept in touch with one another after graduation and well into college—and not just the students who attended the Talent Search project's host college.

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Students consistently felt that Talent Search staff related to them more closely and on a different level than their teachers and other school staff. Their comments indicated that program staff were “more like friends” but also took on some characteristics of a caring parent. Consider the following remarks drawn from a few different projects: “He’s a great guy. He’s really funny. He’s like one of us.” “He speaks our language. He’s down with us.” “If you don’t have a father, he’s like your father.” “She talks to you like your mom, and she never forgets your name. She’s the best tutor and teacher you could have.” “He talked to me almost like I was his daughter.”

A certain level of understanding came about because many staff hailed from similar backgrounds as the participants and had overcome similar obstacles to educational success. In addition, as some students noted, Talent Search staff were often considerably closer to their age than were school staff. And, of course, the ability to connect closely with students varied somewhat between staff due to interpersonal skills, longevity, and service schedules—those who had worked in schools longer and saw students most often got to know the students best and were able to develop closer relations.

Students often related well to staff because of their similar backgrounds.

RELATIONS AMONG STAFF

Almost without exception, the staff members we interviewed exhibited respect for one another and got along well. They often shared ideas for workshops or other services. Several project directors had much praise for their staff. The director of a project that relied heavily on target school teachers as part-time Talent Search staff referred to them as “angels.” “She’s my angel in that school.” “They’re my two angels in this school.” She felt that they served as the students’ guardian angels, watching over and helping them during the school day.

RELATIONS WITH TARGET SCHOOLS

Relationships between Talent Search projects and their target schools were generally positive. School staff spoke highly of Talent Search staff. Guidance counselors, for example, appreciated what the program did for participants, giving them far more personal attention than the counselors themselves could have provided. One key to good relations with target schools was reciprocation. One project, for example, regularly provided its target schools with a variety of resources, ranging from computerized and hard-copy educational and instructional materials to use of a fax machine it had installed for its own staff. In return, the schools provided Talent Search staff with other resources, including office space, the use of office machinery, and easy access to student files. Another important element, according to staff from the same project, was that Talent Search staff worked to support the schools’ guidance counseling departments rather than providing services that would show them up or make them appear ineffective. In some target high schools, the Talent Search staff blended into the schools’ guidance departments, essentially becoming an “extra counselor”—one specializing in college preparation.

Relations between projects and target schools were generally positive. One key to good relations was reciprocation.

TALENT SEARCH AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Much of what Talent Search does for students—such as provide information on college admissions requirements and financial aid—could theoretically fall under the purview of school guidance counselors. What did students and others say about assistance provided by counselors? First, across all the projects we studied, accessibility of school-employed counselors was a major issue.

- At one suburban high school we visited, the regular full-time counselors were each responsible for over 500 students, whereas the two Talent Search advisors who worked in the school almost full time each had a caseload of about 150 students.
- At a project based in the heart of a large city, counselors' positions at local schools had been reduced for budget reasons, often to the point where students could not realistically expect to receive any precollege assistance from them. For example, one target high school, with an enrollment of 3,000, had just one college counselor, and he worked there only on a half-time basis.
- A liaison to the program at one target high school said that students might receive some information and assistance from guidance counselors, but with only two counselors for the school's 550 students, "Getting in to see one [takes] an act of God." Moreover, one of them was about to retire and the district did not plan to replace him.³

A second issue related to school-provided counseling services was that counselors were perceived as doing little outreach, instead serving primarily those students who stopped in to see them or just those who seemed to show the most potential for college. At one project, a former staff member said that the types of students served by Talent Search—low-income and first-generation college students, many of them minorities—typically are not pushed by their parents to see their school counselors. As a result, they often "fall through the cracks," and counselors end up serving the most motivated students and those seen as the brightest and with the greatest potential. At another project, parents and Talent Search participants perceived school counselors as making time only for the students with the highest GPAs; average students, they felt, were on their own.

A third issue related to school counseling services pertained to comfort and familiarity. One alumnus said that he had four guidance counselors in four years and felt that he never knew them, nor they him. Program participants from one target high school said that they were a lot closer to their Talent Search advisor than to their guidance counselors. They found him easy to relate to; he was younger and "more like a friend" and could "speak their language." They also perceived their Talent Search advisors as having more credibility; as one student said, with them "it's more than just talk."

³It is not surprising that target school counselors were very busy, because "a high ratio of students to school counselors in the target schools" is one of five specific criteria that applicants must address in the "need for the project" section of the Talent Search grant application.

Finally, some students and program alumni commented on receiving better advice and assistance from Talent Search than from their school counselors.

- Participants at one project said that when it came to information about scholarships, they relied exclusively on their Talent Search advisor, who had developed expertise in that area.
- At another project, an alumna said that counselors were focused on high school issues, not college and the future, and that her Talent Search advisor knew more about college than the counselors. An alumnus recalled that a school counselor had told him that he needed only two years of mathematics—but the two years of mathematics turned out to be the requirement for high school graduation, not for admission to a university.

Occasionally, counselors themselves described some of these same concerns. In a small rural high school where the counselors also worked as teachers, the counselors told us that they were overwhelmed with paperwork—registration, schedules, record-keeping, and so on—and did not have the time to provide students with substantive advising. A counselor from a target high school at another project said that his school was down to 3.5 FTE counselors from six as a result of budget cuts but that school enrollment had not dropped. As a consequence, he and his colleagues could not do as much as they could in past or would have liked to do at the time of the case study. He went on to say that Talent Search staff are able to provide more “follow-through” than counselors and that the school certainly could not provide the type of field trips to colleges that Talent Search provided.

One counselor, though, in trying to assure us that he and his colleagues would continue to play an important role at the school even in the absence of Talent Search, unintentionally highlighted a potentially important difference between the program and school counselors. “If Talent Search went away,” he said, “we [the counseling staff] would still be here. We would still go out to classes and make contact with every senior in the first quarter of that year.” But Talent Search staff operated under the belief that contacting students at the start of 12th grade would be far too late for most of their target program participants.

It was clear, especially from students’ comments, that Talent Search staff had largely—and in some cases entirely—supplanted school counselors as a source of precollege assistance. When we asked high school students at one project about getting help and information from their counselors, one girl responded sardonically, “We have counselors?” An alumnus of a different Talent Search project said, “I didn’t even know who my high school counselor was.” At a third project, a participant told her mother, “We don’t need a senior counselor, we have our Talent Search advisor.” Finally, the alumnus who received incorrect information on required mathematics credits said of his counselors, “Eventually, I just stopped talking to them.”

