
WORKING TOWARD JOBS

The Focus Group Interviews



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF EVALUATION AND INSPECTIONS

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OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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This technical report was prepared to summarize the focus group interviews with the administrators of work programs participating in the Working Toward JOBS project. This technical report is part of the Working Toward JOBS project which was conducted to describe the operation of a sample of mature, well-regarded and comprehensive work programs for AFDC recipients and the insights of the administrators of those programs.

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INTRODUCTION

Focus Groups

Professor Richard A. Krueger in his book “*Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*,” states that:

Focus groups typically have five characteristics or features. These characteristics relate to the ingredients of a focus group: (a) people, who (b) possess certain characteristics, (c) provide data (d) of a qualitative nature (e) in a focused discussion.

Typically, these are:

- (a) people, who (b) possess certain characteristics

anonymous, users or potential users of a particular product or service, they share in common the trait or behavior being studied, 7 to 10 participants per focus group

- (c) provide data (d) of a qualitative nature

their attitudes

- (e) in a focused discussion

one and a half or two hour moderator facilitated session

In focus groups participants are encouraged to interact with each other and to question each others attitudes. The interviewer acts as a moderator, keeping the group focused on the topic at hand and asking the central questions the group discusses, but does not exercise the level of control common to most interview techniques. The other key characteristic of focus groups is that they are solely for information gathering, not for building consensus or planning action.

There are many advantages to focus groups. The most important of these is that focus groups allow researchers to capture the interaction of participants. Participants who share like traits will be able to question each other and, through discussion, reach insights which could not have been gained through other interviewing techniques.

It was for this reason that we decided to use focus group interviews as the cornerstone of the Working Toward JOBS project.

Designing the Working Toward JOBS Focus Group Interviews

We selected eight States and one county which have well-regarded, mature and comprehensive work programs. We invited the administrators of those programs to attend a three day conference of focus group interviews on their pre-JOBS work program for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipients.

The topics to be discussed were drawn up from issues which became apparent during preinspection research, site visits, and interviews with Government experts.

In designing the Working Toward JOBS focus group interviews we chose to employ several important variations of the typical focus group format. These variations are outlined in Table 1.

Two of the variations were particularly important to our results. By holding a series of sessions on related topics with the same participants, we were able to address a more complex issue than those generally discussed in focus groups. The multiple sessions also allowed us to speak with great specificity on the most important aspects of running an AFDC work program.

In one of our sessions, we asked the participating work program administrators to select the discussion topics. That session yielded some of the best information which came from the conference. By asking the participants to name the discussion topics we ensured that there were no important topics missed and gained greater insight into the perspectives of State and local officials on work programs.

Table 1

<p align="center">WORKING TOWARDS JOBS Focus Group Variations</p>		
<i>Typical</i>	<i>Variation</i>	<i>Purpose of Variation</i>
Anonymous participants	Identified experts	To gather expert opinion
Participants selected for commonalities	Participants selected for commonalities and variances	To make findings meaningful for States in different situations
No audience or audience behind one way mirror	Visible audience	To keep vitality over three day conference To allow for immediate information flow without use of special facility
No audience participation	Concluding audience question and answer session	For expert follow-up on issues discussed
Preselected topics	Allowing interviewees to select discussion	To insure that all important topics were covered
	Topics in one session	To get maximum benefit from participants' expertise

Reporting on the Working Toward JOBS Focus Group Interviews

The comments recorded at the focus group interviews were incorporated into the study findings in two ways. First, the most important points were used to form the basis of the summary report, "Working Toward JOBS: An Overview" (OEI-12-89-01320). This report also includes information drawn from site visits at four of the programs, and a mail survey of each of the programs. In choosing the information to highlight in the overview report, we concentrated on findings which represent trends visible in a significant number of the programs studied. We also chose to direct most of our attention to issues which the Family Support Act leaves to the discretion of the States.

This technical report presents materials from the focus group interviews which were not included in the overview report. The format for this report includes a section summarizing each of the focus group discussions. We have organized each section around the questions the moderator asked of the participants. Under the questions are paraphrased quotes from the participants which present the discussions main points. Wherever possible, these paraphrased quotes have been organized by key discussion points. We chose to paraphrase the quotes for the sake of brevity.

The Working Toward JOBS focus group interviews were held August 1-3, 1989. The comments made at the conference were based on pre-JOBS work programs for AFDC recipients. As these programs have converted to JOBS, they may have made some changes to meet JOBS legal and regulatory requirements.

PARTICIPANTS

Robert Cecil

The Michigan Opportunities and Skills Training (MOST) Program

Mr. Cecil is Director of the Bureau of Employment Services in the Michigan Department of Social Services. He is responsible for the planning, development, and implementation of employment support services for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and general assistance recipients.

James Clark

The Florida Project Independence Program

Mr. Clark is Director of Project Independence for the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services. He directs program development, policy formulation, budget development, interdepartmental coordination, program monitoring, and legislative and Federal coordination.

Cheri Gonyaw

The Washington Opportunities and Family Independence (FIP) Programs

Ms. Gonyaw is currently Chief of the Office of Policy and Program Development for the Washington Department of Social and Health Services. She is responsible for administering FIP eligibility, employment and training activities, and the AFDC Opportunities employment program.

Margaret Hall

Nebraska's Job Support

Ms. Hall serves as a Public Service Administrator for the Nebraska Department of Social Services in Lincoln, Nebraska. Currently her responsibilities include the AFDC work program Job Support, Emergency Assistance, Refugee Assistance, Child Welfare Income Maintenance, and training for income maintenance workers.

Richard Jacobsen, Jr.

The County of San Diego Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) Program

Mr. Jacobsen is currently Director of the County of San Diego's Department of Social Services. The department has a fiduciary responsibility for more than \$1 billion, employs 3400 staff, and serves one out of every nine San Diego residents.

Kathy Lewis

California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) Program

Ms. Lewis is Chief of the Employment Programs Branch in the California State Department of Social Services. Her responsibilities include management of the GAIN Program and the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program.

Ronald Newcomb

The Massachusetts Employment and Training (ET) Program

Mr. Newcomb is Director of Program Management and Technical Assistance for the Massachusetts Employment and Training (ET) Choices Program. He was selected by the Welfare Commissioner to be part of the core group which was responsible for planning, staffing and implementing the ET program.

Rebecca Varella

The Delaware First Step Program

Ms. Varella is Chief Administrator of the Employment and Training, Division of Social Services in the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services. Ms. Varella is a former welfare recipient who, in 1986, testified about her experiences and recommendations for restructuring the welfare system before the annual meeting of the National Governors' Association.

Paul Walker

The Oklahoma Employment and Training Program

Mr. Walker is the Programs Supervisor for the Employment and Training Program of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services. He has received the Social Security Administration Associate Commissioner Citation for his leadership in providing technical assistance to other States in the development and implementation of work programs for the disadvantaged.

EXTRACTS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Establishing A Work Program

What is the most important advice you would give to those establishing a program?

Assess the level of existing political commitment; establish goals and expectations; determine the capabilities and characteristics of the labor market; assess communication linkages; use a local planning process; measure results through development of a management information system; market the program to service providers; and don't re-do what already has been done. (Michigan)

Gauge the level of political support; identify the parameters in terms of laws and regulations in which the program must operate; develop a cooperative planning process; and use the budget creatively. (Washington)

Understand the law; know the population of the clients to be served; inform all the players about the program; continually evaluate the program; establish a budget; develop a management information system; and hire a committed staff. (Oklahoma)

Think through past experiences to know what has and has not worked; set goals and objectives; educate the politicians and get their commitment; assess the local community and get commitment; and network resources. (Massachusetts)

Determine the level of the commitment to the program; know the client population before the goals and objectives are established; perform quality planning; don't rush to implement the program — understand what services are available and how to influence the development of other services; know the political players and continually market to them; and dream about the program from the client's perspective. (Delaware)

Look at the present efforts and build on existing strengths; understand the financial resources that are available; study the laws and regulations; leverage the resources of others; involve staff from all levels in the planning process; and look at the clients and assess their self-determination. (Nebraska)

Be conservative in the planning process; consider the impact on providers; recognize that planning takes time but is worth the effort; look at what might not work in the program; use a 50 percent rate of participation, not a 100 percent rate, in the planning process; establish a management information system to track clients in the program; and recognize that it takes time to hire, staff, and orient

people concerning the program and build these times into the planning process.
(California)

Be involved in the program for the long haul — don't have a short term perspective; market the program; communicate, cooperate, and coordinate.
(County of San Diego)

Provision Of Services

What methods are used to provide job skills training?

- *An understanding of the specific goals of the training is needed.*

Job skills training is expensive; it is necessary to first assess the skills of each participant in the program, then look at the training that is required. (County of San Diego)

Must look at the goals of the client and remember them at all times. (Delaware)

- *Training is provided in a variety of ways.*

The welfare agency should provide the basic foundation; other organizations should be used for specifics. (Delaware)

Some training is provided through Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), but creaming often is a dominant issue. It's necessary to keep in mind the fact that the power constituent groups are different for JTPA than for human services. Customized training also is used with the private sector in which there may be a pre-arranged agreement with employers. After a person is trained, he or she then will be hired. Specific contracts are worked out with employers. (Florida)

On-the-job training (OJT), funded through JTPA, is the end of the line product. Employers want to hire someone who is ready to work and then perform OJT themselves. The State work programs must concentrate on basic skills.
(Michigan)

The Job Corps is an effective vehicle for training in the long term. (Oklahoma)

What education services would you want to provide?

- *Education services are provided in different ways.*

Two basic approaches are used: push concurrently remedial education and training, and take the embarrassment out of education through greater use of computer assisted learning. (County of San Diego)

Work with the Education Department to shorten courses and include basic literacy skills. (Florida)

JTPA agencies and community colleges are used. (Nebraska)

Greater stress is needed on vocational education particularly with training in English as a second language. Computer assisted learning centers provided by JTPA help to reduce the stigma of the classroom. Psychometric testing has been used to determine if there are specific learning disabilities. (County of San Diego)

- *Education alone will not meet the needs of program participants.*

There is a worry that ten years from now the result will be a more literate welfare recipient who still can't get off the rolls. The variables that cause people to end up on public assistance aren't just one factor but many; education is just one component. The relationship between literacy and employment is not as direct as it appears. (Florida)

There is a direct relationship between essential literacy and life skills. Few AFDC recipients have high school diplomas which are required by most employers. (Michigan)

You must remember that even with improved education and training, about 10 percent of the population will remain on welfare. Remember though that the more education you have the more you know you don't want your children to remain on welfare and the way to do that is for me to get off welfare! (Delaware)

How should services be provided?

Don't ever underestimate the willingness of other entities that want to help you. We had offers of help, free help, from the most interesting social organizations, coalitions, universities, even small businesses. I'm overwhelmed and impressed. I think that sometimes we rule people out before we ever give them a chance to begin. (Washington)

The issue is not to duplicate what already exists. Only provide in-house services as a last resort. Contracting is used to get around the problems of bureaucracy. (County of San Diego)

The objective is to contract for those services that do not already exist. Everyone should share in the glory. (Delaware)

Staffing Issues

What advice would you give other States and counties in terms of motivating and training staff members?

Involve direct service staff in the planning process; make them feel that they are part of the team; ensure that they buy in to the program. (Delaware)

Need a clear direction of goals and standard position descriptions. Establish a method to recognize outstanding efforts. Communicate continually about the contents of the program. (Oklahoma)

Make an effort to hire good people. Have a commitment to helping others. Don't tie people/staff down with regulations and procedures — give them as much flexibility as is possible. (Florida)

Convince the Director of the Department or the Governor of the importance of the employment and training program. Hold kickoff meetings with the staff members. Treat the cause of poverty and not the effect. Foster the attitude that the staff members are special. (Delaware)

Recognize the best practices and share them. Allow local flexibility. Determine what is desired — quantity versus quality. (California)

A positive attitude begins at the top. In-service training staff and contractors must be supportive. Have a system in place of awards and rewards. (Massachusetts)

Phase-in new programs as much as possible. Recognize the ongoing nature of training. Promote local flexibility. Don't do an enthusiasm overkill. (Washington)

Be aware that staff can make or break a program. Involvement and commitment are needed from the top. Participation is necessary at all levels. Perform surveys of training needs. Share letters from participants and best practices. (Nebraska)

Identifying And Assisting Potential Employers

How do you identify employers to participate in the program?

- *Formal and informal mechanisms are used to identify employers.*

Non-profit organizations are identified by reading the Yellow Pages. The Employment Development Department receives job announcements. New businesses are identified through contacts with the Small Business Administration and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration. Some cold calls are made. Private industry council (PIC) groups also are another source to use. In the County of Sonoma, the program was advertised on all milk cartons. (County of San Diego)

A self-directed approach is used. Try to have the clients sell themselves. Invite employers to workshops to meet the clients. Network among existing employers. (Nebraska)

In a State with full employment, the emphasis is on developing a client for life-long skills. This means that the client must go out as well to find work. (Delaware)

Use a Speakers Bureau to market the program to employers by speaking at the Rotary, Elks, Shriner, and other groups. Try to get business people to pledge to hire a certain number of employees. Get actual commitments. (California)

Look toward a broader level of recruitment. Move away from the one staff member finding a job for one person in the program approach. The self-directed job search has replaced individuals looking for jobs for others. Use employer advisory groups on a State-wide basis. (Washington)

Encourage a consortium of employers to work together to support a common training program. This has been effective in training in word processing as well as in more specialized areas like the tool and die industry. (County of San Diego)

- *The emphasis should be placed on supplying productive employees.*

The employer wants someone who will make money. Tax credits are of little use. Productive employees are the key. Remember that hiring people is an emotional process. Often, people get hired through referrals. The job development staff members must become known in the community and then refer candidates for positions. Don't over market the program — be sure you can deliver. If the employees want to work, the employers will be responsible for training them. (Oklahoma)

An Employability Skills Development Task Force was established, chaired by Lee Iacocca, which prepared a “blue ribbon report”. The task force was set up by the Governor of Michigan to alleviate the differences between what the employer requires and what the social services person thinks the employer needs. The task force found that specific skills training wasn’t required. Employers want people who are productive and will perform. It’s necessary to talk with the employer community to set goals. (Michigan)

Recognize that tax credits aren’t a big payback. Supplying productive people is the key. (Washington)

- *It’s necessary to understand the needs of the employer.*

Make sure you know the benefits offered by the employer and the specific procedures which are followed in an organization. For example, know that health benefits only begin at a certain time each year. Understand the finances of small businesses in terms of tax benefits and tax credits. Realize that tax breaks at times only are offered if someone is part of an “enterprise zone”, but that sometimes it is possible to say that any person involved with AFDC automatically is part of the enterprise zone. Talk with the accountants in large companies as well as the personnel directors. (Florida)

- *Employer recognition is an integral part of the work program.*

Have an annual employer recognition day. Follow-up with the employers and find out why someone has not worked out. (County of San Diego)

Bring back clients who have succeeded to a Speakers Bureau of Alumni. Invite the employers as well to this forum. Promote success stories. (Massachusetts)

Recognize employers through participation in PICs and Chambers of Commerce. (Delaware)

What methods are used to follow-up once a client is placed?

Follow-up varies with the client; no set pattern is followed. Employers and clients will telephone if there is a problem; our staff try not to bother the client on the job. (Washington)

Work supplementation agreements are monitored. A monthly report is prepared on CWEP. The purpose is to ensure that employer abuse, such as not providing training as planned, does not occur. (Oklahoma)

A site visit is made by a neutral case worker after two weeks if the employer performs OJT. In CWEP, there is a regular monitoring process with the employers. (County of San Diego)

All services are contracted. Each participating employer has a contract with the contracting agency. Post placement follow-up is done in a continuous way. (Massachusetts)

Coordinating With Other Programs

What are the key organizations which are involved and how is coordination effected?

- *Coordination occurs at a variety of levels.*

There have been successes with small projects in a partnership role between agencies. For example, with JTPA, there is a small effort in training participation underway to prepare persons for work in the insurance and hospital fields. A community college was used for the training. Where there are problems is in the global issues and when we try to do all things for all people. It's more effective to work with smaller projects. Coordination must occur at the local level. (Nebraska)

Four major groups are involved: State Job Training Coordinating Council, the Department of Education, Community Colleges, and the Employment Development Department. At the State level, the groups meet to set policy and to solve broad problems. At the county level, plans are reviewed for coordination. Each of the four organizations has a GAIN coordinator, and quarterly meetings are held. Monthly meetings are held between the County Welfare Associations and the GAIN coordinators. (California)

Interagency agreements are in place with five State agencies and 85 contractors are involved on a State-wide basis. The program is dependent on coordination with other State agencies and community based organizations. Full cooperation is required. The 52 area office directors meet monthly with the service providers to resolve issues on a local level. (Massachusetts)

By meeting regularly with groups at the local level, we find we have more in common with others than we originally thought. The JOBS program will provide even greater opportunities for collaboration. (County of San Diego)

- *Different approaches are used in the coordination process.*

Go to their office; don't ask them to come to you. Review their regulations and State plans before you visit. Identify their needs. Don't assume that agencies can become alike. Each agency serves different populations and must meet different needs. Understand the other agencies' goals and objectives. Then, realize that what you can offer is people. Market people to the agencies. Then, try to monitor to see if the other agencies needs were met. Take a systematic approach — understand the others' needs first and how you can meet them. (Oklahoma)

End up with a lead agency but recognize that the lead agency cannot share all the glory. You must share a common problem or a common client for success, but remember that each agency must tend to its own knitting. There are few rewards for collaborative successes. Networks are required at the highest levels of the organizations involved. (County of San Diego)

Try to work on the basis of having the same interests. Try to be flexible in your needs. Work on neutral ground. Share in successes. (Delaware)

View the program as a cause around which everyone can rally. Then people will phone you offering to help. At times, barriers were perceived, but in actuality, they did not exist. (Washington)

Government is based on multiple programs with overlapping missions. In private industry, this is known as competition. There are different goals, functions, and power constituencies. Try to create ambiguous terms to show an illusion of cooperation. It's necessary to see the common points. Some legislation may be required to change some of the missions and functions. (Florida)

Assess the need; tap the expertise; then, pay for it. Look at the duplication that exists and review it to see if it can be eliminated. (Massachusetts)

What problems have been encountered in the process?

- *Drug and alcohol abuse are significant concerns.*

Drug and alcohol abuse are acute concerns. The problem is dealing with them. Deferring people from the GAIN program won't solve the problem. With these problems, the persons in GAIN then become "no shows" in the work force. Problems must be acknowledged. (California)

We just finished training our staff to identify clients with substance abuse. There are few resources available. Must direct substance abuse dollars where they can do the most good. Strategies are needed to deal with substance abuse. (Florida)

Collaboration with legislators is helpful to identify what new services and drug abuse resources are required. (County of San Diego)

- *The issue is the need to serve the entire family.*

It's necessary to recognize you are serving a total family. Addicted babies are a problem. Society has not accepted the fact that the family has changed. (Washington)

The larger issue is restructuring the family. We have not established institutional methods to meet family needs. (Oklahoma)

Don't write off segments of the population. The rehabilitation process may need to address the total family. (Delaware)

Encouraging Client Participation/marketing

What methods are used to encourage client participation?

- *Marketing efforts begin when the client first enters the welfare office.*

Start with the receptionist in the office. Have a short video in the waiting room describing the program. (Delaware)

The eligibility worker describes the program and encourages participation during the intake process. All the people on the staff are enthusiastic and view the program as one of "fun and games". (County of San Diego)

An applicant friendly process throughout beginning with the first contact is needed. Cartoons in the waiting rooms are one approach to gain interest in the program. The clients need to see that this program is different from others. (Washington)

The orientation sessions must encourage participation. (Michigan)

- *A variety of outreach efforts are used.*

We use public service announcements on radio stations. (Delaware)

Our program has a nine person marketing division. We use public service announcements on radio and television and check inserts. We try to zero-in on the children. A coloring book for the children, "My Mom and ET", is available in the waiting rooms. (Massachusetts)

We used legislation. Florida passed a law which mandates that State agencies must hire welfare recipients for at least 10 percent of the entry level jobs. Posters, check inserts, and specific pitches directed toward children also are used to market the program. A newsletter is prepared of success stories which is widely distributed. Remember, though, that there still will be approximately one-third of the client population that you won't reach. (Florida)

The client grapevine is the best way to market. We also work to get the media to use our public service announcements during prime time. (Washington)

A successful program will use the client network. The informal network is the best. (Oklahoma)

Seasonal employers must give priority in hiring to AFDC recipients. (California)

What are your selling points?

Here is an opportunity to move out of the welfare system to the world of work. (Oklahoma)

We believe you can do it. You have been denied an opportunity. Here is an opportunity to show that you can contribute. (Delaware)

People need the opportunity to make mistakes; they need to be taught how to take control of their lives. Convince people to believe in positive change and remember that for a large percentage of the population, change often is too negative. (Florida)

I don't think we should expect any more from welfare clients than we expect from ourselves in relation to change. When someone asks us to change, we don't do it too readily. We circle the fence. Then, three to six months later, probably if we are in the right mood, we might consider making some movement toward the change. I don't think welfare clients are any different from the rest of us. We need to position our program to help them incrementally to receive enough information in their lives so they can process the data and make the necessary

changes. We must be ready to help them move when they desire to move.
(Oklahoma)

Are there methods and messages that work better for different audiences?

You must match up your staff ethnically with the client population. Try to have an Iranian deal with an Iranian. Have someone who was a teen mother to match up with teen parents. You need the full panoply of the clients you are serving available on your staff. (County of San Diego)

Teen parents require intensive explanation of the program and what it can do for them. They need special attention. (Washington)

Pitches to teenagers need to be direct. They can't be interpreted as "hokey" or demeaning. Be explicit and direct. (Florida)

Strategies For Encouraging Participant Success

What is meant by success?

- *Several different measures of success are in use.*

Helping families to function more effectively. Provide the ability to deal with the world and understand where to go for help if something goes wrong.
(Washington)

There is one clear point of measure — getting off and remaining off welfare.
(Florida)

A goal is to reduce the amount of the grant which is provided. Promote self sufficiency. (Michigan)

Determine what the program costs and how much you have saved. If someone does return to welfare, hope it is at a higher functioning level. (County of San Diego)

The legislators will ask whether or not money was made. (Oklahoma)

- *Realistic performance standards are important.*

There is a quantum leap from welfare dependency to self sufficiency. This may not occur for the hard-to-serve. Interim measures of increasing employability may be useful. Build a record of interim successes. (Michigan)

Try to measure success on a national basis. Support the use of an eighteen year longitudinal study. (County of San Diego)

Performance standards drive the program; these standards though may not be relevant to the client. You need to establish client specific goals and measure the movement toward these goals. (Oklahoma)

What elements of the work program are most crucial to helping a client succeed?

- *Social policy requires emphasis and interest.*

I question the emphasis on clients. Its too micro-analytic. We need to think in terms of the broader environment to cause an institutional change in terms of dealing with the poor. (Florida)

There is a complex interrelationship in social policy development. You need to look at what society requires in terms of full employment. (Michigan)

State And County Concerns

The topics discussed in this section were selected by the focus group panel.

What are the major concerns regarding client service delivery?

Differences in rural areas versus urban areas; experiences in contracting with private agencies; and how to define participation. (Nebraska)

States need to know what is involved. What has worked and why and what is the impact. (Oklahoma)

Review each State concerning the economic conditions. (Delaware)

Be careful of overselling the program. Must sell the long-term nature of the program. (California)

Can't make excuses for possible failure. There is a problem of not accepting ownership and dumping problems on other agencies. Management training is too process oriented in the current system. (Florida)

Employment and training are initiatives. Other programs are reactive. We must be risk-taking. (Michigan)

Common definition of terms Government-wide, even at the level of a definition of welfare and service. The problem is the lack of common reporting and evaluation on a State-to-State basis. (Oklahoma)

Top administrators must understand the mandates and options of other programs and the payment structures which are involved. (County of San Diego)

Cooperation between agencies. (Massachusetts)

What are the key implementation and transition issues?

- *Suggestions for program administrators.*

One can have the best program design but it's up to the people to implement the program. You must make it clear what you are really trying to do. You must have a positive, global framework. Credit must be shared with all involved. The goal should be to try to reduce the cost and slow down the rate of increase of clients in the program. (County of San Diego)

The program must be sold at the top. The Governor must be involved and must sell the program. The in-service and training people must be brought on board. (Massachusetts)

- *Suggestions for the Federal Government.*

The Federal Government should provide some strategies to help States foster commitment. A White House conference would help to promote ownership. Federal influence is needed to keep the momentum going. The JOBS program, if it's handled right, will have significant impact on the U.S. (Delaware)

A national or a series of regional training centers would be useful to help implement the program. Hold a White House Conference with a "pep talk" from the President. (County of San Diego)

Provide a checklist or a worklist to the States that describes what they need to do to implement the program. Provide information on how to conduct labor market surveys. (Oklahoma)

Provide a facsimile plan format for the States concerning the key external and internal issues. (Michigan)

Provide guidance in how to change the existing program to the new program and ways to notify clients of the changes and staff members of the administrative changes which are required. (California)

The Federal Government must provide leadership to identify the issues to help States reduce duplicity. (Florida)

How do you promote ownership and risk-taking and how do you deal with failure?

- *Risk taking requires support.*

It was effective for us to draft a comprehensive piece of legislation. (Florida)

The Governor and the legislature are committed to our program. I wonder what would happen if other States lacked commitment from the top. (Delaware)

Define the mission of the program and its principles for operation up front. Then decide whom to target and how to allocate funding. Then, get commitment from the top. (California)

Agencies need help in order for them to want to take risks. (Nebraska)

- *Expect some failures and learn from them.*

Be prepared for failure. Some communities won't be able to successfully complete the project. Some people won't be able to get through the process. (County of San Diego)

Expect some failures and be able to learn from them. (Nebraska)

Someone needs to be able to recognize when something isn't working. You need someone to "tell the emperor he needs new clothes." (Florida)

Flexibility must be a part of your program. You need the flexibility to say that something isn't working. (Massachusetts)

- *Broadcast Success.*

You must address the flip side. When something is a success, broadcast it. (California)

Institutionalize the best practices. People then will try to do the good things to get attention. (Oklahoma)

Buy plaques for \$40.00. Have a storage bin of these in HHS and distribute them widely to acknowledge success. (Florida)

Recognition must occur at all levels — Federal to State; State to local; and local to contractors. (Delaware)

What are the key data collection issues?

- *Excessive reporting requirements exist.*

There are too many unnecessary reporting requirements. Ask why the data would be used at the local level to manage the program before it becomes a requirement. (County of San Diego)

What are the questions which will be asked concerning the performance of the program? What data are necessary to manage the program? These are the key concerns. Then, recognize that there are different requirements at different levels. There are greater needs for more data at the local levels. The local level looks at jurisdictions; the States look at the local level; and the National level looks at the States. Aggregate data reporting is needed. Look at performance outcomes and consider sampling to collect data. (California)

The States need the flexibility to gather those data needed to manage the program. (Florida)

- *Common data definitions and data elements are desired.*

Data needs should expand across programs. (Delaware)

Let people know there are common problems. Have common definitions and data elements. (County of San Diego)

We need common terms with JTPA. Interim data collection systems are not realistic. Look at the long term. Don't handle the same data twice. (California)

- *A management information system is a necessity.*

Management information is needed. A management information system should be driven by outcomes and outputs. (Florida)

We are dependent on our MIS. We contract everything out. At the time we award a contract, we negotiate the data to be collected. Through this approach, we have set up common data definitions. (Massachusetts)

No money is provided for data collection systems for the State and local Governments. Few automated income maintenance systems exist in the country. Look at what now is available and try to standardize. Consider a consortium of States sharing available hardware and software. (County of San Diego)

What are the key education issues?

- *The education community must be an active participant.*

We need to work together with education. The education community must realize that by freeing up dollars in entitlement programs by slowing down the rate of growth in these areas, greater discretionary funds will be made available for their programs. (County of San Diego)

We must deal with education in terms of teen pregnancy issues. (Delaware)

Our education community is involved and aware of the JOBS initiative. There are many clients in common. (Massachusetts)

- *Coordination is a time consuming process.*

We need to accept that relationship building is a legitimate activity. Education has more problems than just the AFDC recipients, and those involved with human services must recognize this fact. We must let people know the time involved in coordination and in influencing program participation by other agencies. (Oklahoma)

It will take time to promote coordination. The Federal Government and the Congress need to understand that relationship building takes time. Commitment is needed at the top. (Delaware)

It took us five years to establish a process to coordinate. (Massachusetts)

We need involvement and commitment at the community level. (Nebraska)

Best Practices/Best Advice

What “best advice” would you give to others?

It's critical for the management information system to produce credible statistics. You need definitions for grant reductions and welfare savings even with the service delivery nature of the program. There also is no substitute for enthusiasm. Form core groups and look at the community resources which are available. A charismatic leader can be helpful, but others besides zealots are needed to run the program. Assess the resources which are available. (Michigan)

Involve consumers and advocates up-front in your plan. Keep the plans simple. When the plan is in place, assess the resources to see who can provide what. Requests for Proposal (RFP) are crucial if the State plans to buy everything. The RFPs must be specific in terms of standards. Put a motivation and evaluation system in place early on. This is crucial for quality control. (Massachusetts)

Look at whether the participant spent time in a program activity and the amount of time which was spent without evaluating the impact of the activity. Try to establish some predictors as to what components are the most valuable to the people in your program. (Oklahoma)

The most important advice is to make sure goals, missions, and principles are laid out. Determine how the client will flow through the system. Determine the relationship with other programs and how to involve affected persons in decision-making. Determine the funding priorities and ways to plan and operate the program. (California)

Take a slow approach. Don't be driven by high numbers; don't oversell. Instead, strive to build a good foundation. (Delaware)

There are three things to do: (1) Management. Don't confuse the outcome and the goals. You need management flexibility, quality circles, and ownership. This should be a focus. (2) Performance standards - information system. You need clear and concise outcomes and goals. Look at the relationship of input to output. (3) Interagency cooperation through legislative planning. You need a concise planning mechanism. (Florida)

Remember the client. Look at each staff member and determine what he or she must do for success. You need top management commitment. Need discretion to make decisions to do your job at the local level. Remember that your staff will “make or break” you. Cooperate, coordinate, communicate, collaborate, compromise, and be ceremonial. Share the credit, both up and down your organization and across organizations. (County of San Diego)

A somewhat different approach is needed in a more rural State. We look at the program options and are operating with five counties. We strive not to exclude people just because they are in a rural area in another county. Recognize the turnover in the labor market and the job movement which exists. Self-directed Job Search Workshops are effective and help people expand their horizons and their base of operations. You need to remember that the rural areas have fewer traditional resources to draw on, such as community colleges. Transportation also is a major problem. (Nebraska)