Placing Senior Community Service Employment Program Enrollees in Unsubsidized Employment

A Summary of Best Practices in Successful Programs

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Goals of the Summary
This Summary of Best Practices is designed to help SCSEP projects to increase the placement of enrollees in unsubsidized jobs. The information is based on a study of SCSEP grantees conducted in 1998. The goal of the study was to identify the factors that contribute to successful placement of low-income older workers in unsubsidized jobs and to apply this information to improve the placement outcomes of less successful grantees. The grantees participating in the study are listed at the end of this summary.

Background
In Fiscal Year (FY) 1999, the SCSEP funded over 60 grantees. Each year the performance of these grantees is rank ordered with respect to unsubsidized placement rates for their enrollees. Some SCSEP grantees consistently have high unsubsidized employment placement rates (35% or greater), whereas other grantees consistently have low rates (15% or lower). This Summary describes the approaches used by the most successful projects and identifies some practices to be avoided.

The study of SCSEP projects was conducted in the fall of 1998, not long after passage of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (Public Law [PL] 105-220). As with other employment and training programs, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) will have a dramatic impact on the SCSEP. The practices and procedures of many SCSEP projects will change now that the WIA became operational on July 1, 2000. The ideas and practices described in this

Summary of Best Practices should assist SCSEP grantees in making the transition to working as part of the team operating One-Stop centers as mandated by the WIA.

SCSEP goal for unsubsidized placements. The SCSEP goal is to foster and promote useful part-time opportunities in community service activities for persons with low incomes who are 55 years old or older, who have poor employment prospects, and have the greatest economic need. Community service means social, health, welfare, and educational services, legal and other counseling services and assistance including tax counseling and assistance and financial counseling, and library, recreational, conservation, maintenance, or restoration of natural resources; as the Secretary of DOL may prescribe. DOL regulations set a goal of 20 percent placement of SCSEP enrollees in unsubsidized positions

Variation in grantee attainment of placement goals. Some SCSEP projects have been remarkably successful in helping enrollees find jobs in a competitive marketplace. Their efforts have consistently paid off with unsubsidized placement rates exceeding 30 percent, putting older workers into jobs, improving their standard of living, and allowing more eligible people to be helped through the program. Other grantees have consistently failed to reach the goal of placing 20 percent of their enrollees in unsubsidized positions.

How projects help SCSEP enrollees find jobs differs with each project's circumstances. Some projects have paid job developers and job club leaders; in others, the project director performs these functions; in still others, enrollees

function as job developers and there is no functioning job club. The unique situation of each SCSEP project determines the nature and kind of help it can offer in the job search process. For example, large urban projects function differently than rural projects where enrollees are widely dispersed. What is clear, however, is that success in achieving a high placement rate is not always a function of project circumstances. Some project directors with minimal resources achieve high placement rates. The individual project directors' motivation and commitment are, by far, the major factors in achieving high placement rates.

502(e) projects.   Section 502(e) of the OAA authorizes Title V service providers to engage in "experimental job training projects" by placing eligible individuals in unsubsidized, private sector employment.   These 502(e) projects are required to be "innovative and experimental." The performance of these special 502(e) projects was assessed in a separate study conducted in 1998.

The 502(e) requirement is that training should be designed to promote second career training and innovative work modes resulting in the placement of enrollees in jobs with private business concerns. Agreements for 502(e) training may be among states, public agencies, nonprofits, and/or private businesses. The training should emphasize placement into growth industries and jobs reflecting new technologies.

Related Materials and Documents

The SCSEP has developed and/or funded a number of documents in a technical assistance and training series that

contain useful information for project operators. For copies of these documents, contact David Richardson at the DOL/ETA/DOWP, Room N4644 Frances Perkins Bld., 200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20210; Fax: 202- 693-3817; email: DRichardson@doleta.gov.

2.0. BEST PRACTICES AND APPROACHES

Commitment to placement goal. The SCSEP projects that are most successful at placing enrollees in unsubsidized positions make this the central point to virtually every aspect of the program. From start to finish, the project staff communicate that the goal is for the enrollee to get an unsubsidized job. The message to enrollees, prospective enrollees, host agencies and prospective host agencies is "we are here to help you find, get, and keep a job."

Less successful projects communicate more complicated and ambiguous expectations; the message may be "we are here to help you assess your interests and skills, to market yourself by improving your resume and interview skills, to locate job openings, and to hang on to a job if you get one." Some of these projects consider the SCSEP as a social welfare program designed to supplement the incomes of older workers

The project's emphasis on the placement goal often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy--if the project strongly emphasizes placement of enrollees in an unsubsidized job, then the project's placement rate is high. If the goal is ambiguous and described in terms of a supplement to the

income of enrollees and/or to provide employment and training services, then the placement rate is likely to be low.

- **Effective project director.** As is often the case with successful schools, businesses, and other organizations, the project directors have a critical impact on the success of the SCSEP program. There seems to be no single style or approach for directors of successful SCSEP projects—some directors are outgoing, others are not; some are in the office a lot, others spend most of their time "in the field;" some are good at details, others are not. Nevertheless, directors of successful programs seem to share the following approaches:
  - Perform job development themselves and/or delegate job development as a key responsibility,
  - Develop trusting relationships with employers or potential employers in the region,
  - Communicate to staff and enrollees that placement in unsubsidized jobs is the key goal of the SCSEP,
  - Invent or discover jobs and employment opportunities in even the most unlikely circumstances.

- **Fixing enrollee responsibility.** Successful projects tend to clearly define that responsibility for finding, getting, and keeping a job is on the enrollee. Project staff is viewed as facilitators who make resources available to the enrollees as opposed to persons who are responsible for finding jobs for the enrollees. Many successful programs foster collaboration among enrollees so that they help each other find jobs. Less successful projects may state that it is the responsibility

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of the enrollee to find and get a job; however, this approach may be implicitly negated or subverted by project atmosphere and activities. There is often a fine line between encouraging and helping an enrollee on the one hand and actually relieving the enrollee of the responsibility for a task (i.e., doing the work or activity for the enrollee). Successful projects seem to find a way to get the enrollee to do what is required with the result that the enrollee gains confidence.

- **Job development.** No matter how good the employment and training services are, an enrollee cannot be successfully placed if no jobs are available. Identifying and developing jobs for SCSEP enrollees requires significant effort even in times of full employment. In times of high unemployment, job development is correspondingly more difficult. Successful projects treat job development as an investment. Knowing that the payoff (job openings) often occurs months after job development contacts, successful projects sustain job development activities throughout the year.

  Successful projects often develop innovative approaches to job development, essentially creating new jobs and employment opportunities. Here is an example of an innovative solution to successful placement of hard-to-place enrollees—one project serves enrollees who have limited English-speaking skills, low levels of formal education, and little prior work experience. The project helped to develop jobs for home health care workers serving persons who speak languages other than English. Many limited- or non-

English speaking SCSEP enrollees have been trained and successfully placed in these home health care jobs.

Successful projects often train and involve enrollees in job development activities. For example, taking a prepared enrollee on calls to prospective employers can simultaneously increase enrollee involvement in the job development process and help overcome employer stereotypes about enrollees.

- **Coordinate network with local resources.** Successful projects tend to exploit community resources that are sometimes ignored by less successful programs. Examples of local/regional institutions and programs used by successful SCSEP projects include:
  - JTPA/WIA One Stop Centers
- Community colleges
- Local radio and television stations, newspapers
- Chamber of Commerce
- Large and small businesses.

- **Enrollee motivation and encouragement.** Successful projects seem to do a better job at motivating and encouraging SCSEP enrollees. Often, new enrollees lack self-confidence—they feel that they have few marketable skills and that employers will not want to hire them even if jobs are available. Successful projects use a variety of approaches to change enrollee expectations, perceptions, and self-confidence. Some projects use a group dynamic approach, getting enrollees to work in groups, and establishing norms supporting enrollee efforts to look and apply for jobs. Often these programs use SCSEP "graduates" with

successful placements to work with the enrollees and to serve as role models. Getting the enrollee to accomplish tasks (e.g., make a list of jobs of potential interest, develop/revise a resume, conduct a job search on the Internet) appropriate for the enrollee's experiences and aptitudes seems to facilitate the confidence building process. Another way projects foster enrollee confidence is through rotation of enrollee work assignments if a job fails to lead to employment—the enrollee gains confidence by successfully performing different jobs in different circumstances.

- **Enrollee assessment and placement.** Successful projects tend to do a better job at assessing the aptitudes, strengths, and interests of enrollees and at matching these aptitudes, strengths, and interests to jobs. Often choice seems to play an important role in the success of an enrollee's placement. If the enrollee feels he/she is responsible for getting a job and the enrollee chooses to accept an available job, then the enrollee is more likely to keep the job. If the enrollee feels that he/she has little input or choice in the placement process, he/she is less likely to appreciate and keep the job. Thus, successful projects somehow find a balance between matching the enrollee's aptitudes, skills, and interests to jobs while keeping the enrollee responsible for getting/selecting the job. Similarly, successful programs tend to balance enrollees' "dreams" (i.e., ambitions) with their aptitudes, experience, and the types of jobs that are available.

- **Use of media.** Successful projects tend to exploit local/regional media more than less successful projects. For example, the project director, other project staff, or current/former enrollee(s) may have a regular column in a local daily or weekly newspaper. Such a column serves as free marketing by bringing attention to the project before potential employers, referral sources, and other groups. Similarly, representatives of successful projects often make regular appearances on local/regional radio and television programs.

- **After placement follow-up.** Successful projects tend to place more emphasis on after placement activities than do less successful projects. Many successful projects systematically interview both the (former) enrollee as well as the employer to determine how the placement is working out. Any deficiencies or problems are identified and a plan to remedy the problem(s) is developed and implemented. A critical component of the follow-up is increasing rapport and confidence between the SCSEP project and the employer. Successful projects help the employer understand that the project is invested in *successful* placements – placements where both the employer and enrollee are satisfied. If the employer is dissatisfied with the employee's performance, the problem is either resolved to the mutual satisfaction of the employer and the enrollee, or a new placement is arranged. Consequently, the employer is disposed to accept more SCSEP placements in the future – "success breeds success."

- **Implement a special 502(e) project.** The flexibility associated with the special 502(e) projects, especially in

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the context of a one-stop center, enables SCSEP projects to work more effectively with a wide range of potential employers. The operation of a special 502(e) project tends to enhance the focus on placement in unsubsidized jobs.

3.0. THINGS TO AVOID – DON'Ts

Don't believe there are no jobs. Obviously, unemployment rates vary over time and across regions. Nevertheless, even in areas of high unemployment, large numbers of persons invent jobs and obtain work. Successful SCSEP projects often find jobs where others believe there are none or help to create previously unrecognized work opportunities. The key to finding such opportunities is networking with others (e.g., education and training programs, employers, Federal, State, and local organizations and programs).

Don't make job development a sporadic activity. Do not begin job development efforts when the supply of jobs starts to dry up – job development should be an on-going activity.

Don't let the program fail for lack of transportation. Enrollees need transportation to get to the program and to get to and from work after placement. While a community may have little or no public transportation in a certain area, the SCSEP, working in conjunction with others in the community, can find the needed transportation resources. For example, some successful programs have worked with high school and/or junior college automobile repair classes to repair and make safe automobiles donated directly to the

project or to a cooperating institution such as a church. Often, a van or bus is available from a school, from Head Start, or from some other program. Insurance regulations, organizational inertia, and other barriers must be overcome, but partially used transportation resources can be made available. Also, enrollees may need to be shown how to use *public* transportation. This may require having a staff person go with enrollees to the job site showing them pick up points, transfers, use of automatic ticket machines and other things that the enrollees may not be familiar with.

It is possible to make the lack of transportation a source of jobs (e.g., as van drivers) for SCSEP enrollees and to provide needed services to the community if the necessary arrangements can be made.

Don't let negative attitudes toward older workers keep jobs from SCSEP enrollees. The Department of Labor is participating in an international campaign to promote the hiring of older workers. Successful SCSEP projects have sponsored local/regional campaigns to promote the hiring of older workers, often with the enthusiastic support of the print and electronic media. The DOL is currently sponsoring regional conferences promoting services to older workers in One-Stop Centers.

Sometimes employers do not understand that their policies and practices represent illegal age discrimination. In such cases, appropriate education may solve the problem. In other cases, the employer is aware of the violation, but is not disposed to change the illegal behavior – in such circumstances, exposure to the media, public, or civil rights enforcement agencies may correct the problem.

Changing negative stereotypes about older workers sometimes starts with the SCSEP project – both the project staff *and the enrollees* must not underestimate enrollee capabilities. Staff expectations about enrollee capabilities tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Don't commit these management errors:
→ Don't define your program as a social service program; define it as a jobs program.
→ Don't let the atmosphere of job club meetings become too social – keep the job-search goal paramount.
→ Don't facilitate hasty, inappropriate placements – the goal is for the enrollee to be successful at the job, not just to get any job.
→ Don't diffuse the responsibility for getting the job – the enrollee owns this responsibility.
→ Don't try to do everything yourself – network with other stakeholders who support older workers.
→ Don't do after-placement follow-up on a sporadic basis. WIA now calls for 6-month follow-up. Create procedures that call for follow-up at regular intervals after placement.

Don't let the enrollee's lack of technical skills limit employment opportunities. Provide or secure the training enrollees need to get and be successful at the available jobs. Training should be available for different levels of experience and aptitudes.

4.0. CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this *Summary of Best Practices* will help SCSEP grantees to increase the numbers and percentages of enrollees who obtain unsubsidized jobs. The best practices were identified by studies of both SCSEP programs and Special 502(e) programs. All grantees are encouraged to select and adapt the described practices to their own particular circumstances; and, remember, staff at the DOL Division of Older Worker Programs will be happy to assist you in these efforts.

STUDY SITES

This Summary of Best Practices is based on studies of a sample of SCSEP grantees and of Section 502(e) special projects conducted in 1998. These grantees generously gave their time and shared their experiences and materials with the aim of helping other grantees improve the placement of enrollees in unsubsidized employment. The grantees participating in the SCSEP study included:

- AARP Foundation
- National Senior Citizens Education and Research Center
- State of California
- State of Idaho
- State of Virginia
- State of New Mexico
- State of Maryland
- State of Rhode Island

The grantees participating in the 502(e) study included:

- AARP Foundation
- Green Thumb, Inc.
- State of Kentucky Division of Aging
- National Council on the Aging, Inc.
- National Senior Citizens Education and Research Center
- National Urban League
- State of New York Office on Aging
- State of Tennessee Commission on Aging
- Commonwealth of Virginia Governor's Employment and Training Department